Using the Rod: Education, Punishment, and the New Woman in fin de siècle British Literature

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USING THE ROD: EDUCATION, PUNISHMENT, AND THE NEW WOMAN IN 
FIN DE SIÈCLE BRITISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of 
Louisiana State University and 
Agricultural and Mechanical College 
in partial fulfillment of the 
requirements for the degree of 
Doctor of Philosophy 

in 
The Department of English

by 
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M.A., University of New Orleans, 1996 
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DEDICATION

For Elsie Michie,

With admiration, respect, and devotion
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The writing of a dissertation is a lonely job but one that is never done alone. I had a committee that most graduate students only hope of having, and I am still amazed that such distinguished scholars chose to guide me throughout this challenge. Though this dissertation discusses the correlation between education and punishment, I am fortunate to have a group of people that prevented me from experiencing what I write about in this project. Consequently, I owe them a large debt.

I would like to thank Professor Elsie Michie, whose British Novel and whose Brontës courses shaped this project. Her faith that I could write this dissertation—a faith she generously lent me when my own faltered—kept me from abandoning graduate work. The words of encouragement she offered, her infinite availability, and the scholarly wisdom and vision she unselfishly offered, not just in the dissertation stage but all throughout my work as a doctoral student, equipped me with the fortitude to finish what I started. The kind of integrity she has is hard to find in academia. I can only hope to become half the professional she is. Words fall short in expressing my gratitude for her munificence in helping to develop me, both as a researcher and a teacher. I am honored that she graciously agreed to work with me.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between female education and punishment in the British novel of the fin de siècle. It considers the “New Woman” (the emancipated, intellectualized, and unmarried prototypical feminist appearing in late nineteenth-century culture) in light of how female education affects fictional characterizations of her. Female education in the “New Woman” and her fictional counterparts worked to destabilize class and gender hierarchies for Victorian Society, producing anxiety in its culture and texts. To defuse this anxiety, authors frequently demonstrated the consequences of espousing the feminism driving the “New Woman” and the education producing her. The education she desired/received caused her undue difficulty and lead to her punishment and suffering. In some cases, the punishment represented in late nineteenth-century texts was extreme enough to take the form of narrative masochism, this study arguing that such narrative strategies were employed predominantly by authors who came from punishing educational backgrounds themselves. Thus, exploration of these texts uncovers a literature of containment that attempts to suppress potentially subversive feminist narratives. The literary origins of punishment for the “New Woman” in the works of George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Mary Wollstonecraft establish a precedent for a more intense punishment in later nineteenth-century texts, the phenomenon intensifying as the Victorian Period progresses. This dissertation focuses on its appearance in the works of Ella Hepworth Dixon, George Gissing, Grant Allen, Olive Schreiner, and Thomas Hardy. However, it also recurs in contemporary narratives and culture as late as the end of the twentieth century. Because literature shapes culture as well as reflects it, these narratives inevitably serve to repress not only the female characters of these literary works, but the women of the society that produces these texts.
Using a new historicist approach that incorporates feminist history and theory, educational history, and psychoanalytic theory, *Using the Rod: Education, Punishment, and the New Woman in fin de siècle British Literature* offers insight into the contentious relationship between British *fin de siècle* society and the educated female of the period.
Figure 1.1 “New Woman Riding Bike” *Punch* Vol. 108 (1895)
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
USING THE ROD: EDUCATION, PUNISHMENT, AND THE NEW WOMAN

On June 2, 2006, the twentieth anniversary of the infamous June 2, 1986 Newsweek article “Too Late for Prince Charming,” came a slew of retrospective articles revisiting the pronouncements the original one made. The host of contributing authors of the Newsweek piece based their conclusions on the then unpublished work of Neil G. Bennett, Patricia H. Craig, and David E. Bloom, professors from Yale and Harvard who conducted a study that allegedly handed down a death sentence for any college-educated/career-minded woman hoping to find a husband. It cited the study’s findings that “white, college-educated women born in the mid-‘50s who are still single at 30 have only a 20 percent chance of marrying” (Eloise Salholz et al.). While education was not the sole factor keeping these degreed women from finding mates—age was also implicated in the study—it seemed to be the preëminent obstacle. It was, after all, these women’s educations that had forged the prominent careers that made them so unattractive to potential mates. As the article pointed out, “[e]ven though men say they respect women’s career aspirations, many openly long for full-time wives and mothers.” The piece continued with a quotation from an interview with a 33-year-old professional male who believed in equality but wanted “a more traditional relationship” and dinner when he got home from work. Perhaps the most disturbing, inciting, and, therefore, suspect findings of this study resided in the predictions for older educated women, whose prospects for marriage were so bleak, according to the study, that the Newsweek authors deemed them “more likely to be killed by a terrorist” than to get hitched. Fortunately, the retrospective articles serve as a corrective lens through which to view the
Newsweek piece and the significantly flawed study. According to Jeffrey Zaslow, “it turns out that less than 10% of college-educated women now ages 50 to 60 have never been married, census records show,” and “new research suggests that women today who are highly educated are actually more likely to find husbands.” How could this study have been so inaccurate, and why the shift to a rosier future for educated women today?

The Yale/Harvard joint study and the subsequently published Newsweek article are not the first of their kind to project doom for women who attempt to better themselves. Susan Faludi’s well-known study on the backlash against feminism points out that at nearly every point in history wherein women have attempted to make gains, there are significant repercussions and obstacles purposely put in their way to halt their progress. Anti-feminist propaganda regarding marriage and fertility rates serves as such a deterrent by demonstrating the consequences of pursuing progressive aspirations, conveying the punishing ends a woman can expect in rebelling against conventional, prescribed roles established for women. Faludi uses women’s attempts to enter the labor force as an example:

A woman’s claim to her own paycheck is one of these arrows. The proportion of women in the paid labor force has been rising with little interruption since the Victorian era. In a society where income is the measure of social strength and authority, women’s growing presence in the labor force can’t help but mitigate women’s secondary standing. But it hasn’t brought full equality. Instead, with each turn of the spiral, the culture simply redoubles its resistance, if not by returning women to the kitchen, then by making the hours spent away from their stoves as inequitable and intolerable as possible: pushing women into the worst occupations, paying them the lowest wages, laying them off first, and promoting them last, refusing to offer child care or family leave, and subjecting them to harassment. (55)

Although Faludi terms such occurrences “resistance,” it is clear from her description that there is an element of retribution in the backlash, hence the inequity in pay, the demeaning work, and the harassment women who attempt to transgress these cultural boundaries
experience, as opposed to mere legislation that would curb their attempts. Faludi observes that each time women gain, they meet with adversity. Such adversity has been strong enough to be considered punishment, and, as the passage cited above notes, this punishment for American women harkens back to the Victorian Period. While Faludi’s study concentrates on the backlash against late twentieth-century American women, Americans are not the only demographic to experience it. Such a cultural phenomenon exists in British history as well, and it is women’s behavior—sexual, social, and eventually, professional—that the backlash attempts to contain.

A hotly debated issue during the nineteenth century, education played a significant role in the development of Victorian English culture and socio-economic structure. Such advances in education in general (coded here as “male education”) demanded female parity. If women gained more rights and became formally educated, their range of social roles would expand. However, as legislation allowed Victorian women more accessibility to education, and consequently more potential for class mobility through education, the promise of such social and economic independence spawned a societal anxiety resulting in a backlash that has become widely accepted and documented in Faludi and others. The rallying cry for female sexual, social, and professional egalitarianism was heralded by the feminists of the late Victorian Period, and, as I will argue momentarily, the New Woman was the icon of the feminist movement. She represented, both in and out of literature, the culmination of Victorian women’s demands to be treated equally with men, and education was part and parcel of that equal treatment.
The ideology that drove the New Woman was, at once, inspiring and threatening to Victorian reading audiences and society at large. As Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst have argued, what the New Woman stood for was “double-coded.” Any representation of her could mark an image of sexual freedom and assertions of female independence, promising a bright democratic future; it could also mark an apocalyptic warning of the dangers of sexual degeneracy, the abandonment of motherhood, and consequent risk to the racial future of England. Such political codings are not always easy to distribute, and indeed self-nominated New Women could themselves be advocates of conservative causes. (xvii)

Ledger additionally notes that the specter of the New Woman frequently appeared in literature of the period next to other culturally threatening figures like the dandy; thus the two became perpetually intertwined, despite their lack of commonalities in minutia, by their monstrous capacity to transform a stable status quo. (See Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 for such threats to gender roles manifested in dress styles). She rightly argues that the “New Woman and the decadent writers both overtly challenged the dominant sexual codes of the Victorian era” (The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle 5). For this reason, Victorian culture frequently saw such challenges as dual: anything that would positively open opportunities for the New Woman, who would advance feminist causes, would certainly also change society irrevocably and, perhaps, detrimentally. Therefore, such challenges would almost certainly need to be contained, a counteraction which could take the form of punishment.

Faludi notes the correlation between female education and a backlash in the argument she advances for twentieth-century American women. That response is manifested in physical violence against women in some cases, like the one Faludi describes of Charles Stuart, “the struggling fur salesman in Boston who murdered his pregnant wife, a lawyer,
Figure 1.2 “Imitation is the Sincerest Flattery” *Punch* Vol. 98 (1890)
Figure 1.3 “Sterner Stuff” *Punch* Vol. 101 (1891)
Figure 1.4 “What It Will Soon come To”  
*Punch* Vol. 106 (1894)
because he feared that she—better educated, more successful—was gaining the ‘upper hand’” (66). Stuart essentially punished his wife for her success, for her intellectual superiority. But this kind of punishment for education has a precedent in British history, waxing and waning in relation to female advancements in this arena. One of the many eras in which a resurgence in punishment related to female education can be seen is during the High Victorian Period, gaining stronger momentum at the *fin de siècle*. The backlash against education for women was evident not only in the legislation of the period, but also in the treatment of the New Woman in fictional texts at that time. By the end of the century, it attained such a ferocity that its message was clear: females (both in and out of literature) seeking education would be punished significantly. The wise woman would not aspire to such accomplishments. The real issue was, as I have asserted, a sexual one in that education would give women more authority not only to become speaking subjects but to become unyoked from the bonds of marriage and the sexual contract implicit in those bonds. Any time the power balance in heterosexual pairings is disturbed, as Faludi notes, the backlash rears its ugly head again. (See Figure 1.5 for the implied threat to marriage in illustrations of the period). Thus, as women made progress in the Victorian Period, they became fettered by a culture that refused to accept their new freedoms and to make room for their widening sphere. Education, then, became intimately tied to punishment and became a dangerous aspiration.

The terms “education” and “punishment” are not unrelated signifiers. In fact, “education” has a history of being associated with punishment. “Educate” comes from the Latin root *educare*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term’s earliest usage in 1588
WE'VE NOT COME TO THAT YET.

She. "I was so glad to hear of your marriage! Do come to us and bring your wife. By the way, what is your name now?"

He. "Oh, I haven't changed my name. It's Shy, you know!"

Figure 1.5 “We’ve Not Come to that Yet” Punch Vol. 106 (1894)
as relating to the instruction or schooling of the young (“Educate”). However, the term takes on added significance in the middle of the nineteenth century (1841-4) to include the concept of discipline in the administration of developing a mental or physical ability or some special skill. The definition reads thus: “[t]o train, discipline (a person, a class of persons, a particular mental or physical faculty or organ), so as to develop some special aptitude, taste, or disposition” (“Educate”). The term “discipline,” in contrast, has had a longer history in relation to education and has, additionally, been linked to punishment. As early as 1382, the term was synonymous with education, the *Oxford English Dictionary* listing its definition of “discipline” as follows: “[t]o subject to discipline; in earlier use, to instruct, *educate*, train; in later use, more especially to train to habits of order and subordination” (“Discipline,” emphasis mine). “Discipline” had already been used in terms of punishment in the same period it became associated with education (1300). The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides a subsequent listing for this usage: “[t]o inflict penitential discipline upon; to scourge or flog by way of penance or mortification of the flesh; hence, by extension, to chastise, thrash, punish” (“Discipline”). Thus, the concepts of education and punishment have been intimately linked for centuries.

Michel Foucault notes the correlation between education and punishment in *Discipline and Punish*. His observations on the nature and purpose of punishment echo the *OED* definition for “educate.” “And beyond this distribution of roles operates a theoretical disavowal: do not imagine that the sentences that we judges pass are activated by a desire to punish; they are intended to correct, reclaim, ‘cure’; a technique of improvements represses, in the penalty, the strict expiation of evil-doing, and relieves the magistrates of the demeaning task of punishing” (Foucault 10). Despite Foucault’s biting sarcasm in the
passage, the connection between education and punishment obtains. Here Foucault argues that “education” replaces “punishment” at a specific historical moment, the idea of “correcting” with the intent to improve behavior made manifest in his “relieving” the magistrates of the distasteful job of meting out pain and replacing it with the more palatable one of “educating.” He implicates education in the process of disciplining again, including “educationalists” within a wider network of power that progressively “appropriates” from the executioner the responsibility of punishing the deviant:

[i]f it is still necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much ‘higher’ aim. As a result of this new restraint, a whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists; by their very presence near the prisoner, they sing the praises that the law needs: they reassure it that the body and pain are not the ultimate objects of its punitive action. (11)

In this passage, educationalists are included in the catalogue of those assuming the role of punisher from the executioner, and the purpose of punishment is camouflaged. Its aim purportedly is no longer to administer pain but to teach. Foucault implicitly argues that the educationalist’s ultimate object is to participate in the punishment of the deviant. His later references to “penal tutelage” (21) and “useful pedagogy” (122), both metaphors for punishment, compound this assessment of education and its complicity in exacting retribution. Foucault explicitly links punishment to education, stating that

[1]he meaning of this mourning [on the occasion for punishment] must be clear to all; each element of its ritual must speak, repeat the crime, recall the law, show the need for punishment and justify its degree. Posters, placards, signs, symbols must be distributed, so that everyone may learn their significations. The publicity of punishment must not have the physical effect of terror; it must open up a book to be read. . . .
This legible lesson, this ritual recoding must be repeated as often as possible; the punishments must be a school rather than a festival; an ever-open book rather than a ceremony.

This, then, is how one must imagine the punitive city. At the crossroads, in the gardens, at the side of roads being repaired or bridges built, in workshops open to all, in the depths of mines that may be visited, will be hundreds of tiny theatres of punishment. Each crime will have its law; each criminal his punishment. It will be a visible punishment, a punishment that tells all, that explains, justifies itself, convicts: placards, different-coloured caps bearing inscriptions, posters, symbols, texts read or printed, tirelessly repeat the code. Scenery, perspectives, optical effects, trompe-l'oeil sometimes magnify the scene, making it more fearful than it is, but also the existence of certain cruelties which, in fact, do not take place. But the essential point, in all these real or magnified severities, is that they should all, according to a strict economy, teach a lesson: that each punishment should be a fable. (111-13)

Here, according to Foucault, it is not only the deviant who is to be schooled through punishment; the “correction” of the deviant’s behavior is carried out publicly in order to educate the onlookers. The ceremony functions as a classroom for all who attend. Thus, the job of the executioner to kill the deviant is taken up by the educator who, in a spectacular display, strikes fear in all involved in the enactment of punishment in order to teach.

According to Foucault, punishment of the deviant metamorphoses into education, this education functioning not merely for those who violate the law, but also for future potential violators.

Foucault also discusses schools as a manifestation of disciplinary power, contending that institutions of learning progressively incorporated surveillance as an instrument of pedagogy. Through what he terms “hierarchical observation,” students are “corrected” and learn appropriate behavior and thinking:

The same movement was to be found in the reorganization of elementary teaching: the details of surveillance were specified and it was integrated into the teaching relationship. The development of the parish schools, the increase in the number of their pupils, the absence of methods for regulating simultaneously the activity of a whole class, and the disorder and confusion
that followed from this made it necessary to work out a system of supervision. In order to help the teacher, Batencour selected from among the best pupils a whole series of ‘officers’—intendants, observers, monitors, tutors, visitors. The roles thus defined were of two kinds: the first involved material tasks (distributing ink and paper, giving alms to the poor, reading spiritual texts on feast days, etc.); the second involved surveillance: the ‘observers must record who left his bench, who was talking, who did not have his rosary, or Book of Hours, who did not comport himself properly at mass, who committed an impure act, who indulged in idle talk or was unruly in the street’; the ‘admonitors’ were placed in charge of those ‘who talk or hum when studying their lessons and those who will not write and who waste their time in play’; the ‘visitors’ called on the families of pupils who had been absent or who had committed serious offences. The ‘intendants’ supervised all the other officers. Only the ‘tutors’ had a pedagogical role: their task was to teach the pupils reading, two by two, in low tones (M.I.D.B., 68-83). A few decades later, Demia favoured a hierarchy of the same type but almost all the functions of surveillance were duplicated by a pedagogical role: an assistant teacher taught the holding of the pen, guided the pupil’s hand, corrected mistakes and at the same time ‘marked down trouble-makers’; another assistant teacher had the same tasks in the reading class; the intendant who supervised the other officers and was in charge of behaviour in general also had the task of ‘initiating newcomers into the customs of the school’; the decurions got the pupils to recite their lessons and ‘marked down’ those who did not know them. We have here a sketch of an institution of the ‘mutual’ type in which three procedures are integrated into a single mechanism: teaching proper, the acquisition of knowledge by the very practice of the pedagogical activity and a reciprocal, hierarchized observation. A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency. (175-6)

Clearly, Foucault sees discipline as inherent in education.

Keith Hoskin illustrates the way in which power operates in Foucault’s hypothesis of the school as a disciplinary unit, also using Foucault to connect education to punishment. He further illustrates how the “hierarchical observation” used in schools streamlined education.

Institutions as disparate as the prison, the hospital, the barracks and the school undergo a fundamental reorganization. In all we find a new ‘means of correct training’, based on what he calls ‘disciplinary power’. Disciplinary power is derived from simple techniques which taken separately can easily be seen merely as extensions of existing practices: a more systematic organization of time and space, and an extended use of surveillance. But taken together these
simple techniques add up to a qualitatively new form of control. The clearest educational example of the transformation he has in mind is perhaps the monitorial system in which pupils’ actions were dictated by a specific command, every minute of the day being organized and accounted for, and the use of space controlled (its motto might well be a place for everyone and everyone in his place). At the heart of the system were monitors, who embody the principle which Foucault calls ‘reciprocal hierarchical observation’. The monitors were the classroom's N.C.O.s, part of a hierarchy of authority, and by their introduction everybody in the classroom was drawn into a network of power relations. Teaching was made more efficient, as it became harder to evade the disciplinary gaze which had been spread, literally, around the classroom space, but at the same time, the teacher was put under certain constraints, because he had to teach in turn what the monitors would be able to manage. This is an early form of disciplinary power, an integrated system of observation in which ‘although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally’.  (3-4)

Hoskin additionally summarizes Foucault’s use of Brothers of the Christian Schools in Foucault’s outline of the concept of “normalizing judgment”:  

. . . like hierarchical observation, this develops from small-scale beginnings. In the Brothers of the Christian schools from the 1680s on LaSalle institutes a system of small rewards and punishments, where merits can make up for demerits. This constant ‘economy’ of points for lateness and promptness, inattention and obedience, insolence and politeness introduces the principle of ‘normal behaviour’, as bad and good behaviour become categories given an objective status according to the number of merits and demerits amassed. In the seventeenth century LaSalle is a lonely voice in the wilderness. But by the nineteenth century the power of the Norm, visible in the introduction of standardized curriculum and normal schools and standard style of architecture forms a presence that cannot be missed.  (4-5)

Hoskin observes that by the nineteenth century, such a system of discipline has become utterly crucial to the foundations of education. Foucault’s Discipline and Punish and Hoskin’s succinct glosses of Foucault establish a clear link between education and punishment and the use of punishment in order to achieve the goal of educating.
Such a linking between education and punishment bears out not only in the historical contexts Foucault explores, but also in the literary texts thereafter. Because this association exists, an exploration of the manner in which that connection is rendered in the literary text is warranted. Therefore, my project examines the relationship between education and punishment in fictional texts of the Late Victorian Period in England. I argue that the representations of this relationship served the ends of the society in which the threat of female autonomy proliferated. Many of the New Woman texts have been treated as “arguments” for feminist causes at the time they were produced as well as in more recent scholarship. However, when held up to scrutiny, these texts actually reflect the reactionary tendencies of the society from which they emanated (and the individual authors’ psyches that were byproducts of this culture). The dissertation, then, considers the New Woman in light of female education and how that education affects characterizations of her. While our current mainstream understanding of education is that it should broaden horizons, making life more fulfilling and happier, late nineteenth-century authors created heroines who were more likely to endure punishment as a consequence of their education or their desire for it, some even to the point of narrative masochism. This punishment works to proscribe the New Woman, and, consequently, its representation in literature attempts to subvert the desire for the education that would ultimately liberate her from her social obligations of marriage and family. The ultimate goal of this study is to expose a literature of containment aimed at the potentially subversive feminist narrative that intensifies at the fin de siècle. It will also explore the way in which punishment operates in the texts of individual authors, ultimately concluding that the authors’ respective experiences with education, determined largely by
socio-economic class that is dictated by geography, exposed them to punishment that informs their treatment of punishment in their respective narratives.

THE NEW WOMAN

The rise of the New Woman and the “New Woman Fiction” at the fin de siècle has been the subject of much scholarship, as it was a heavily debated topic during the late nineteenth century. Elaine Showalter’s Sexual Anarchy examines the disruption and evolution of gender relations at the end of the century. Sally Ledger’s The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle looks at the New Woman as a discursive phenomenon, focusing on her “complex relationship to decadence, socialism, imperialism and emergent homosexual identities” (5). Ann Heilmann’s exploration of the New Woman questions to what extent New Woman Fiction can “be considered a woman-centered and woman-authored genre” (5). Chris Willis refers to the correlation between the fulfillment of romantic aspirations of New Woman characters and their respective ideologies in his study of the New Woman fiction, incidentally observing that “the New Woman cannot be allowed to attain the conventional romantic happy ending and still keep her principles intact” (57). Although all of these critics examine the New Woman in her diverse capacities (represented in and out of literature), none looks critically at the role education plays—that is, how it works in the suffering or punishment depicted by her respective author. Nor do they examine the role each author’s own education plays in the creation of his or her character’s punishment with respect to education.

The literary origins of the New Woman have long been neglected as well. Sally Ledger acknowledges this oversight:
Looking with a backward glance at the earlier part of the nineteenth century, a case could of course be made for including such writers as George Eliot in a study of the New Woman: the Woman Question so-called had, after all, been a substantial area of social debate since the mid nineteenth century, *Middlemarch*’s nebulously ambitious Dorothea Brooke and *Daniel Deronda*’s sexually recalcitrant Gwendolen Harleth could both be construed as embryonic New Women. (*The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism* 2)

Although Ledger attests to the viability of such a study, she chooses to forego the backward glance that gives a retrospective on the prototype, leaving a discursive space open for a discussion of the role this prototypical New Woman plays in forecasting the punishment her literary progeny would receive decades later in relation to the education they acquire.

Also writing about the New Woman, Penny Boumelha discusses the melodramatic narrative techniques some New Woman writers of the turn-of-the-century employ, admitting that “marriage and sex are the crucial education structures” for the female *Bildungsroman* in the 1880s (82). What Boumelha alludes to here is that in many of these novels, females obtain their real learning experiences through hard lessons acquired in the course of marital struggles and sexual “indiscretions.” However, for some *fin de siècle* heroines, it is education or an intellectualism that fosters certain idealistic principles in them that makes their experiences with marriage and sex intensely difficult. Education provides them with their initial exposure to the punishment that prepares them for such acute experiences with retribution throughout the course of their narrative lives. Hence, education becomes elemental in the suffering and punishment of the New Woman character. Part of the strategy of authors of New Woman Fiction includes the education that fosters such intellectualism and idealism of their heroines in order to create the ideologies these characters espouse, ideologies that drive their punishment in (and out of) relationships. Not coincidentally, the education of these characters also raises the expectations of reading audiences for the
successful narrative resolution of these characters, making the heroines’ struggles seem less
deserved, and therefore, even more punitive.

The New Woman, by now, is certainly not new. She has a rich critical heritage. Elaine Showalter forged her a place in the literary world during the late twentieth century with *Sexual Anarchy*, her follow-up to *A Literature of Their Own*. Subsequent scholars have carved out a substantial niche for her. However, part of her heritage includes argument over just exactly what she is and whether or not she existed outside of a fictional context. Current critics tend to disagree, almost as vehemently as contemporary Victorian audiences and reviewers did, over definitions of the New Woman. Sally Ledger has drawn attention to the conflicted attempts to ascertain the nature of the New Woman when she states that the “New Woman of the *fin de siècle* had a multiple identity. She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement” (*The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* 1). Perhaps because Gail Cunningham denies the existence of the New Woman as anything but a literary phenomenon, she has the most rudimentary and philosophically abstract discussion available in the scholarly literature of what the New Woman denoted. According to her, the New Woman stands as a signifier for two things: principle and choice. As Cunningham observes:

two essential points have to be borne in mind if an accurate picture of the New Woman is to emerge. Firstly, a woman was only genuinely New if her conflict with social convention was on a matter of principle. Mere eccentricity, or flamboyance along the Girl of the Period lines were not sufficient.” Secondly, the New Woman’s radical stance was taken on matters of personal choice. It was not based on any recognizable movement or organisation, and was necessarily limited to the areas where personal choice
could operate. A woman at the end of the nineteenth century could not choose to vote in a general election, but she could opt for bachelor motherhood, or a career, or even, on a trivial level, short hair, comfortable clothes and a cigarette. Any one of these, provided it was accompanied by stern pronouncements on its liberating effect, would be enough to label its perpetrator a New Woman. (10-11)

Accordingly, principle and choice function interdependently to form the ideology of the New Woman. Undoubtedly, Cunningham outlines some of the issues on which the New Woman was expected to exercise her will. Marriage, maternity, profession, dress, and behavioral vice were some of the provinces over which she acquired agency.

If, as Cunningham asserts, a New Woman could choose to bear children, either in or out of wedlock, then birth control assuredly also was part and parcel of what constituted her identity. Contraception, as well as other issues that determined women’s quotidian life, certainly was a feature of first-wave feminism. Although Cunningham argues that the New Woman was not readily affiliated with any organization or movement, but more driven by personal choice, most feminist critics today recognize the common conception that the personal is and always has been political, just as fin de siècle writers correlated the two. Since this is the case, the New Woman was frequently synonymous with the feminist of the period. Along with Sally Ledger, Ann Heilmann associates the New Woman with the feminist, asserting that definitions of the New Woman at the end of the nineteenth century “were apt to shift and contest the parameters of the category,” a class that could include the “writer, social reformer, or feminist activist” (2). Heilmann argues that it is hardly coincidental that “the term ‘feminism,’ coined in the early nineteenth century by Charles Fourier, entered the English language at the same time as that of the ‘New Woman’ (1894/95)” (5). Because the appropriation of both terms (“New Woman” and “feminist”)
occurred in the late nineteenth century and because their ideologies frequently were
interchangeable, these terms consistently refer to the same figure in literature as well as
history. This study will treat these figures as such.

For some critics, though, an absolutely essential component of the New Woman was
her tendency toward mild psychopathology, usually as a consequence of her newly acquired
privileges. For these critics, the New Woman is a figure who fits anywhere in the spectrum
of mental diseases between mild neurosis and overt hysteria. Elaine Showalter asserts that
the New Woman was frequently described at the turn of the century not only in androgynous
terms but also in terms of illness pronounced by both the medical community and Victorian
society as a whole. According to Showalter, the terminology used to depict the New Woman
includes such maladies as anorexia, neurasthenia, and hysteria (39). Jane Wood agrees that
the New Woman was pathologized, arguing that at the end of the century

women who were striving for more freedom from the constraints of
domesticity were considered by many to be directly responsible for what was
being presaged as the certain breakdown of the family as a social unit. Such
women were regularly being warned by socio-medical commentators in
journals and periodicals that they were doubly disadvantaged since they
courted nervous illness if they resisted their biological destiny of marriage and
motherhood, and were liable to give birth to weak and sickly children if they
fulfilled it. (163)

Thus the choice Cunningham insists is central for the New Woman ultimately
functions in the cultural construction of her identity as emotionally and mentally deficient.
Frequently cited as the quintessential voice of the period on the New Woman, the German
reviewer of Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* recognizes the New Woman’s tendency toward mental
instability, labeling her as

. . . the woman of the feminist movement—the slight pale bachelor girl—the
intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were
producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves as superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises.

(Hardy Jude Bantam ed. 7)

Purportedly, the “slight” and “pale” signify the New Woman’s inappetence, and the “bundle of nerves” reference indicates her neurological deficits. Thus, both modern and contemporary critics include some sort of mental disease in their characterization of the New Woman.

Although Hardy’s German reviewer refers to the New Woman as an urban trend, some modern scholars contend that New Women could also emerge in rural settings as well. While Hardy’s heroine in Tess of the d’Urbervilles is clearly meant to be read as an elemental part of the landscape in Hardy’s English countryside of Wessex, Penny Boumelha pits herself against Gail Cunningham in treating Tess as a type of New Woman based on the publication date and subject matter of the novel.

It has been claimed that ‘Tess immediately preceded the New Woman fiction’, but, as my account of the New Fiction has shown, novels dealing with sex and the New Woman were already no longer a novelty. Some of the attacks on Tess—which was greeted with a moral furore and a degree of partisanship that must have made most of the earlier criticisms of his [Hardy’s] work seem trivial—were surely induced by the fact that Hardy appeared to be lending the weight of his position as a well-established (if slightly controversial) author to the more recent developments of the New Fiction. (119)

Boumelha uses Hardy’s chronological and thematic positioning of the text as justification for treating a bucolic heroine as a New Woman in her discussion of New Fiction, thereby broadening categorizations of the New Woman that had formerly upheld her as an urban artifact.

Ultimately, what the New Woman came to signify for Victorian culture seemed to evolve with each subsequent publication of a novel in the last decades of the century.
containing a heroine who even remotely challenged Victorian norms. The identifying characteristic of the New Woman came to be her contrariness and all the ensuing consequences of that contrariness. If the New Woman was defined by her defiance—her rebellion against nineteenth-century conventions established for Victorian women—then a brief examination of the conventions the New Woman was resisting would shed light on her identity. Of course, standards for Victorian women varied depending on their class. Both upper and middle-class women were subject to the doctrine of separate spheres, a concept that arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century and was reified by poets like Coventry Patmore around mid-century. According to Richard Altick, women were barred from participation in the worlds of commerce and intellect, which led to their eventual exclusion from gainful employment. After being barred from the world of intellect, they were declared less capable mentally than men, thus further justifying their prohibition from the workplace, and a woman who attempted to make use of her intelligence was considered unpleasant, strong-willed, and alarming, traits in a woman that were not well received (Altick 54).

Having their participation in such endeavors circumscribed, they were relegated mainly to the home (Altick 50-1). Their responsibilities there, too, were limited, having servants to clean house and to care for and educate the children. Altick uses the phrase “decoratively futile” to refer to the existence Victorian ladies were encouraged to cultivate (51). Their primary responsibilities entailed creating a tranquil atmosphere for their husband and the many children they were expected to bear. They achieved such aims by perfecting skills taught them as girls, such as “needlework, making boxes from shells collected at the seaside, sketching and watercolor painting, flower arrangement, strumming at the piano or harp” (Altick 51-2). Working inside the home to create such an environment, wives were
subservient to the husbands who returned from employment outside the home. Such submissiveness was facilitated by the culture’s insistence that the position women occupied in this scheme was one that bestowed on them the role of arbiter of taste. Such a role would make them authorities in their limited realm. As if the upper and middle-class Victorian woman’s job to navigate her decoratively futile life bearing numerous children were not complicated enough, she had to accomplish this feat with a purportedly absent libido. It was commonly held during the Victorian Period that women had no sexual desire, and it was considered indecorous to refer to such passions in women. Some critics register dissent, advancing the belief that female sexuality within the bonds of marriage was a necessary and healthy part of Victorian womanhood:

[s]exual pleasure in women was pathological and socially problematic if it was the result of solitary, homosexual, or promiscuous sexual activity, healthy and socially constructive if it was pursued within the context of the marital relationship. Pace William Acton and his well-known views about the asexual woman, most Victorian medical men recognised that sexual pleasure formed an important part of conjugal love and companionship.

(Ornella Mosucci 71)

The attributes exalted in middle and upper-class women were clearly reflected in the literature of the period. Carol Christ examines them through her discussion of Coventry Patmore’s “Angel in the House.” The ideals particularly valued by Victorian society center around female asexuality and passivity: “Patmore associates woman with a complex of traditionally feminine values—love, intuition, beauty, virtue. Each of these values, however, results from woman’s lack of desire to act.” She claims, on the other hand, that “man is defined by his capacity for action, aggression and achievement” (149). Kristin Brady further illustrates the paradigm within which females operated: “[t]he biological imperative of reproduction was thus used to reinforce the Victorian construction of gendered social roles,
which confined women to the domestic world and enforced a cult of female chastity” (88).

All of these norms—chastity, inactivity, passivity, asexuality, maternity—defined Victorian womanhood and functioned dialectically in opposition to Victorian manhood.

The expectations for women of the working class were, unsurprisingly, vastly different, largely out of necessity. There were no separate spheres for the working class, and wives worked beside, and sometimes longer hours than, their husbands, female labor being some of the most easily exploitable during the century. Poverty drove women to work alongside men, and frequently their own children, in mills and factories as well as on farms to supplement the family income. Women who were fortunate enough to have come from reputable families who could provide a more than nominal amount of education for them had better options, one of which was to become a governess (or teacher). However, such positions were still considered ones of domestic service. Even though a governess was a more revered position than a scullery maid, her work was still drudgery, and she was woefully underpaid. Thus, the ideal to aspire to for the working woman was still positioned inside the domestic sphere, albeit not her own domestic sphere.

**EDUCATION**

Punishment for the figure of the New Woman in literature did not emerge *ex nihilo.* Punishing female characters had already had a long literary history, including figures like Chaucer’s Patient Griselda, demonstrating her willingness to endure the sadistic torments of a husband to prove her constancy. But the trend toward punishment roots itself firmly in eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, with its share of damsels in distress chased down long hallways by caped villains who eventually capture them and hold them prisoner in locked towers. What does emerge toward the end of the eighteenth century is the correlation
between education and punishment, and Mary Wollstonecraft articulates this phenomenon succinctly in *Vindication on the Rights of Woman*. In her argument for female betterment, she asserts that women are entitled to education and to deny them that is not only detrimental to the individual woman but also to every person who comes in contact with her and society at large. She notes, however, that the educated woman will be punished; specifically she will not find a mate:

> The exclamations then which any advice respecting female learning, commonly produces, especially from pretty women, often arise from envy. When they chance to see that even the luster of their eyes, and the flippant sportiveness of refined coquetry will not always secure them attention, during a whole evening, should a woman of a more cultivated understanding endeavour to give a rational turn to the conversation, the common source of consolation is, that such women seldom get husbands. (176)

Wollstonecraft also acknowledges that societal punishment is not confined to the unmarried thinking woman; the thinking mother can also be punished through societal censure:

> Nay, has not a little rationality exposed many women to the severest censure? I advert to well known facts, for I have frequently heard women ridiculed, and every little weakness exposed, only because they adopted the advice of some medical men, and deviated from the beaten track in their mode of treating their infants. I have actually heard this barbarous aversion to innovation carried still further, and a sensible woman stigmatized as an unnatural mother, who has thus been wisely solicitous to preserve the health of her children, when in the midst of her care she has lost one by some of the casualties of infancy, which no prudence can ward off. (176)

According to Wollstonecraft, any woman who demonstrates independent thought, even if it is established in rational and learned foundation, can expect to incur the wrath of those around her.

> Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft firmly advocates female education. She also staunchly promotes parity in instruction, believing coeducation necessary for the institution of marriage
to endure. She argues that “to improve both sexes they ought, not only in families, but in public schools, to be educated together. If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellow” (165). Such beliefs imply that men and women should be taught the same curriculum, and she states this very idea explicitly:

But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being—one of Rousseau’s wild chimeras. (39)

Her reference to the fanciful kind of education is clearly an indictment of the finishing schools that taught women what she obviously deems to be, at best, utter foolishness and, at worst, a health hazard.

She expresses her disgust at what these schools teach females, which can hardly be called a curriculum:

. . . for girls are more restrained and cowed than boys, speak of the wearisome confinement, which they endured at school. Not allowed, perhaps, to step out of one broad walk in a superb garden, and obliged to pace with steady deportment stupidly backwards and forwards, holding up their heads and turning out their toes, with shoulders braced back, instead of bounding, as nature directs to complete her own design, in the various attitudes so conducive to health. (164)

Such exercises are designed to capture the male imagination and to aid women in snaring a husband. Unsurprisingly, the education being offered women sounds very much like bodily punishment in and of itself, and the development of undergarments that hold women in such positions in the latter part of the nineteenth century surely had its origins here. But perhaps the most controversial aspect of Wollstonecraft’s treatise, specifically for contemporary
audiences, is contained in her proposition that education will allow women to survive outside of marriage. She writes that “a proper education; or, to speak with more precision, a well stored mind, would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity, I grant” (33). Such a statement strikes at the very heart of the motives for punishing female education, for the societal fear that a woman might not marry by virtue of her own choice rather than out of her unsuitability for marriage (translated as her physical unattractiveness) would threaten the institution of marriage. To threaten marriage would undermine civilization. Such choices, therefore, could not come to pass. Demonstrating the harsh consequences that would ensue would surely curb the behavior.

Questions about women’s education became more complicated in the nineteenth century as they were situated in the context of the general (widespread) educational advances that must be discussed in order to understand the position of women within these broader social movements. Any discussion attempting to trace the evolution of education in nineteenth-century England becomes difficult since nineteenth-century educational reform has its roots always firmly planted in the periods just prior to it. Figures such as Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft cannot be ignored, as they serve as visionaries for later models of education. Also complicating any overview of nineteenth-century education is the diversity of kinds of instruction the period fosters. The scope of this discussion, therefore, is limited mainly to the development of formal, public education—that is, the development of a state-funded educational system. Given this limitation, then, most scholars agree that the Victorian Period solidifies formal education in an unprecedented manner.

Historians seem unified on the point in the Victorian Period at which real advancements in education took place in England. Although monumental strides occur
throughout the nineteenth century, most studies credit the passage of the Forster Act in 1870 (also known as the Education Act of 1870) as the birth of England’s modern educational system. The Forster Act provided funding from the national treasury for universal elementary education. This legislation made school attendance compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 13; however, this requirement was not nationally mandated until 1880 with the supplementary Sandor Act passed in 1876 and the Mundella Act of 1880. In addition to mandatory attendance, the Act subsidized educational systems by endowing them with money, furnishing financial assistance for buildings and teachers where no school systems or inadequate ones previously existed. Nonetheless, this legislation did not entirely alleviate the fees students had been paying, and they could still be required to put forward a portion of their fees, although usually not to exceed nine pence per week. The reform included provisions for electing local school boards to oversee education in their respective districts as well. As such, the Forster Act established the first state-run schools and defined the national school system in England as it stands today.

Although the Forster Act is thought of as the crucial moment in the history of public education in England, it was, of course, the culmination of all that had come before it, and the passage of legislation that enhances education in the country frequently seems to occur almost simultaneously with the passage of labor laws that restrict the employment of children. The Forster Act is no exception in that it came on the heels of previously enacted laws that kept children out of the workplace and freed more of their time for schooling. Such laws emanated from the persistent discussions throughout the first part of the century, a time when debates surrounding the necessity of universal education proliferated. One significant determinant in the early development of state involvement in education was the Church of
England, an institution that displayed some ambivalence toward childhood instruction, but on the whole advocated it principally for its own ends:

The motives of the Church, its leaders and its clergy, and the attitudes held towards the education of the poor were diverse. Certainly education became seen as a weapon against spiritual ignorance, infidelity, dissent, socialism, Chartism, profligacy, crime and immorality, as well as a philanthropic activity. Throughout the period the Church as a whole regarded its schools primarily as instruments of religious and moral instruction. Despite this, Church schools increasingly provided secular instruction and became the chief public institutions for elementary education. Though the National Society was founded in 1811 by the High Church party, it was soon supported by Churchmen generally and, with church building, was in its early decades part of a movement to restore the Church to an influential place in the new industrial society. (Stephens 43)

Religious leaders by and large wanted their congregations to be able to read Scripture as a guard against moral turpitude and saw education as fundamental to their cause. However, as Raymond Williams points out, there was a representative faction that advocated such reading skills but was opposed to education extensive enough to include applied literacy skills like writing. This faction believed that such measures would create dissatisfaction in the lower classes, making them unfit for their occupations as laborers: “for moral reasons the poor must learn to read the Bible, but that writing and arithmetic, to say nothing of more dangerous subjects, were less necessary or even harmful” (135). The belief that education could promote thinking, and that thinking could threaten the good of the economic base of the country, gave religious leaders pause. Over and above the economic threat, Church leaders also feared political upheaval in educating the working classes too extensively. As Michael Sanderson points out, the clergy feared that “the acquisition of literate skills would make the working classes receptive to radical and subversive literature” (17). Thus, although the Church advanced the cause of education, its participation was not without reservation.
As the debates on education continued through mid-century, concerns over moral instruction became progressively more important to national interests. State political and governing bodies figured largely in shaping the future of education in the country. Lawmakers were aware that education had the potential to ameliorate crime. Those who were most likely to commit such acts were the first to receive the benefit of these insights. The decade prior to the Factory Act in 1833 saw the English government take the concept of childhood education seriously enough to ensure that children who were most at risk of becoming burdens to the state, those who were relegated to the workhouse or prison, would have their educations guaranteed. Their schooling was ensured by provisions in the Prisons’ Act of 1823 and then followed by the Poor Law of 1834 (Sanderson 21). However, some believed that the advantages being offered to at-risk youth should be extended to all children:

Shortly before parliament, in 1833, voted £20,000 *per annum* in aid of schools for the people, John Arthur Roebuck unsuccessfully moved a resolution in the commons in favour of universal, compulsory education, the professional training of teachers in normal schools and the appointment of a minister of education, in all these proposals avowedly following the example of Prussia and of France. (“Education” 14:55)

Although the proposal failed, in 1833 Parliament did begin to subsidize elementary education with public money through religious organizations and continued thereon to increase funding over the latter part of the century.

As a matter of course, the dispensation of public money necessitated the supervision of the grants, and in 1839 the Education Committee of the Privy Council was established to oversee the disbursement of funds to schools (D. G. Paz 129). Consequently, the financial support of education Parliament enacted in 1833 complemented the Factory Act passed that same year, which forbade the employment of children under 9 in textile mills (Howard P.
Children ages 9 to 12 were also limited by the Act from working more than 9 hours per day (later amended in 1836 to no more than 48 hours per week) (*A Short History of Education*). Under the same Act, adolescents from 13 to 18 had their hours curtailed to not more than 9 per day (Maurice Walton Thomas 67). Although the Factory Act of 1833 attempted to improve labor conditions for children who worked in mills, those who worked in mines and on farms remained unprotected. It was not until 1842 that the Mines and Collieries Act was passed that prohibited underground employment in mines for women, girls, and boys under 10 (*A Short History of Education*). In 1844, another Factory Act limited the workday to 12 hours for women and those under 18 (*A Short History of Education*), and in 1867 the Agricultural Gangs Act prevented gangmasters from employing children under 8 to perform farm labor (John Patrick 23). Thus, the regulation of children in the workplace during mid-century, coupled with the burgeoning state-funded educational system, provided more opportunities for children to obtain education who had previously been excluded by virtue of their employment.

As the state began to increase its subsidies for the expanding educational system after 1833, agencies were formed to monitor the progress of the schools receiving support, and a Department of Education was formed. In 1858 the Newcastle Commission was appointed to resolve issues concerning religious instruction in, what were considered at this early stage, public schools and to find ways to maximize cost-effectiveness of elementary instruction. It specifically focused its attention on the poorer classes and the education available to them. The findings of their study led to the Revised Code of 1862, responsible for changes that led to a “payment by results” practice, among other modifications to the existing system (Jackie Latham 7). The Code “instituted a system of payment by results in relation to definite
standards in reading, writing, and arithmetic (reading a short paragraph in a newspaper; writing similar matter from dictation; working sums in practice and fractions). Increasing public aid to the schools was thus tied to the old criterion of a minimum standard” (Raymond Williams 137). The Clarendon Commission, appointed from 1861 to 1865 also investigated schools receiving support, although what constituted a public school remained unclear. Because of this lack of clarity, the Clarendon Commission confined its inquiry only to a handful of schools, and their investigation resulted in the Public Schools Act of 1868, which was ultimately critical of curricula, pedagogical methodology, and management of these institutions (John Lawson and Harold Silver 303-4).

With the expansion of elementary education came interest in secondary education, and committees were appointed to lay the foundation for the education of older students. The Taunton Commission, or Schools Inquiry Commission, appointed from 1864 to 1867 was responsible for a number of advances in secondary education. According to Raymond Williams, it set up a three-tiered system:

The Taunton commission of 1867 envisaged three grades of secondary school: those for the upper and upper-middle classes, keeping their boys till 18 and giving a ‘liberal education’ in preparation for the universities and the old professions; those for the middle classes, keeping their boys till 16 and preparing them for the Army, the newer professions, and many departments of the Civil Service; and those for the lower middle classes, keeping their boys until 14, and fitting them for living as ‘small tenant farmers, small tradesmen, and superior artisans’. (138)

With the aid of government money and commissions to oversee and regulate the distribution of such funds, public education, both elementary and secondary, was well underway by mid-century. These commissions and the changes they initiated were instrumental in the foundation of universal education in England leading up to the Education Act of 1870.
Although the Forster Act altered the landscape of public and universal education dramatically, state involvement in the development of England’s educational system did not halt thereafter. Just as legislation advancing universal education was coupled with legislation limiting children in the workforce prior to the Forster Act, both educational and workforce legislation functioned in tandem after the passing of the Forster Act as well. The Agricultural Children Act of 1873 stipulated that children under 10 who were employed by a landowner must have attended a certified school at least 250 times within a year. Thus, Parliament combined workplace regulation for children and education reform in the same amendment. In 1876 an amendment to the Elementary Education Act extended the prohibition of employment of children under 10 in any occupation without proof of requisite time in school, this proscription being extended to children under 11 in factories and workshops by the Factory and Workshop Act of 1891. To provide assistance to rural areas that were less populated and had less local revenue with which to subsidize their own regions, the Education Code Act, passed in 1890, provided smaller school districts in England with additional national funding and extended the educational curriculum in evening schools. In an effort to make schools affordable to all, the Free Education Act in the following year eliminated fees paid by students in public schools altogether. The Elementary Education Act in 1893, to enhance the regulations handed down in the Factory Act of 1891, raised the age of compulsory attendance in schools to 11. Of course, educational reform in public and elementary schools continued beyond the nineteenth century; however, the heavy legislation both in industry and in education during the nineteenth century makes clear the Victorian agenda for getting children out of the workforce and into the school system.
While universal elementary education was clearly a state concern, it became a concern for industry during the Victorian Period as well. In addition to state governing bodies taking a vested interest in education, industry became involved in creating a literate and educated populace. In mining towns, mine owners traditionally set up libraries for the children of their employees, but they began to extend their financial support to local educational efforts by contributing first to private schools, then public ones as well until their own company schools were established. These companies discovered that this practice served their own interests by producing a better workforce and found advocacy in local government for the practice:

[t]his policy, intended to produce civilized workmen who would appreciate the mutual benefits of co-operation, was supported by the school inspectorate, and by the commissioners appointed to report annually on conditions in the mining districts in the 1840s and 1850s, and who regarded the pit villages not only as sinks of depravity, sloth and savagery, but nests of political subversion. And to the wish to inculcate habits of industry, obedience and morality through schooling were added other motives. Deeper pits, more complicated machinery, and so on, accentuated the advantages of a literate workforce which could understand regulations and written instructions. There was also the hope that provision of good schools would reduce the habit of workmen to move frequently from one colliery to another. The colliery schools were not simply engines of social control. Humanitarianism and paternalism played a part in their establishment and education provided was certainly not inferior to that of Church schools. By 1853 most coalowners supported half-time education for boys of ten to fifteen. (Stephens 56-7)

In its patronage of school systems, industry consequently had a controlling interest in the development of education in Victorian England.

Although institution-sanctioned motives for education were apparent, there was also demand among individuals for education. According to Phil Gardner, most studies on education in Victorian England focus on the efforts of agencies during the century to shape
the education offered to individuals, largely ignoring the effect those individuals themselves had on the expansion of universal education. The focus of these studies “continues to be the progressive expansion and refinement of formal education provision for the working class, through the combined—and generally laudable—efforts of Church and State. In this perspective, the concept of ‘education’ is narrowed to a known and agreed facility, to a neutral process that is simply ‘done’ to people, both for their individual benefit and for the good of society as a whole” (1). However, further study reveals that Victorians, in fact, did see advantages to becoming educated, particularly as the century progresses, and became agentive in the development of the school system. In the beginning of the century, many failed to see any correlation between education and the attainment of better jobs. However, individuals slowly begin to value the importance of education, as W. B. Stephens recognizes: “[s]ince schooling generally was not free and did not begin to become compulsory until the 1870s, the rising school attendance figures over the two generations before that must reflect a growing demand from working-class parents for formal schooling, however minimal” (49).

Parents began to comprehend the significance of sending their children to school for purposes of opening up better job opportunities for them. According to Stephens, since a number of prospective employers turned to schools to find workers, the schools functioned as a kind of employment agency for those children looking for placement (21). Parents who wanted their children to secure positions with affluent families had better chances of obtaining such positions for the children if they kept them in school. However, this reason was not the sole motivation for some parents to ensure their child’s education, or desire education for themselves for that matter. Print culture in Victorian England served as an incentive to become literate enough to read: “the vast expansion from the 1830s of didactic
evangelical and utilitarian publications, of political and commercial literature, and of newspapers, radical and otherwise, attests to a working-class society in which the ability to read must have added to the economic advantages political and social ones” (Stephens 51). Although Church, State, and Industry were considerable factors in the establishment of universal education in the nineteenth century, individuals themselves, and particularly the working class, also contributed to the rise of universal education.

In addition to the arguments over universal elementary education, disputes concerning secondary education arose during the century as well. While some debated whether or not the masses should be educated at all and, if so, to what extent, others assumed that education was a fundamental human right and had moved on to question what kind of education was most beneficial to the people of England and, by extension, to the country itself. John Roach attests to the obstacles historians contend with in attempting to treat “middle class education” effectively. According to him, “middle class education” is “difficult for the historian to handle because it is not represented by any single institution. Historically, the grammar school fulfilled that role, but the grammar schools, as we shall see, developed many different functions” (3). He asserts that the decline of the grammar schools brought forth a host of educational institutions with varying missions, some of which include the group of boarding schools from which the nineteenth-century public schools were to emerge. Others had become parish schools teaching elementary subjects, the three Rs of reading writing and arithmetic. Many grammar schools straddled uneasily the two worlds of secondary and elementary education. They taught the classics to a few boys, some of whom proceeded to university, and they gave a more limited education—part classical, part modern—to a more numerous group of boys who left early for business or trade. The harmony between the two objectives was poorly attained, and the diversity of function meant that no single function was performed successfully. (3)
As a result of this diversity, the opinions of educational reformers at this time were reflexively diverse.

Chief among these reformers was Matthew Arnold, who inherited the legacy of educational reform from his father before him. Arnold began his venture into educational reform in 1851 when he was appointed an Inspector of Schools and became a strong proponent of classical education. Reacting to Benthamite utilitarian currents of the early nineteenth century that posited the merit of any education should be weighed against its usefulness (which thus roundly dismissed study of the classics as worthless), Arnold passionately believed the ideology he propounded in *Culture and Anarchy*, published in *Cornhill* throughout 1867 and 1868. The ideology expressed in that work was the culmination of his years of study of the public school system as an inspector and of his observations of the English working class throughout his travels over the countryside. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold extols the virtues of “getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically” (5). Arnold is concerned not only about whether men read, but also about what they are reading, which, unsurprisingly, he believes has a profound influence on their lives and can help them achieve a state of perfection, a love of perfection being the origin of his definition of culture.

While he confirms that religion is a necessary and worthy component of the making of the cultured individual, he also believes that to get to this cultured state, one must engage all the faculties at one’s disposal:
And religion, the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself,—religion, that voice of the deepest human experience,—does not only enjoin and sanction the aim of setting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail; but also, in determining generally in what human perfection consists, religion comes to a conclusion identical with that which culture,—seeking the determination of this question through all the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as religion, in order to give a greater fulness and certainty to its solution,—likewise reaches.       (Arnold 32)

The “voices of human experience” Arnold refers to here constitute what Victorians considered a liberal education, one forged through studying the classics, though the sciences only became part of that education later in the century. To the Benthamite argument promoting education that has utility as its end, he submits that a classical education is an end in and of itself: "For as there is a curiosity about intellectual matters which is futile, and merely a disease, so there is certainly a curiosity,—a desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are,—which is, in an intelligent being, natural and laudable" (30). Arnold’s support of classical education would inform the future of public education in Victorian England through his many reports to the Newcastle and Taunton Commissions. Though Arnold worked closely with these agencies, his position on education diverged from his colleagues. While “most academic liberals of the 1860s” disapproved of State intervention, Arnold “heartily endorsed it; backing up his position with a series of reports on Continental education systems” (Christopher Stray 173-4). Stray notes that his disagreement with his colleagues was probably the reason why he was never made a full member of the Taunton Commission. Nonetheless, Arnold’s work with these commissions promoted the role of the state in secondary education
Given the progress education in general made throughout the century, it would not be unreasonable to expect that female education would have advanced as well. Initially it did make some strides. Perhaps, though, what is most meaningful to note is that secondary education was mainly reserved for boys. Nowhere was female secondary education addressed. This is clearly what Mary Wollstonecraft reacts so vehemently against as she condemns her society for their treatment of females and as she makes her argument that women need to be trained and formally educated in the same way and with the same curriculum as men. She argues that, like men, women need to be intellectually challenged, and such intellectual rigor may need to include training in the classics as males are trained. Female education did not progress with the same alacrity male education did and was largely determined by socio-economic status. Elementary school curriculum for girls from 1800 through 1870 differed from that of boys. According to June Purvis, middle-class girls were educated toward finding husbands:

While public schools aimed to ‘mould’ the character of middle-class boys and prepare them for success in professional and public life, middle class girls tended to be educated as potential wives and mothers who would be supported economically rather than as independent salary earners. The curriculum they studied therefore stressed forms of ornamental knowledge that might be ‘useful’ in attracting a husband. Thus ‘snatches of disconnected information’ in subjects such as English, history, geography and Latin, and ‘trivial or showy accomplishments’ in subjects such as French conversation, fancy needlework, singing, piano playing and the use of the globes were commonly taught. (72)

But secondary education was reserved mainly for boys, and its access for females is curbed through formal legislation before it gains momentum. While formal education geared toward male development made rapid progress in the early part of the Victorian Period, education for females lags sorely behind.
Prior to the Victorian Period, protofeminists and progressive thinkers believed that the best way for women to better themselves was for them to become formally educated. Beginning with the establishment of institutions such as Queen’s College in 1848 that opened higher education to women and advancing to women’s admittance to London University in 1868, legislative developments in education permitted women to obtain some type of formal education, particularly technical training and elementary school apprenticeships. Women’s colleges, such as Girton, taught females the same kind of curriculum that male universities did, and women were, in time, permitted to attend and take examinations at male colleges (though they still were not awarded degrees from institutions such as Cambridge and Oxford).

**PUNISHMENT AND EDUCATION**

A consequential development in response to the rise of female demand for education was punishment, which takes place both outside and inside literary texts. Nancy Armstrong observes the rise of censuring the woman in literature who chooses against societal norms, stating that “the production of this new Victorian fiction [at mid-century] depended on bringing forth some monstrous woman to punish and then banish from the text, as regularly happened in the novels by the Brontës, Gaskell, Dickens, and Thackeray” (165). She recognizes that women who choose against marriage pose a threat to civilized society: “[m]ore serious still is the implication [in Darwin] that a female's failure to desire a male will put civilization itself at the mercy of the male unregulated competitive instincts” (234). The prospect of female choice, therefore, was policed through the conduct books and domestic fiction that “represented forms of female subjectivity that posited a basis for the self prior to any social identity” (Armstrong 164). Female subjectivity, therefore, became rooted in
sexual desire “and in one’s ability to channel such desire toward socialized goals. It made the welfare of the social group depend, before anything else, on the regulation of the individual’s desire” (Armstrong 164). As such, anything that deterred marriage, as would female education according to Wollstonecraft, had to be contained. Nineteenth-century fiction charts the images of such containment.

Armstrong discusses the Edgeworths’ endorsement of fiction as a desirable means for inculcating values in British society during the early part of the nineteenth-century (16). Such endorsement ran counter to the arguments conveyed in Wollstonecraft’s Vindication, which clearly inveighs against fiction as a devil’s playground for women, though better than nothing at all. Wollstonecraft indicts the “stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties” (Wollstonecraft 183). Such novels are fodder for several of the heroines included in this study and serve as the primary instrument of education for a few. (See Figure 1.6 for a rendering of the negative associations of novel-reading as a corrupting influence for females nearly 100 years after Wollstonecraft writes). For others, reading material is of a more substantial nature, consisting of histories such as the one Jane Eyre peruses in the opening of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, though Jane is handed down the plots of sentimental novels like Pamela and Henry, Earl of Moreland by Bessie’s storytelling in the nursery (Brontë 40-41). Jane’s avid reading at a tender age serves as her initiation into education. However, Brontë consistently pairs passages in which female education occurs with passages in which punishment ensues. That correlation between female education and punishment becomes the
DONNA QUIXOTE.

["A world of disorderly notions picked out of books, crowded into his (her) imagination."—Don Quixote.

Figure 1.6 “Donna Quixote” *Punch* Vol. 106 (1894)
means of social control later in the century when the New Woman fiction arises as a threat to the Victorian status quo.

In the opening of *Jane Eyre*, Jane has been relegated to the breakfast-room where she hides to read a copy of Bewick’s *History of British Birds*. Jane has only mused over the book for a short time before John Reed interrupts her to mete out the daily torment Jane endures at his hands. He calls her from her window-seat where she is reading to strike her, asking her after he administers the blow what she has been doing. When Jane replies that she has been reading, John forces her to produce the book, which he identifies as belonging to his own family, and not subject to Jane’s use:

’You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma’s expense. Now I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years.’  (42)

In response to Jane’s reading, John Reed literally throws the book at her, hitting her in the head and causing her to fall against a door that causes her to sustain a head injury. Brontë uses the very tool Jane has been acquiring an education through to punish her physically, a punishment that leaves her wounded sufficiently for a physician to be called. Such a scene sets the stage for subsequent pairings of education and punishment in the novel.

While Jane leaves Gateshead for Lowood Institution, a charity school where she hopes to escape the torments of the Reed family, she receives yet more punishment, as Brocklehurst, the director of the school, subjects her to both physical and psychological torment in the name of educating her and the other girls. Jane’s initial meeting with
Brocklehurst at Gateshead presages the contentious relationship she will have with him throughout her tenure at Lowood, where he makes an example of her early on for the rest of the girls in the class by forcing her to stand on a stool while he identifies her as a liar. He also warns the other students not to speak to her, to “avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse” (98). The punishment is meant to humiliate Jane and cause her psychological distress. Brocklehurst achieves his aim initially. Jane is mortified at having been singled out and unjustly accused of deceit. It is only when her newly found friend, Helen Burns, passes by her and ignores Brocklehurst’s orders by smiling at Jane that Jane gains the courage to sustain the insult and even find solidarity in it. Not an hour before that, Helen had been censured similarly.

Lowood School is a place of learning characterized by deprivation. The students there lead a punishing existence. What little food is fed them there is bland at best and rotten or burnt at worst, and, at every turn in the narrative descriptions of Lowood, Jane remarks how hungry she is and how meager the portions of the inedible food are. It is not merely the food, or lack thereof, that contributes to the bodily punishment that the students endure. The general hygiene of the institution is called into question:

by degrees various facts came out which excited public indignation in a high degree. The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation, the pupil’s wretched clothing and accommodations—all these things were discovered; and the discovery produced a result mortifying to Mr. Brocklehurst, but beneficial to the institution. (115)

To compound the unsanitary conditions, the pupils are not even sheltered from the elements. Jane notes that their clothing was inadequate in keeping them from feeling the harshness of the winters.
Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold; we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes, and melted there; our ungloved hands became numbed and covered with chilblains, as were our feet. I remember well the distracting irritation I endured from this cause every evening, when my feet inflamed, and the torture of thrusting the swelled, raw, and stiff toes into my shoes in the morning. (92)

Jane’s tenure at Lowood emphasizes the correlation between education and punishment. Brontë introduces early in the novel, demonstrating that one must suffer in order to obtain the education that will result in female betterment, higher class standing, and better economic stability. In presenting this punishment, Brontë sets up the model that George Eliot would follow in subsequent novels, with the aid of Mary Wollstonecraft’s treatise, underscoring the punishing circumstances surrounding education.

George Eliot addresses the issue of female education and its ensuing punishment through the characters of Dorothea and Rosamond in Middlemarch, using many of the same arguments found in Wollstonecraft’s Vindication. In so doing, she presents a fictional embodiment of the argument for educating women by offering two female characters whose destinies have been altered significantly by unfortunate marriages because of their lack of education. Wollstonecraft and Eliot both insist that women need education, but Eliot demonstrates Wollstonecraft’s arguments concretely through her creation of tangible characters that embody and illuminate Wollstonecraft’s exposition. Through the incompatible pairings of these female characters, Eliot illustrates the punishment women receive who desire or are in need of education, thus establishing the correlation of education and punishment so readily encountered in the fiction of the 1890s.

Both Dorothea and Rosamond epitomize the argument for the necessity of female education, Dorothea in her ardent desire for it and Rosamond in her woeful lack of it. The
setting of the novel places the characters in the early 1830s, a time in which the doctrine of separate spheres specifically defines male and female roles. The concept of the “angel in the house” was taking shape fictionally in the novel and had already been articulated by Patmore by the time Eliot wrote and published *Middlemarch* in 1871 and 1872. Lydgate’s initial tastes in women reflect this ideal of female conduct when Eliot describes his dislike of Dorothea’s non-conformity: “[t]he society of such women [Dorothea] was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach a second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird notes and blue eyes for a heaven” (64). In the novel, education for women is tailored to fit the female who is pleasing to the senses. Eliot’s narrator describes Mrs. Lemon’s school as responsible for the cultural reproduction of the “ideal female,” referring to it as “the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female—even to extras such as getting in and out of a carriage” (65). The finishing school, thus, produced the woman who was sought after by middle and upper class Victorian men.

Because the “angel in the house” model of woman catered to male affinity, it became a successful strategy for women who were looking for husbands; however, as Wollstonecraft points out, it would become, at best, useless and, at worst, dangerous after marriage. Eliot picks up on Wollstonecraft’s argument that “[t]he woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone” *(Vindication* 27). Eliot’s Mrs. Plymdale echoes these same sentiments about Rosamond’s training: “for what was the use of accomplishments which would be all laid aside as soon as she was married” (115). Rosamond receives the kind of education typical of middle and
upper-class women of the early nineteenth century—that of finishing schools. Because formal education that challenged women intellectually was not accessible to them, they frequently relied on the only means available to raise themselves not only intellectually, but also socially and financially: marriage. Again, Wollstonecraft argues first what Eliot will later reify: “meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to the libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,--the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage” (10).

Dorothea yearns for and expects to gain a more cultivated intellect from Casaubon as his wife. Eliot demonstrates the nature of Dorothea’s yearning when she writes: “but it was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband that she wished to know Latin and Greek. Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing ground from which all truth could be seen more clearly. As it was she constantly doubted her own conclusions because she felt her own ignorance” (142). Dorothea’s desire for education is apparent in her painful awareness of her own deficiency and in her exalting of the kind of knowledge specifically reserved for males. Her marriage to Casaubon serves as a vehicle for the education she arduously pursues. Although Dorothea seems to have genuine feelings for Casaubon, her interest in him is not based on passion but more on what he can provide her. This is evidenced in her sense of obligation to him once they are married and in the almost total absence of language denoting any kind of sexual attraction between the two of them. In fact, the narrator makes clear that Dorothea’s attraction to him is based on the intellectual gifts she might receive from him and the benefits his education may confer on her: “the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her
own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path” (17).

Clearly what Dorothea seeks in him is access to education not currently available to her, and the narrator tells us Casaubon “had been as instructive as Milton’s ‘affable archangel’” (14). Dorothea looks to Casaubon for the learning she so desperately desires, but the narrator, distancing himself from the character of Dorothea, uses verbal irony to foreshadow that the faith she places in Casaubon to teach her will not be rewarded. Casaubon will not be the mentor who will provide her with the ability to transcend her uneducated predicament, as is apparent in later passages when Dorothea becomes little more than an amanuensis. In this manner, Eliot critically comments that the Victorian woman had a desire much stronger than that of love; she had a thirst for knowledge needing to be sublimated into a more acceptable desire for a woman, that of heterosexual love. The failure of this marriage is yet another of Eliot’s commentaries on the need for female education. Because Dorothea marries for education rather than love (certainly not the companionate marriage Wollstonecraft advocates), her marriage is unsuccessful, and Eliot demonstrates this failure by punishing her character. Thus, Dorothea’s desire for education, sought through marriage, is punished, and a good deal of the knowledge she does acquire along the way comes not from formal education but from the school of hard knocks.

Like Dorothea, Rosamond marries for ulterior motives as well. She weds Lydgate to enhance her social and financial standing. The narrator points to her intentions to “rid herself adroitly of all the visitors who were not agreeable to her at her father’s” and fill her house “with various styles of furniture” when she marries (184). Just as Dorothea wishes to escape, so does Rosamond. However, because an authentic education is not a viable option to her,
thereby allowing her to acquire a profession and financial independence to achieve her aims, she uses love as a pretense to attain her goals, and again, this pretense drives the punishment she receives. Eliot embodies yet another of Wollstonecraft’s ideas in Rosamond. If a woman is taught only to please, Wollstonecraft asks: “is it not more rational to expect that she will try to please other men” (27). Since Rosamond has been well trained in the art of attracting men by her finishing school education, she simply continues to do what she excels at—attract men.

This behavior is acceptable in unmarried women but thoroughly intolerable in married women, as they were expected to be chaste. Rosamond’s flirtatious conduct is a source of marital discord because it is her trifling with Captain Lydgate that leads to the horseback ride that causes her miscarriage. Again, Eliot argues for the necessity of female education by the failure and complete disintegration of Lydgate and Rosamond’s relationship and the utter collapse of Lydgate. Here, not only is the woman punished for and by a lack of education, but the man is as well, illustrating yet another of Wollstonecraft’s arguments:

I have repeatedly asserted, and produced what appeared to me irrefragable arguments drawn from matters of fact, to prove my assertion, that women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns; for they will, however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason which rise above their comprehension.

(5)

Rosamond’s cunning undermines Lydgate’s financial solubility because she does not comprehend the concept of living within one’s means. She meddles with Lydgate’s family, requesting financial assistance from them, and this act further alienates Lydgate from his family and from Rosamond as well.
In both Dorothea and Rosamond’s situations, lack of education is of vital significance in the choices they make. Through education, one undeniably gains valuable knowledge not only about the external world, but also about one’s self. This is the central issue with both of their choices in marriage. Although Eliot’s narrator seems to be in possession of the female characters’ motivations, neither Rosamond nor Dorothea knows herself well enough to choose a marriage partner successfully. Dorothea has no idea that she marries Casaubon because she admires his knowledge, and she believes that he can aid her attempts to become useful to society. When Dorothea becomes aware that Casaubon may intend marriage, the narrator explains that she is not overcome with passionate feelings of love, but of veneration:

\[\text{[i]t had now entered Dorothea’s mind that Mr. Casaubon might wish to make her his wife, and the idea that he would do so touched her with a sort of reverential gratitude. . . . For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desires to make life greatly effective . . . she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse.}\]

(17)

Dorothea convinces herself, because of her desire for knowledge, that admiration is sufficient to make a marriage work.

She is, of course, mistaken. However, she is fortunate enough to have the capacity to see beyond her self-interests, empathize with Casaubon, and learn from her errors.

Rosamond also demonstrates a lack of self-knowledge when she marries Lydgate. She deludes herself into believing Lydgate can provide her with the social and material comforts to which she is accustomed. However, Rosamond refuses to see beyond her own interests in order to empathize with her husband in a time of need. Rosamond obviously does learn from her mistake also; for her second marriage seems somewhat more successful than her first, as
does Dorothea’s. Here Eliot evinces that women, instead of receiving a formal education, receive an education through the misfortunes resulting from poor judgment and life’s experience in general, supporting Boumelha’s assertion that marriage is one of the fundamental ways women receive education in the nineteenth-century novel (82). Instead of getting their education through formal instruction, they receive it through the suffering they endure in unfortunate matches.

George Eliot not only argues that women need education, but she also asserts that some women are better equipped and more desirous to obtain education than certain men. This argument is portrayed through the character of Fred Vincy. Fred lacks the ambition and discipline needed to acquire a scholarly education, and these missing components delay his acquisition of a college degree. Fred’s ambivalence towards education becomes the source of stress for his family, demonstrated in Mr. Vincy’s consternation: “‘Well sir,’ he observed, when that young gentleman [Fred] was moving off to bed, ‘I hope you’ve made up your mind now to go up next term and pass your examination. I’ve taken my resolution, so I advise you to lose no time in taking yours’” (235). In contrast to Dorothea, who ardently desires to be educated, Fred seems undeserving of a formal education. In this way, Eliot implies that the frequent argument of the period that women were incapable of and less equipped for education lacks substantiation. Thus, Eliot reifies Wollstonecraft’s argument in Vindication through the characters in Middlemarch, demonstrating Wollstonecraft’s assertion that refusing to educate women is not merely detrimental to the women being denied full access to comparable education, but also to the men who become involved with these women.
PUNISHMENT AND PLOT

Both Brontë and Eliot figure punishment in the models of education they depict in their fiction. Additionally, because both authors create heroines that have seedlings of the resistant ideology the New Woman at the end of the century would come to embrace, their fiction serves as a prototype for later authors who punished their New Woman heroines through education. Using such models, authors of the fin de siècle became creative in the ways they punished their heroines. Punishment seems to be created in several ways in narrative, the most obvious being through plot.

The element of fiction termed “plot” has come under significant scrutiny, causing it to be defined and redefined continuously by various theorists. Most definitions are rooted in Aristotelean poetics, proposing that the pity and fear that drive the Tragedy are contingent, first and foremost, upon a plot comprised of “men’s actions.” Thus, Aristotle privileges action over character: “character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions” (23). This privileging of action/plot over character ignores the fact that character actually determines which actions and choices an author can have a character make. Hardy’s novels, for example, almost invariably subvert “men’s actions” through the construction of a plot in which a character’s volition and agency have been taken away. Thus, the “actions” that occur in Tess and Jude are rarely those of “men,” but more the action of “Hap,” “the President of the Immortals,” “Nature,” i.e., events beyond a character’s control, upon that character. However, this robbing of a character’s volition and agency does not throw the focal point back on plot. Characters can maintain an equal footing with plot, driving it
through their reactions to events beyond their control. Hardy acknowledges this emphasis on character, asserting: “after all, it is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter” (Millgate 268). The reaction of the characters in these texts rivals action in importance—a notably significant development with regard to the genre of realism, and in particular to the *Bildungsroman*.

Distinguishing between story, plot, and action, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg base an economic and rudimentary definition of “plot” on Aristotelean principles, though expanding Aristotle’s definition to some extent by stipulating character in limited circumstances. They hypothesize plot as “the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature” that incorporates other elements in the narrative when those elements become dynamic. Plot, for them, is a “term intended to refer to action alone, with the minimum possible reference to character” (207). As such, when character becomes dynamic, it becomes essential to plot. Because character is a dynamic component of plot, an accurate assessment of “plot,” and the most appropriate critical model with which to study it, would include the element of character in its definition. Because Scholes and Kellogg are two of the few neo-Aristotelean formalist critics who address the element of character in relation to plot in their model, their approach is most useful in studying how novelists structure tragedy, thus manipulating their reading audiences into sympathetic submission through a plot that focuses on character. Hence, it is imperative to examine character in relation to plot and how these two components function interdependently, possibly obscuring demarcations between the two to create the sympathy Wayne Booth refers to in his study.

This blurring of plot and character allows for the fall characters necessarily experience in Tragedy, and thus for the pity and fear Aristotle refers to that intensifies
tragedy and creates a kind of cathartic sympathy. Aristotle is clear about the nature of the character that elicits the most intense cathartic reaction; that character must be one who resides in an “in between” state: “[t]here remains, then, the character between these two extremes,--that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous,--a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families” (26-7). Thus, such characteristics contribute to the sympathy a reader will feel for a character and to the degree a reader will feel a character’s punishment.

Contemporary critics recognize the function of plot in the punishment of characters. Rachael Blau DuPlessis observes that authors make decisions with narrative outcomes for their characters based on ideology:

One of the great moments of ideological negotiation in any work occurs in the choice of a resolution for the various services it provides. Narrative outcome is one place where transindivudual assumptions and values are most clearly visible, and where the word “convention” is found resonating between its literary and its social meanings. Any artistic resolution (especially of a linear form that must unroll in time) can, with greater or lesser success, attempt an ideological solution to the fundamental contradictions that animate the work. Any resolution can have traces of the conflicting materials that have been processed within it. It is where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning; it is where the author may side-step and displace attention from the materials that a work has made available. (3)

DuPlessis posits that one of the narrative resolutions nineteenth and twentieth-century female authors opted for was marriage, the other punishment: “[î]n nineteenth-century fiction dealing with women, authors went to a good deal of trouble and even some awkwardness to see to it that Bildung and romance could not coexist and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution” (3). One of the ways authors negotiated this conflict was by punishing one of
these components in the novel. Frequently, it was the Bildung or quest that was suppressed in service of the romance plot. DuPlessis refers to this as the “quest plot of punishment for female aspiration” (21). One such quest of the heroines of these novels is the pursuit of education, and through narrative retribution, authors punished their heroines for the lack of, desire for, or receipt of education.

The plotted punishments the New Woman authors usually resorted to involved having the heroine abandon the very ideologies that were so important to her in the first place, thus betraying herself. This is the case for Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure and Grant Allen’s Herminia Barton in The Woman Who Did. Others wrote the heroine out of the text altogether through her death, as is the case in Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Olive Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm. If an author wanted to intensify that death in some way, he might have her take responsibility for writing herself out of the text by having her commit suicide, as Allen’s Herminia does after she abandons her principles. However, as odd as it may seem, authors who punished their characters most intensely had their heroines live with some disability, usually clipping their wings by virtue of their health or mental status. Neurosis, hysteria, neurasthenia, alcoholism, and depression frequently appear as consequences of espousing ideologies that correspond to the New Woman. We see these kinds of punishments in striking ways in Hardy’s Sue Bridehead and in George Gissing’s Virgie Madden. Occasionally, an author martyred his or her heroine, making her suffer for the injustices of others, but clearly the suffering is meant to be punishing to the female character, as Herminia Barton is punished. At times, such martyrdom took the form of an ironic “consent to be raped,” as is the case in both of Hardy’s texts in this dissertation. The
most extreme forms, in fact, involved the consent of the heroine and even employed her in her own punishment, which utilizes a kind of narrative masochism.

Yet another way in which authors heap abuse on their characters is through the intrusion of a narrator so omniscient that the difference between what the narrator understands and what the character understands highlights the ignorance/lack of education of the female character, as is the case with Eliot’s narrator in *Middlemarch*. Penny Boumelha notes this kind of narrative technique, arguing that the “‘New Woman’ novel was often perceived as a work of propaganda or a disguised tract . . . not because its ideological project is any more visible or determining than in other kinds of fiction, but because of the sporadic punctuation of the narrative by meditation, harangue or lyric, by an informing commitment which constantly threatens the circumscribing narrative voice” (66). Here Boumelha cites writing style as having potentially punishing qualities. Elaine Hadley extends the idea of narrative technique in punishing characters by including melodrama as a choice in the authorial repertoire of punishment that would elicit sympathy from an audience. Hadley asserts that “[m]elodrama’s familial narratives of dispersal and reunion, its emphatically visual renderings of bodily torture and criminal conduct, its atmospheric menace and providential plotting, its expressions of highly charged emotion, and its tendency to personify absolutes like good and evil were represented in a wide variety of social settings, not just on the stage” (3). Authors of the late nineteenth century employed melodrama in such way to torture and punish their characters, and the New Woman writers who punished their characters more severely, resorted to such narrative techniques to intensify a character’s suffering.
Although British fin de siècle literature experiences no dearth in feminist publications, this dissertation will focus specifically on New Woman fiction that features heroines who attempt to negotiate the conflicting desires to become educated and also to pursue heterosexual union as well. While fiction certainly is not the only vehicle for the proliferation of feminist ideas, this study deals with narrative technique in instances in which such technique is employed for emphasis. As such, fiction becomes the primary genre for such a study. I use nineteenth-century treatises to supplement the argument I am making when appropriate or in the case of an apparent conflict between authors’ respective stated ideology and their fictional embodiments.11

In Chapter 2, “Disciplining the Female Student: Education and Punishment in George Gissing, Grant Allen, and Ella Hepworth Dixon,” I examine three New Woman authors: Ella Hepworth Dixon, Grant Allen, and George Gissing. These authors punish their New Woman heroines in similar ways, all related to a lack of, a desire for, or the receipt of education. Ella Hepworth Dixon punishes her heroine, Mary Erle, in The Story of a Modern Woman by employing the same kind of plot trajectory for her character as that found in Brontë’s mid-century fiction, one of a solitary (and poverty-stricken) existence stemming from a highly principled streak in her heroine as a function of her education. Like Dixon, Grant Allen also represents punishment related to education in his novel The Woman Who Did. His heroine, Herminia Barton, suffers the consequences of an ideology fostered by intellectualism she acquires as a result of being educated at Girton. While Dixon punishes through plot by leaving her character desolate and alone at the close of her novel, Allen
punishes his character by having her suffer the same lonely existence but also by striking her from the text through her own suicide. In *The Odd Women*, Gissing represents various types of female characters ranging from prototypes of Victorian womanhood commonly figured as Patmore’s “angel in the house” to rebellious, ideologically-driven “shrieking sisters.” In each case, Gissing represents the consequences of education to his characters’ respective fates. While one of his heroines, Monica Madden, is similarly stricken from the text by her death for the ideology she acquires as a result of a limited education, those female characters who are educated and live to see the close of Gissing’s novel seem to suffer more intensely for their relationship to education. Rhoda Nunn and Virgie Madden endure both physical and psychological punishment. The resolution of the novel refuses to abate their misery. While all of these authors demonstrate to varying degrees the cost of needing, desiring, or receiving education, none punishes his characters with such a ferocity as to employ narrative masochism as do the authors I discuss in subsequent chapters. Dixon, Allen, and Gissing all have similar educational backgrounds, ones that include formal education at a young age and university attendance as adults. As a result, they all share similar class backgrounds. Their treatment of educationally related punishment, as severe as that punishment is, never presents the characters as wishing for, requesting, or administering their own punishment.

In Chapter 3, “Marching with the Regiment: the New Woman, Masochism, and the Subversion of Feminism in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*,” I introduce the use of masochism as a narrative strategy in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*. Most critics recognize Lyndall as only a prototypical New Woman, refusing to grant her full status because the narrative is set in a rural colony. Lyndall, therefore, fails to meet the definition of the New Woman as an “urban phenomenon.” I argue that Lyndall is, indeed, a
New Woman by virtue of the ideology she espouses, and, like the other New Women heroines in this study, she both desires and is punished for her education. However, unlike the authors in the prior chapter, Schreiner uses narrative masochism as a vehicle for that punishment. Through the use of her heroine as a rhetorical device for feminist ideology, Schreiner creates a character whose cognizance of the consequences of her choice to be educated, consequences that are ultimately punishing to the point of death, makes her choices not merely self-defeating but seemingly self-injurious. The masochism in Schreiner’s characters may reflect Schreiner’s own tendencies toward self-injury, as noted by Havelock Ellis in his letters to Schreiner. Schreiner’s own educational background and upbringing, which were less privileged and quite possibly more punitive than the previously treated authors, figure in her treatment of her heroine. Home-schooled as a child by her own strict mother and a series of governesses in rural South Africa and never benefiting from a university education, Schreiner experiences a harsher type of education than Dixon, Allen, and Gissing did, a harshness that gets reflected in her fiction.

In Chapter 4, “Unbinding the Masochist: Education, the Erotics of Psychopathology, and Narrative Technique in Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure,” I argue that Thomas Hardy punishes his heroines with unprecedented fierceness. In both Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure, Hardy presents New Woman characters who are desirous of and receive education. Though some critics have refused to read Tess as a New Woman figure for the same reason many refuse Schreiner’s Lyndall, she is driven by an ideology fostered by her education and desire for class mobility. Sue Bridehead is also driven by principles her education fosters and is, in many critics’ eyes, the poster-child for the feminist movement. Both of these characters are punished for the
ideology their educations breed. Like Schreiner, Hardy uses masochism in punishing his characters. However, Hardy exaggerates the masochism through various means, both eroticizing and pathologizing the masochism by employing melodrama. This exaggeration of masochism through melodrama serves as a narrative strategy to elicit pity for the New Woman and to draw the reader into the narrative through readerly sympathy. Hardy’s own education, though it did not occur in a colonial setting as did Schreiner’s, shares similarities with hers in that he was schooled by his mother early on and sent to a National School in Bockhampton in rural England. His attendance at school was spotty because he was a sickly child. The other children there teased him, making his early experiences with education painful. Hardy, like Schreiner, was also not exposed to post-secondary education. I argue that his painful childhood associations with education inform his treatment of the New Women characters, making their punishment more intense as a consequence of his own negative experiences.

Because Hardy and Schreiner come from similar educational backgrounds, their class backgrounds display commonalities as well. Their educational backgrounds differ greatly from those authors in this study—Allen, Gissing, and Dixon—who come from a more privileged position, and they lack the inherent cultural capital that such exposure to education confers. Thus they not only struggle more with the acquisition of their education but also with the stigma of being forced to become auto-didacts in order to write in literary circles. Pierre Bourdieu asserts that credentials and certification carry with them distinction and that papered individuals will realize benefits that those without papers cannot: “Similarly, two individuals doing the same job and endowed with the same useful competences (i.e., those directly necessary for doing the job), but holding different qualifications, are likely to be
separated by a difference in status (and also, of course, in pay), the justification for this being the idea that only the competence certified by the higher qualifications can guarantee possession of the ‘basic’ knowledge which underlies all practical know-how” (328). Thus, according to Bourdieu, those who lack credentials constitute a different class, and clearly the implication here is that such a class is considered inferior.

It is this difference in status, a perceived inferiority by both Hardy and Schreiner, that they battle, the inferiority manifesting itself in rendering punishment for their characters. Bourdieu acknowledges that differences in class among individuals can account for behavioral exaggerations attempting to overcompensate for such differences: “The petit bourgeois do not know how to play the game of culture as a game. They take culture too seriously to go in for bluff or imposture or even for the distance and casualness which show true familiarity; too seriously to escape permanent fear of ignorance or blunders, or to sidestep tests by responding with the indifference of those who are not competing or the serene detachment of those who feel entitled to confess or even flaunt their lacunae” (330). By extension, the class differences in Hardy and Schreiner, when compared to the more privileged authors in this study, can account for how seriously they punish their characters. For Schreiner and Hardy, the struggle and stigma attached to education are reflected in the severity of the punishment they heap on their characters, punishment that is more restrained in authors of more privileged backgrounds. Thus, this study argues that an author’s exposure to education, or lack thereof, informs his or her social status and, in the case of fictions about the educated New Woman, figures largely in the intensity of her punishment. While this dissertation will not deny the cultural backlash as the impetus for punishing the New Woman
in literature, it offers an examination of the varying degrees of severity individual authors chose in punishing their heroines for their desire or receipt of education.

END NOTES

1 It is interesting to note that punishment related to female sexuality and education is not unique to nineteenth-century England. It also occurred both before and during the early modern period. Wendy Wall attests that women’s loquaciousness was equated with their licentiousness, and consequently, their speech needed regulation along with sexual behavior: [w]omen in early modern England faced tremendous obstacles in establishing themselves as public figures of any kind. Literary and historical scholars have dramatized these prohibitions on female education; the link between public speech and harlotry; the definition of the woman’s domain as that of domestic piety; the identification of silence as a feminine ideal; and the mastery of rhetoric as a male puberty rite. (280) Women who spoke were censured for their incontinence by being made to wear bridles and branks in public, and, even in the drama of earlier periods, female characters identified as scolds were beaten into submission, as Noah’s wife was in the Wakefield Master’s plays (Valerie Wayne 160). Thus, female sexuality and speech have been coupled with punishment for centuries, and the backlash Faludi conceptualizes for American women obtains for British women as well. Wall notes that female education was prohibited during the Early Modern Period in England. Please see Wendy Wall’s *The Imprint of Gender*, pp. 280, and Valerie Wayne’s “Refashioning the Shrew,” pp. 160. Jan de Bruyn also discusses the confinement of women by their lack of formal education and their subjection to men who perpetuated standards that mandated women be subservient to men to the point of punishment and that their sexuality be policed as a consequence of pervasive views that women were inherently promiscuous. Refer to de Bruyn’s “The Ideal Lady and the Rise of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century England, particularly pp. 22-27, for further evidence of female punishment for sexuality.

2 The “Girl of the Period” was defined by Eliza Lynn Linton, a novelist and journalist who became widely known for her vitriolic anti-feminist attacks during the Victorian Period. She presented the “Girl of the Period” as a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion; whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury; and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses. Her main endeavour in this is to outvie her neighbours in the extravagance of fashion. No matter whether, as in the time of crinolines, she sacrificed decency, or, as now, in the time of trains, she sacrifices cleanliness; no matter either, whether she makes herself a nuisance and an inconvenience to every one she meets. The girl of the period has done away with such moral muffishness as consideration for others, or regard for counsel and rebuke . . .” (Linton “The Girl of the Period”)
However, it was not only her sense of style with regard to dress that made her so offensive. She also had a flagrant disregard for propriety in manner and speech, leading to slang, bold talk, and fastness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty; to the desire of money before either love or happiness; to uselessness at home, dissatisfaction with the monotony of ordinary life, and horror of all useful work; in a word, to the worst forms of luxury and selfishness, to the most fatal effects arising from want of high principle and absence of tender feeling.

(Linton “The Girl of the Period”)

According to Linton, she was wholly improper. For a complete delineation of “the Girl of the Period,” please see Eliza Lynn Linton’s “The Girl of the Period: an electronic transcription,” <http://erc.lib.umn.edu/dynaweb/victorian/lintgirl/@Generic__BookTextView/104>.

3 For an insightful discussion of the power the middle-class Victorian woman assumed in household management duties, please see Elizabeth Langland’s Nobody’s Angels, in which she examines not only fiction of the era, but also etiquette guides, cookbooks, and supervision manuals.

4 The fact that Dr. Isaac Baker Brown was performing clitoridectomies for female maladies, some of which he deemed ills of self-abuse, does complicate such a hypothesis. If the consensus was that females lacked sexual desire, then such behavior seemingly has no clearly identifiable motive. However, the existence of such medical procedures during the period does support the idea that the proper Victorian woman should not enjoy her sexuality, and the operation functions as remediation for the transgressive behavior. For a discussion of Brown’s practices, please see Elizabeth Sheehan’s “Victorian Clitoridectomy.” Please see also Ornella Moscucci’s essay, “Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain,” in which Moscucci discusses the British medical profession’s fierce reaction to Brown’s procedure and in which Moscucci maintains that clitoridectomy was practiced to enforce heterosexuality and conventional gender proscriptions rather than to suppress female sexuality (71-2).

5 Whether these views were shared by the populace at large was another matter. Please see Michael Mason’s The Making of Victorian Sexuality, which discusses the practices and attitudes of the era, paying particular attention to the differences in class-related behavior and attitudes toward sex. Lesley A. Hall also traces late nineteenth-century sentiments toward sexuality and the millennial attitudes toward impending changes in sexual mores in Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880.

6 In addition to clothing that confined women’s bodies, women’s speech and other of their behaviors also needed regulation. Such restraint was seen even earlier than the eighteenth century. Again, Valerie Wayne’s study of the means by which women’s speech was disciplined seems pertinent here. She has unearthed some of the most barbaric torture devices used on women in the seventeenth century to regulate women’s speech, and thus, their behavior. For an extensive examination of the treatment of shrews and scolds in
Shakespeare and his contemporaries, please see Wayne’s “Refashioning the Shrew,” pp. 159-87.

7 For a discussion of the Factory Act of 1833 as a piece of legislation that failed to prevent the exploitation of child-workers and that acted complicitly with textile manufacturers in a failed attempt to decrease production, thereby driving up demand and prices for their goods, please see Howard P. Marvel’s “Regulation: A Reinterpretation of English Experience,” p. 380-383. However, Marvel’s essay is not the end of the discussion regarding the purported failure of the Act. For alternate views, please see Clark Nardinelli’s “The Successful Prosecution of the Factory Acts: A Suggested Explanation,” Peter Bartrip’s “Success or Failure? The Prosecution of the Early Factory Acts,” and A. E. Peacock’s “The Successful Prosecution of the Factory Acts, 1833-55.”

8 For a detailed discussion of Agricultural Gangs, including gangmaster abuse of women and children and first-hand testimony from laborers belonging to gangs, please see John Patrick’s “Agricultural Gangs,” p. 22-23.

9 Thomas Arnold, father of Matthew Arnold, was a leading education reformer. Born in 1795, he was classically educated from an early age, attending the Endowed School of Warminster and then Winchester. He eventually attended Corpus Christi College and was elected a Fellow of Oriel. “He continued in the University until 1820 at work as a tutor, having been ordained two years earlier. He then left Oxford and took a curacy at Laleham in Surrey, married Mary Penrose, and during the next eight years was chiefly occupied in historical studies in preparing private pupils for the University. In 1828 he accepted the Head-Mastership of Rugby School, and continued in that post until his sudden death in 1842” (Joshua Fitch 4). Thomas Arnold had very specific and reformist ideas about educational curricula and submitted his methodologies to the Journal of Education in 1834, defending protracted study of Greek and Roman classics (Fitch 33-4). As Head-Master at Rugby, he fostered collegiality and encouraged his subordinates to develop a sense of academic freedom and intellectual curiosity (Fitch 71). See Joshua Fitch’s Thomas and Matthew Arnold and their Influence on English Education. Additional information on Thomas Arnold can be found in Park Honan’s Matthew Arnold: A Life, pp. 8-13.

10 This phenomenon of policing women’s desire appears at other times in British history. Celibacy and chastity were lauded not only for women, but also for men in the doctrines and teachings of St. Paul, Theophrastus, and St. Jerome. Such dogma found advocacy in the medical, juridical, and religious institutions of the Middle Ages. Mary Beth Rose attributes a shift in thinking toward conjugal love and marriage during the early modern period to the Protestant Reformation, asserting that “Puritan preachers went about idealizing marriage and the family with all the fervid determination that their Catholic forefathers had lavished upon celibacy and virginity” (17). However, she also notes that while priestly celibacy no longer flourished as an idealized mode of behavior after the Reformation, the distrust of sexual desire and the ideals of maidenly virtue—virginity—and wifely chastity continued to preoccupy the
Renaissance imagination of the moral and spiritual life well into the seventeenth century. (5)
The preoccupation emanated mainly out of capitalist concerns for the transfer of property to legitimate heirs (5). Thus policing female sexuality became a primary concern long before the nineteenth century. For a salient discussion of female sexuality and marriage during the Renaissance, please see Mary Beth Rose’s “Moral Conceptions of Sexual Love in Elizabethan Comedy,” pp. 5-17. Please also see her Expense of Spirit, especially pp. 3-18 and 184-204. For yet another discussion of the censuring of illicit female sexuality during the early modern period, please see Martin Ingram’s “The Reform of Popular Culture? Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England,” particularly pp. 131-39 and 147-53. Kathleen McLuskie also considers the prominence of female sexuality and perceptions of its need for regulation during the Renaissance in “‘Lawless Desires Well Tempered,’” p. 104.

11 Sally Ledger discusses the sub-genre of lesbian utopia novels that featured the New Woman. These novels appeared roughly at the same time the novels included in this dissertation were published. She states that “[a] good number of New Woman novels feature same-sex relationships between women” (124) and that women writers of fin de siècle feminist fiction portrayed the “‘romantic friendship’ model of same-sex female relationships” (The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle 124-25). In some of these novels, these “friendships are diluted by the emergence of a male suitor for one of the women” and the texts close in heterosexual union for one or more of the female characters in the narratives (125). (Perhaps this intrusion complicates these novels’ classification as utopian). Ledger treats novels such as George Meredith’s Diana of the Crossways (1885) and George Moore’s A Drama in Muslin (1886) in her discussion and lists Mona Caird’s The Daughters of Danaus (1894), Isabella Ford’s On the Threshold (1895), Mary Cholmondeley’s Red Pottage (1899), and Gertrude Dix’s The Image Breakers (1900) as just a few of the works in this sub-genre. She also observes that the rise of lesbian identity is connected in the period to female education: “[b]oth Havelock Ellis and his friend and fellow sexual theorist Edward Carpenter made connections between middle-class lesbianism and feminist and educational advances” (130). For an extended discussion of lesbian utopia novels at the turn of the century, please see The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle, pp. 122-142. Although Ledger attests to the candidness of lesbian identity at the time these novels were written, Ann Heilmann disagrees, arguing that turn-of-the-century literature was less frank about the nature of lesbian relationships in their narratives: “[w]hile late-Victorian feminist fiction merely hinted at the existence of lesbian sub-cultures through the theme of female communities, Edwardian literature was more open about the potentially sexual aspects of female bonding” (104). For a dissenting view of Victorian “sisterhood,” please refer to Heilmann’s New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism, pp. 96-108.
If the New Woman was such a threatening figure to Victorian society and if that threat had to be contained, one of the most expedient ways of suppressing the demands the New Woman stood for was to halt her progress and that of the feminist movement by limiting female access to education or by making the education that would teach the New Woman to rebel as unattractive as possible. Presenting education as a punishable offense was certainly one way to make it unappealing, and many New Woman authors did just that, whether their motives were conscious or otherwise. By punishing female characters who desire education, receive it, or are portrayed as severely lacking it, fin de siècle authors sold their audience the anti-feminist messages that drove their narratives: education is anathema to women, and women who pursue it will suffer. George Gissing, Grant Allen, and Ella Hepworth Dixon present this phenomenon in their fiction in striking ways. The punishment is represented as severe enough to contain the desire for education but not severe enough to employ masochism as a narrative strategy in that containment. In other words, the punishment their heroines receive in relation to education is mild in comparison to other authors whose characters are punished in the narrative through the use of masochism, authors like Thomas Hardy and Olive Schreiner who will be considered later in this dissertation. We see narrative restraint in punishing female education in George Gissing’s The Odd Women (1893), Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did (1895), and Ella Hepworth Dixon’s The Story of
a Modern Woman (1894). The moderation of these punishments reflects the authors’ own experiences with education and the difference between those experiences and that of Schreiner and Hardy.

Like so many of the New Woman novelists who were concerned with feminist social issues that get reflected in their fiction, George Gissing includes themes of marriage, sexuality, women’s professionalization and education, reproductive rights, female suffrage, and the like. Pierre Coustillas has noted that although Gissing was ambivalent on the issue of female suffrage, his sentiments on the necessity of female education were abundantly clear (71). While Alice Markow disagrees with Coustillas, arguing that Gissing’s motives for presenting female education fell far short of actually endorsing such a cause, Markow nonetheless provides ample argument that a substantial proportion of Gissing’s career as a novelist was taken up with fictionalizing Victorian society’s contentious relationship with the educated female and her place in—and out of—society (59). One of the most forceful novels in which to study Gissing’s treatment of such a prominent theme in New Woman fiction is The Odd Women (1893). Here the issue is problematized by his proffering of a wide range of female characters who desire, receive, or are in dire need of education. Characters such as Rhoda Nunn, Monica Madden, Mary Barfoot and the Madden sisters (considered peripheral to Gissing’s primary plot) provide ample opportunity to consider the consequences of female education, both in the novel and in Victorian society.

From the opening of the narrative, Gissing’s intent to force the issue of female education to a crisis is apparent. He begins with an idyllic scene of domesticity in which the Madden family is described, a family headed by Dr. Madden, a widower, and his six
daughters. Their educations are a prominent feature very early in the description of the family:

the young ladies had received instruction suitable to their breeding, and the elder ones were disposed to better this education by private study. The atmosphere of the home was intellectual; books, especially the poets, lay in every room. But it never occurred to Dr. Madden that his daughters would do well to study with a professional object. . . . The one duty clearly before him was to set an example of righteous life, and to develop the girls’ minds—in every proper direction. For, as to training them for any path save those trodden by English ladies of the familiar type, he could not have dreamt of any such thing. (3)

Dr. Madden’s sentiments on female education have been formed by proscriptions based on cultural expectations for Victorian females and their role in the domestic sphere. Gissing’s narrator articulates Madden’s views: “Dr. Madden’s hopes for the race were inseparable from a maintenance of morals and conventions such as the average man assumes in his estimate of women” (3). By having Dr. Madden deny his daughters a full and functional education, Gissing sets in motion a narrative that will emphasize the theme of female education. Not long after this description of Dr. Madden’s philosophy on proper education for females, a horse-riding accident leaves the daughters not only fatherless but without financial provision. Their fiscal circumstances are highlighted by the narrative commentary on Dr. Madden’s inattentiveness to the potential material needs of his daughters should anything happen to him:

[i]n hours of melancholy he had of course dreaded the risks of life, and resolved, always with postponement, to make some practical provision for his family; in educating them as well as circumstances allowed, he conceived that he was doing the next best thing to saving money, for, if a fatality befell, teaching would always be their resource. The thought, however, of his girls having to work for money was so utterly repulsive to him that he could never seriously dwell upon it. A vague piety supported his courage. Providence
would not deal harshly with him and his dear ones. He enjoyed excellent health; his practice decidedly improved. (3)

Though Dr. Madden consoles himself that a limited education is all his daughters need, his untimely death forces them to fend for themselves on their own, and, as Gissing demonstrates so vividly in the novel, teaching is not always a viable option for women who must maintain themselves economically.

Although not a New Woman by conventional standards of the period, Monica Madden, the youngest of the Madden sisters, eventually comes to advocate selective tenets of the New Woman. A discussion of her education and the consequences it engenders will illuminate Gissing’s position relative to female education. Because Monica is so much younger than the rest of her sisters—described as a toddler when her father dies—her educational pursuits are emphasized more prominently in the novel than those of the other Madden sisters. After the initial chapter, in which the sisters are introduced and their father dies, Gissing plunges forward sixteen years in the narrative to 1888 and into the adult life of the sisters. Monica will turn 21 very soon and is working unhappily as a shopgirl.

Lise Shapiro Sanders documents some of the evils associated with shop work:

shopgirls, like factory hands, worked in an environment defined by repetition and routine and were expected to reproduce an attitude of deference and readiness upon each encounter with a new customer. The department store’s culture of industrial display labor, in which the employee becomes one of many elements in the display of goods for sale, rendered boredom a constitutive aspect of shop life and resulted in a perceived desire on the part of the shopgirl for stimulation and excitement. (191)

Sanders contends that these labor conditions often produced ennui in the day-to-day lives of shopgirls. In addition to the boredom the shopgirl experienced, she could also expect her
physical health to decline consequent to the harsh conditions under which she labored. Amy Bulley and Margaret Whitley recount the many grievances of the shopgirl, some of which include health concerns related to the long hours shop owners expected girls to stand on their feet without a break:

> the long hours of standing are of course apt to be injurious to the health of women, and especially of young girls. Physicians give evidence of diseases contracted in this manner, and the report of the 'Sanitary Commission' of the *Lancet*, though moderate in expression, is sufficiently explicit upon this point. It must be remembered, however, that constitutions differ, and I have been informed by a young woman who had served ten years in a shop (where, however, short hours are kept) that while she herself had grown used to the standing, her sister, serving in the same shop, was quite unable to endure the fatigue, and had failed seriously in health. (56)

In addition to enduring the ill effects of standing, girls were also denied the use of lavatories in many shops and were not allowed more than 20 minutes to eat, resulting in a host of alimentary complaints: “[a]t most establishments only twenty minutes or half-an-hour is allowed for dinner, and the assistants are liable to be called off if required in the shop. On this system meals must be simply bolted, to the no small injury of digestion; and it is not surprising that dyspeptic derangement is a common ailment of shop assistants” (Bulley and Whitley 59). Such conditions are reflected in Gissing’s treatment of the shopgirl, as Monica complains of her fellow workers’ varicose veins and her own inability to eat without interruption.

Sanders attests that although there is little evidence in Gissing’s research regarding the working conditions of the shopgirl, Gissing, nonetheless, was aware of them through his interactions in his father’s shop and in the journal coverage of the period (222). Consequently, he holds these deplorable working conditions, affecting both the emotional
and physical health of the shopgirl, responsible for driving Monica to abandon shop work. Monica realizes she can only escape in one of two ways—either through more education or through marriage. Neither prospect entices her overly much. She hesitates at the offer to attend Mary Barfoot’s school, where she can get practical education and acquire clerical proficiency suitable for office work, calling the school an “old maid factory” (55). Although she seems more inclined toward marriage, she is less enthusiastic than one might anticipate about the only prospective suitor she has, Edmund Widdowson: “[i]t seemed that he had really fallen in love with her; he might prove a devoted husband. She felt no love in return; but between the prospect of a marriage of esteem and that of no marriage at all there was little room for hesitation” (76). Despite her reluctance to become either a student or a wife, she ends up doing both, though not simultaneously, since education and marriage seem to be mutually exclusive pursuits in this novel as in New Woman fiction in general. She accepts Mary Barfoot’s invitation to become a pupil, and her health and self-esteem improve as a result while she attends the school. Only after her prospects for marriage become a reality, when she gets a proposal of marriage from Widdowson, does she abandon her educational endeavors. Prior to actually experiencing the daily grind of married life, Monica would prefer to marry rather than pursue her education. Her preference distinguishes her from the typical New Woman, whose principles frequently place a high priority on education and more progressive avenues of female advancement.

Though Monica initially evades the category of New Woman, it seems the small amount of education she does receive from Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn takes root and surfaces after her marriage begins to decline. As Monica becomes progressively disillusioned with married life and the oppressive demands her husband places on her, she
begins to function as a rhetorical device for a more progressive view of womanhood, a view more aligned with those of the prototypical feminists in the novel and of the period. As Widdowson becomes more of an autocrat in the marriage—dictating what Monica can read, forbidding her to leave the house or socialize with friends, and extolling the virtues of rigorous routine, housework, and the joys of female duty—Monica rebels verbally, offering Widdowson arguments for the female autonomy she appeared to relinquish willingly when she left the school in order to marry him. Her disillusionment leads her to conclude that her education at the school was more meaningful than she realized:

Monica in truth owed the sole bit of real education she had ever received to those few weeks of attendance in Great Portland Street. Circumstances were now proving how apt a pupil she had been, even against her will. Marriage, as is always the case with women capable of development, made for her a new heaven and a new earth; perhaps on no single subject did she now think as on the morning of her wedding-day. (191)

Monica’s views on marriage and education evolve over the course of the narrative, and although she cannot be classified as a conventional New Woman even by the close of the novel, she certainly exhibits characteristics that distinguish her from the subservient wife who takes as her model the Ruskinian tenets Widdowson preaches. As Wendy Lesser argues, Monica is “not a feminist by principle, but in practice she rebels against the restrictions of the feminine fate” (212).

If Monica had simply adhered to Widdowson’s notions of wifely duties, the suffering she endures and her death might have been averted. However, even the limited education Monica receives causes her to kick rather than submit to his philosophies. The principles she learns in the very brief time she is at the school develop her autonomy enough that she sees the injustice of sacrificing her own needs and desires arbitrarily to those of her husband.
Additionally, supposing she did sacrifice and submit to Widdowson’s ideas, the extra time she would find on her hands spent inside the house would be utterly stifling to her after the freedom she has already tasted as a working woman. Her schooling and education have affected her reaction to conventional Victorian norms and, thus, have shaped her fate. Her education determines her narrative outcome and dictates the punishment she receives. After several endeavors to get Widdowson to see her point of view by presenting him logical argument, Monica simply abandons all attempts to convert him. Instead, she begins to act autonomously, initially without Widdowson’s knowledge. The differences between Widdowson’s overbearing nature and Monica’s educationally driven independence cause a rift between husband and wife. Their bond is tenuous from the beginning, and Monica becomes easy prey to the attentions of another man. She begins to lie to Widdowson about where she goes when she leaves their house. She meets people whom Widdowson finds particularly objectionable, and she compromises her reputation by going unchaperoned to the apartment of another man. Widdowson eventually discovers Monica’s deceit, arousing suspicion in him that he can never confound. He questions Monica’s fidelity in the marriage as well as the paternity of her child, and his suspicions become unbearable enough to drive her from their house. The emotional upheaval she experiences compromises her health just enough to cause her death after she delivers their child. Monica’s death is a direct consequence of the education she receives. While Gissing punishes Monica by ending her life, her punishment does not seem as extreme as that of other characters in the novel who actually survive the close of the narrative.

One of these female characters who survives, but is punished intensely by the author, is Monica’s sister, Virgie Madden. While Virgie has less opportunity for education than her
sister because of her age at the time of her father’s death, the kind of education she receives, one she pursues without formal instruction, makes for a more punishing outcome in her case. The intensity of her desire for knowledge and her interest in a more classical education create a far more threatening figure for Victorian society and, therefore, her punishment must be more severe than Monica’s. Virgie is interested in books and is constantly reading. The type of education she pursues is comparable to those pursued by men, as seen in several novels of the period in male characters like Hardy’s Jude Fawley in *Jude the Obscure*. Virgie’s desire is paralleled to that of a classical scholar:

Up to about her twenty-fourth year she had pursued one subject with a zeal limited only by her opportunities; study absolutely disinterested, seeing she had never supposed it would increase her value as a ‘companion,’ or enable her to take any better position. Her one intellectual desire was to know as much as possible about ecclesiastical history. Not in the spirit of fanaticism; she was devout, but in moderation, and never spoke bitterly on religious topics. The growth of the Christian Church, old sects and schisms, the Councils, affairs of Papal policy—these things had a very genuine interest for her; circumstances favouring, she might have become an erudite woman; but conditions were so far from favourable that all she succeeded in doing was to undermine her health. (14)

It is indicated early in the novel that punishment is tied intimately with education. Virgie’s pursuit drives her not only to the mental breakdown she suffers immediately following this intense study but also to the alcoholism that ravages her physical health and for which she must be institutionalized at the end of the novel. While Virgie cannot be considered a New Woman—she is more an odd woman by virtue of being unable to find a suitable partner and not by principle-driven choices—her idealization of Rhoda Nunn certainly places her in closer proximity to the New Woman than is her sister Monica. Virgie frequently comments on Rhoda Nunn’s independence, drive, and disregard for conventional gender roles, as she
acknowledges that Rhoda is “full of practical expedients. The most wonderful person! She is quite like a man in energy and resources. I never imagined that one of our sex could resolve and plan and act as she does” (32). Virgie’s veneration of the New Woman and the kind of education she pursues dictate a more extreme punishment than that which her sister receives.

Although not all of the characters Gissing creates in The Odd Women are New Women, Gissing does offer his reader at least one prototypical New Woman. Of all the female characters in the novel, Rhoda Nunn is the only true representative New Woman as I have defined her, although Rhoda thinks of herself early on in the novel as an “odd woman.” She explains to Monica: “‘So many odd women—no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, futile lives. I, naturally—being one of them myself—take another view’” (41). Over the course of the novel, Rhoda is offered the possibility of making a pair with Everard Barfoot, an offer she declines. This renunciation, along with her views on marriage, procreation, female education, and suffrage, sets her apart from the vast numbers she lumps herself with who are unable to pair off with a mate. Critics diligently argued the differences between the New Woman and the Odd Woman, figures differentiated by the New Woman’s adherence to a strict ideological code, in contrast to the Odd Woman who was considered unmarriageable because she was undesirable as a mate, or “redundant” . . . “superfluous.” As Rhoda Nunn is, in actuality, a New Woman, the ideology she espouses includes a staunch advocacy of female education, the propagation of which is abundantly clear in the tenets Gissing takes considerable pains to have her articulate.

Rhoda’s views on female education revolve around her anti-marriage sentiments and emphasize her membership in the “shrieking sisterhood.” These perspectives are what drive
her activism as a New Woman and a progressive thinker. Her aims are largely confined to pragmatic concerns—mostly getting unmarriageable females educated so they can support themselves financially. But beyond her pragmatism lies an idealism motivated by the limited choices for marriageable women, choices like the one Monica is forced to make that eventually imprison females within the home. Though a staunch feminist with progressive ideas, Rhoda must operate within the framework of Victorian culture, a framework based on the belief that education and marriage are pursuits antithetical to each other for women and that women who can marry should or must. This compulsory matrimony has its basis in the doctrine of separate spheres so crucial to Victorian middle-class culture. However, what distinguishes Rhoda and separates her from the rest of her culture in the novel is her belief that women should have choices, rather than being forced by cultural and socio-economic pressures to marry.

In a conversation Rhoda holds with her boss, Mary Barfoot, about Monica’s prospects, Rhoda demonstrates this absence of choice for women: “‘[t]hey all strike me as childish. Monica is a dear little girl; it seemed a great absurdity to talk to her about business. Of course she must find a husband’” (56). According to Rhoda, Monica’s choices are circumscribed by her prior inadequate education and her ability to procure a husband, and the narrator notes that Rhoda’s dismissive tone regarding Monica, and her marriage prospects, is one of “slighting concession” (56). Rhoda’s attitude towards marriage amuses (and distresses) Mary Barfoot significantly enough to compel Barfoot to remind her that they are not trying to prevent women from making good matches: “‘[a] word of caution. Your zeal is eating you up. At this rate, you will hinder our purpose. We have no mission to prevent girls from marrying suitably—only to see that those who can’t shall have means of living with
some satisfaction”’ (56). Later in the narrative, Rhoda intimates that when more women have choices and choose to forego marriage for education, female suffering will abate: “‘I maintain that the vast majority of women lead a vain and miserable life because they do marry. . . . Things are changing, and we try to have our part in hastening a new order’” (65). Although Rhoda and Mary Barfoot share concerns over the woman question, their goals differ because Rhoda’s ideology (specifically her opinions on education and marriage) is more extreme.

Rhoda Nunn’s own educational background is a testament to the paradigm within which she operates. Initially Rhoda begins to support herself after her mother dies by working as a teacher, an occupation for which she claims to have no aptitude or inclination: “half my teaching was a sham—a pretence of knowing what I neither knew nor cared to know. I had gone into it like most girls, as a dreary matter of course” (23). In spite of her protestations of incompetence, Rhoda’s potential to land a teaching position implies that she has a not insubstantial educational background from the start. According to June Purvis,

> [u]nlike other occupations considered so far, elementary teaching involved non-manual work anticipating a varying degree of theoretical knowledge, verbal skills, writing ability and classroom management techniques. And unlike entry into domestic service, millinery, dressmaking, shop work and factory work, entry into schoolteaching was dependent upon a certain educational level. (38)

Rhoda protests that she no longer wants to be involved in academic pursuits, yet she rescues herself from her teaching career by putting herself through more school. She learns “[s]horthand, book-keeping, commercial correspondence—I had lessons in them all, and worked desperately for a year” (23). When she eventually comes to be employed in Bath, her clerical skills prove inadequate still, and her boss requests that she learn typewriting.
Again, Rhoda finds herself in school learning a new skill—this time under the tutelage of Mary Barfoot, who asks her to stay and teach at the school from which she acquires her most recent skills. In essence, Rhoda has come full circle in educating herself right back into a classroom. She cannot escape her desire to improve herself, and this improvement comes through education. Although Rhoda does not desire the same kind of classical education that Virgie Madden would pursue—the kind of education that would give Virgie an intellectual advantage over men—Rhoda’s ability to follow through and to acquire the kind of education that would allow her to supplant the male worker is just as threatening, and therefore must be punished as Virgie was.¹⁸

Rhoda’s punishment comes in the form of a narrative attack on her romantic prospects, which conflict with the principles education has instilled in her. Initially, she believes education will be the force that transforms women’s suffering, but her views, like Monica’s, evolve over the course of the narrative. Through her own trials, Rhoda learns that education, while it can be a vehicle for transformation, can also be the basis for punishment for females. Her punishment is meted out in the form of her inability to merge her feminist principles and her education with heterosexual love. Rachel Blau Duplessis documents the narrative conflict both nineteenth and twentieth-century female authors encountered when attempting to resolve romantic aims with female quest for advancement:

[i]n nineteenth-century narrative, where women heroes were concerned, quest and love plots were intertwined, simultaneous discourses, but at the resolution of the work, the energies of the Bildung were incompatible with the closure in successful courtship or marriage. Quest for women was thus finite; we learn that any plot of self-realization was at the service of the marriage plot and was subordinate to, or covered within, the magnetic power of that ending. (6)
Although DuPlessis documents this phenomenon in the women writers of the nineteenth century, this same tension appears in male-authored texts as well, specifically in Gissing’s novel. Gissing presents the either/or dichotomy DuPlessis recognizes—the incompatibility of quest and romantic closure in narrative—and preserves the basic narrative structure, allowing that only one outcome prevail. This outcome is the upshot of Everard’s pursuit of Rhoda. Her ensuing punishment centers around Rhoda’s quest for personal education and educational reform for women.

When Everard Barfoot develops a romantic interest in Rhoda, his attraction is spurred by Rhoda’s intellect, not her physical appearance. When he initially meets her, he professes to be unimpressed with her physically, though he does not feel she is unattractive: “His concern with her was purely intellectual; she had no sensual attraction for him, but he longed to see further into her mind, to probe the sincerity of the motives she professed, to understand her mechanism, her process of growth. Hitherto he had enjoyed no opportunity of studying this type” (114). Rhoda’s principled nature and her ability to hold her own in conversation move Everard to pursue her; her feminism presents a challenge. Everard muses over his intentions with his friend, Micklethwaite:

‘I had an odd thought whilst I was there.’ Everard leaned his head back, and half closed his eyes. ‘Miss Nunn, I warrant considers herself proof against any kind of wooing. She is one of the grandly severe women; a terror, I imagine, to any young girl at their place who betrays weak thoughts of matrimony. Now, it’s rather a temptation to a man of my kind. There would be something piquant in making vigorous love to Miss Nunn, just to prove her sincerity.’ (106)

Everard means to test Rhoda’s adherence to her own ideology, and her initial intentions are to test Everard as well. She has spoken out against marriage excessively from the beginning
of the novel, but, prior to meeting Everard, her prospects for marriage have remained unexplored for lack of a suitable partner: “No man had ever made love to her; no man, to her knowledge, had ever been tempted to do so. In certain moods she derived a satisfaction from this thought, using it to strengthen her life’s purpose” (166). Yet Rhoda cannot refrain from ruminating on what romantic experience might be like:

If only she had once been loved, like other women—if she had listened to an offer of devotion, and rejected it—her heart would be more securely at peace. So she thought. Secretly she deemed it a hard thing never to have known that common triumph of her sex. And, moreover, it took away from the merit of her position as a leader and encourager of women living independently.

(166)

The awareness of this lack and her sexual curiosity in Everard motivate her to entertain his advances, initially only for the novelty of the experience itself. Rhoda decides that Everard’s “interest would only be that of comedy. She did not love Everard Barfoot, and saw no likelihood of ever doing so; on the whole, a subject of thankfulness” (167). She determines that she will bring him to the point of a marriage proposal only to deny him. In this way, the “secret chagrin that was upon her would be removed. . . . To reject a lover in so many respects desirable, whom so many women might envy her, would fortify her self-esteem, and enable her to go forward in the chosen path with firmer tread” (168).

The aims of both Rhoda and Everard, of course, become thwarted when they seem to lose the initial objectivity of their pursuit. They become cathected in a way that keeps them from successful study of each other—or entrapment as the case may be. Both become more emotionally involved than either intended, and Rhoda’s ideology is tested, as Everard seeks it to be. Gissing refuses to allow Rhoda to abandon her beliefs, and, before the interaction in the text between Rhoda and Everard ceases, Everard has proposed both an open union and
legal marriage to Rhoda, neither of which she can bring herself to accept. Yet the details of Rhoda’s suffering at not being able to share any kind of life with Everard indicate a despair tantamount to punishment. Rhoda buries herself in her work to numb her feelings, and when she cannot find solace in work, she contemplates suicide: “On the first night of solitude at Chelsea she shed bitter tears; and not only wept, but agonized in mute frenzy, the passions of her flesh torturing her until she thought of death as a refuge” (325). By the close of the novel, Rhoda eventually comes to terms with the life she has chosen, but her choice is not devoid of regret. Her contentedness in being an unmarried woman at the opening of the novel has been spoiled with the realization that there is something else she cannot have. In the closing passage of the work, Monica’s baby falls asleep in Rhoda’s arms: “as the baby sank into sleep, Rhoda’s vision grew dim; a sigh made her lips quiver, and once more she murmured, ‘poor little child’” (385). Lesser’s analysis of this passage is noteworthy. She asserts that Rhoda’s sympathy is aimed at more than just the infant she holds:

[t]he child who provokes Rhoda’s maternal pity is not just the orphan, or not just Monica embodied in her daughter, but also the child Rhoda might have had if she had chosen to marry Everard—as well as Rhoda’s own child-self, that naively tough woman who finally disappears only when Rhoda herself begins to understand the power of passion. (214)

Rhoda’s choices, actually choices dictated by the conventions of nineteenth-century narrative, deny her the possibility of having both marriage and progressive ideology. Rhoda laments her thwarted maternity as well as her thwarted romantic aspirations. Katherine Linehan agrees with the idea that Rhoda’s actions constitute a form of punishment, arguing that Rhoda makes a huge sacrifice that limits her happiness when she gives up Everard at the end:
The dialogue is Jamesian in its subtlety, even so far as to allow for the possibility that Rhoda surreptitiously sets Everard free in a supreme act of love, herself loving him still, but perceiving his secret desire for release from an engagement to which he is not equal. Finally, we can choose to join Everard in compassionating Rhoda as a diamond in the rough--a woman of tremendous principle, courage, and intelligence, whose lack of social advantages has kept her rebellious zealotry on edge, forcing her to sacrifice her best chances for happiness. (366-67)

Thus, Rhoda’s punishment lies in her relinquishment of her romantic aspirations.

DuPlessis argues that the “contradiction between love and quest in plots dealing with women as a narrated group, acutely visible in nineteenth-century fiction, has, in my view, one main mode of resolution: an ending in which one part of that contradiction, usually quest or Bildung, is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death” (3-4). Nineteenth-century authors took sometimes incredible measures to ensure that the two ends were incompatible for the heroine at the close of the novel. Duplessis’s assertion implies that, in the dual narrative, conventionally successful resolution demands that one part of the contradiction be repressed for the other to succeed. Marriage or death is the usual mode of repression for the quest plot. She refers to the repression of this quest as “the quest plot of punishment for female aspiration” (21). This narrative punishment is precisely employed in the case of Gissing’s The Odd Women; however, the quest plot in Gissing’s work is not repressed in the service of the romance plot in the primary heroine’s case. In fact, for Rhoda Nunn, Gissing represses both portions of the contradictory dual narrative. Instead of repressing the Bildung in favor of the marriage plot, as DuPlessis argues is the predominant narrative form in nineteenth-century fiction, Gissing underscores the quest narrative by representing it in a female character who seeks education. He concurrently deemphasizes the
marriage plot by renouncing its “magnetic power” in his demonstration of Rhoda’s ability to transcend its allure.

Neither of the two possible resolutions DuPlessis suggests (marriage or quest) are represented as successful endeavors for Rhoda, proving that characters who attempt to take on both (or either) are doomed in the Gissing narrative. Those who quest rather than marry do not meet with successful ends. Yet his repeated representations of the failure of the marriage plot—particularly for those characters who have had their quest (usually forged through education) repressed—indicate that Gissing saw marriage as no less viable than quest, limiting its success to one couple in the novel only (the Micklethwaites). That couple reflects what Carolyn Perry has, for all intents and purposes, described as the quintessential Ruskinian model of marriage (64-5). Instead, Gissing opts for a more forceful resolution—one that ultimately castigates the female for her quest as well as her desire for heterosexual union. The punishment for Gissing’s major heroine, however, is not her death or her subordination in an unfulfilling marriage—for Rhoda neither dies nor marries. Her punishment is in her discontent, her realization that her choices are limited and her life must be incomplete and unfulfilling by necessity. As readers come to expect the romantic plot to be resolved in marriage, any deviation from that ending represents the subversion of “the natural order” of the narrative. Thus, Rhoda’s quest to be educated, to have choices, and to provide choice for other females and her desire to engage in heterosexual union seems to thwart the “happy ending.” But even more punishing is Rhoda’s inability to achieve happiness and personal satisfaction in the alternative path she chooses. In this way, Gissing inherently punishes the female for the opposing mode DuPlessis outlines, the quest revolving around female betterment through education. Thus, for Gissing, even when one portion of
the contradiction is set aside, as in Rhoda’s case, there is no satisfying narrative resolution because the educated woman who desires anything more than marriage will always lack.

If Gissing’s punishment of Rhoda is less formulaic, his treatment of Monica demonstrates a reversion to the predominant narrative form DuPlessis discusses. Monica’s independence is punished by death. According to Christina Sjoholm, Gissing’s readership understood that punishments like the one Monica endures were necessary for their female characters and actually were more desirable than the punishment their independence might have necessitated: “[m]odern readers might wish that Monica had been spared and allowed to find an independent life for herself and her child—as a separated woman and single parent. But Gissing as well as his contemporary women readers knew that such a solution would probably have been an even more severe punishment than death” (71). This more severe kind of punishment occurs in Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895), a novel whose heroine attempts to retain her independence as well as experience heterosexual love and motherhood. Herminia Barton’s quest for autonomy within the bounds of a heterosexual relationship that she refuses to license through marriage emerges from her educational background. Her punishment is consequent to that education.

Though the tone of Allen’s work seems less serious than Gissing’s, Allen’s text offers a viable window into the fictional treatment of the New Woman. Alison Cotes argues that there is little point in comparing Gissing’s *The Odd Women* to Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*, contending that Allen’s novel is a “very silly, badly-written book” that does not merit critical attention (4). Despite her claims that Allen is unworthy of study, she nevertheless compares the two writers herself, arguing that “Herminia Barton is a martyr to the cause of female sexual revolution as Rhoda is a martyr to the cause of female social and professional
revolution” (4). Although Allen’s text is not artistically sophisticated, it did generate heated debate and scathing reviews subsequent to its publication. One anonymous reviewer claimed that he wanted Coulson Kernahan to cut both the book and Allen himself to pieces (Clodd 163). Allen received yet more censure in sending advance proofs of the manuscript to William T. Stead, who “published a summary of the story, with copious extracts, in the ‘Review of Reviews’ (March 1895), because he believed ‘that the book was its own best antidote’” (Clodd 161). Moreover, bookstalls in Ireland uniformly boycotted the book, refusing to sell it (Clodd 163). With respect to Cotes’s view, modern critics seem divided on the literary significance of *The Woman Who Did*. Jane Wood acknowledges the value of Allen’s novel in studying the New Woman (181), and P. J. Keating alleges that Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* was likely the most famous of the New Woman novels (189). While I agree that Allen’s text is lacking aesthetically in comparison to Gissing’s *The Odd Women*, Allen’s novel is nonetheless worthy of study as a cultural artifact. It allows critics to explore the way in which some fin de siècle authors viewed female education and the way in which their views took shape narratively. One contemporary reviewer labeled the novel “a perfectly straightforward, serious book, written in a more obviously instructive tone than we have been accustomed to since our perusal of the religious fiction put into our hands in youth” (Anon. “Review of The Woman Who Did” 119). I believe it is this difference that modern critics like Cotes object to when assessing the literary value of Allen’s work, thus neglecting the historicity of the textual document.

Allen’s heroine in *The Woman Who Did* differs from any of Gissing’s female characters in *The Odd Women*. Allen created a more deliberate New Woman in Herminia Barton. Her family background accentuates her elevated class status, a status that neither the
Madden sisters nor Rhoda Nunn can boast of possessing. Herminia is the daughter of the Dean of Dunwich. She comes from privilege and a family that has money; therefore, that background gives her choices a premeditation that Gissing’s characters seem to lack. She is not predestined to suffer the fate that the Madden sisters endure by virtue of their forced circumstances of poverty, and she does not fall into her lot as Rhoda Nunn does. She chooses her destiny, at least initially, until she loses her ability to control it through the maternity that Rhoda Nunn renounces.

_Fin de siècle_ authors identified their heroines as New Women in a variety of ways, some of which involved the heroine’s style of dress. One of the first indications Allen offers his audience that Herminia is a staunch New Woman is his description of her fashion sense. Herminia appears in the opening of the novel in very simple dress, described as “a curious oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woolen stuff” (26). Similar graphic illustrations such as the one in the March 30, 1895 issue of _Punch_ titled “The Woman Who Wouldn’t Do,” document such fashion (see figure 2.1). The image in _Punch_ serves as a parody of the New Women of the period and the type of clothing these women were adopting, much to the dismay of mainstream Victorian culture. The _Punch_ illustration, like Allen’s description of Herminia’s dress, emphasizes East Asian culture in the bodice of the dress and in the hairstyle (twisted and pinned up) and the dark haircolor. Again, Allen describes Herminia as a New Woman in terms of dress in a passage immediately following, having her appear in a “simple white morning-dress, a mere ordinary English gown, without affectation of any sort, yet touched with some faint reminiscence of a flowing Greek chiton” (33). Yet once more, Allen’s description of Herminia’s garb is represented in the _Punch_ illustration: “The Woman
Figure 2.1 “The Woman Who Wouldn’t Do” *Punch* Vol. 108 (1895)
Who Wouldn’t Do” wears a dress with a neckline that drapes over her shoulders in much the style of a classical tunic. Clearly, this style of dress made artistic representations of New Women easily identifiable to reading audiences, and Allen fully anticipated that his heroine would be recognizable as one. Sally Ledger describes the fashion statement New Women of the period were making and refers to a number of cartoons in *Punch* documenting the campaign for “rational dress” (“The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism” 26).

Easily decipherable by virtue of her clothing, the New Woman sported dress styles that were particularly noteworthy in highly educated women like “the Girton Girl,” whose clothing was often described in masculine terms in journal lampoons. Ledger asserts that “the Girton Girl was much maligned and ridiculed throughout the period” and that she appeared in illustrations as “severely dressed, wearing college ties, and smoking” (26). Although Herminia is educated, Allen stops short of masculinizing her dress. Instead, she wears her education in her mien. The narrator describes her as having the “face of a free woman.” Other characters describe her demeanor as “very free and advanced; a perfect firebrand” (Allen 26).

Her look is further enhanced by her educationally-driven ideology. Herminia has had the opportunity to attend the first established university college for women, Girton, and her views have been shaped by her education there as well as elsewhere. According to Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch, by 1885 the vast majority of female students in women’s colleges, such as Girton and Newnham, were working towards Cambridge degrees (9). Gillian Sutherland observes that the curriculum for women’s colleges replicated those of men’s colleges of the period in an attempt to create parity in education:
[t]he strategy adopted to deal with this by the other women’s college beginning to grow in Cambridge at the same time, Girton, proved an elitist one. Emily Davies, Girton’s founder, was determined that equality for women could only be secured and be seen to be secured if women did exactly the same course as men, taking the same time over it. Therefore Girton students had to commit themselves to courses and fees for three years, to take the same entrance examination as the men, the ‘Previous’ or “Little-Go’, including compulsory Greek, and then degree-level examinations at the end of three years. Only a privileged few had both the resources and the prior training to cope with this. (106)

Such stringent requirements for gaining entrance into the college would indicate that Allen intended to create a character with a substantial educational foundation, substantial enough for her to matriculate into Girton’s program. Although Herminia fails to finish her course of study at the college, she absorbs enough of what is being taught to form her own opinions about the curriculum. She voices these views to the man with whom she becomes sexually involved, Alan Merrick:

“You see, if we women are ever to be free in the world, we must have in the end a freeman’s education. But the education at Girton made only a pretence at freedom. At heart, our girls were as enslaved to conventions as any girls elsewhere. The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman’s education without the faintest danger of her emancipation.” (Allen 27)

This dissatisfaction with current female education seems common in the heroines of New Woman fiction, as seen in Gissing’s Rhoda who voices a dislike for schooling, in Olive Schreiner’s Lyndall who becomes disenchanted with the frivolity of the Finishing School she attends, and in Thomas Hardy’s Sue Bridehead who abandons the constrictions of the teacher training school from which she is subsequently dismissed.

Regardless of the limited time Herminia spends at Girton, her education is extensive enough for her class status to be elevated by it. Her lover’s father notes that Herminia “is a
lady, I admit. And she’s been to Girton” (70). Her education allows her to secure a teaching position at a high school as well as work as a freelance writer. In addition to using her career opportunities to emphasize the extent of her education, Allen also demonstrates that her instruction and reading has formed the principles by which she means to live. When Alan Merrick visits her home, he finds her bookshelves lined with the Romantic poets, notably Keats and Shelley (Allen 61). Later in the novel, Herminia cites George Eliot and Mary Godwin, née Wollstonecraft, as role models, signifying a familiarity with their writing and respective biographies, but also indicating that these writers have shaped her ideas about how women should (and should not) live:

“[b]rave women before me have tried for a while to act on their own responsibility, for the good of their sex; but never of their own free will from the very beginning. They have avoided marriage, not because they thought it a shame and a surrender, a treason to their sex, a base yielding to the unjust pretensions of men, but because there existed at the same time some obstacle in their way in the shape of the vested interest of some other woman. When Mary Godwin chose to mate herself with Shelley, she took her good name in her hands; but still, there was Harriet. As soon as Harriet was dead, Mary showed she had no deep principle of action involved, by marrying Shelley. When George Eliot chose to pass her life with Lewes on terms of equal freedom, she defied the man-made law—but still, there was his wife to prevent the possibility of a legalized union. As soon as Lewes was dead, George Eliot showed she had no principle involved, by marrying another man. Now, I have the rare chance of acting otherwise. I can show the world from the very first that I act from principle, and from principle only. I can say to it in effect, “See, here is the man of my choice; the man I love, truly and purely; the man any one of you would willingly have seen offering himself in lawful marriage to your own daughters. If I would go the beaten way you prescribe, and marry him legally. But of my own free will I disdain that degradation. I choose rather to be free. . . .” (45-6)

Herminia’s exposure to such writers through her education has influenced her views on marriage and female autonomy such that she decidedly renounces the conventional bonds of marriage, preferring free union instead.

91
Like so many of the New Woman authors writing before him, Grant Allen uses his heroine’s education to shape her views on marriage, views that will ultimately cause hardship for the heroine and eventual punishment. Herminia’s refusal to marry Alan Merrick presents only minimal difficulty and narrative tension; it is the fruit of that union that produces a real impediment in that Herminia eventually bears a child, Dolores, from her relationship with Merrick. The child is aptly named for the suffering she will cause Herminia. Like the heroine of Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall, Allen’s heroine encounters the true dilemma of the New Woman who eschews marriage in the face of maternity. It is through the vehicle of the child that authors such as Allen and Schreiner punish their heroines. The narrative retribution Herminia receives through her child comes in a variety of ways. Prior to the birth, her lover unexpectedly dies, forcing Herminia into poverty because her status as an unwed mother is, expectedly, unacceptable in Victorian society. She can no longer teach because she poses an unwholesome risk to the reputation of her female pupils, and both her family and community ostracize her for the same reasons. Thus, her only means of supporting herself and her child is through freelance writing. She purposely bears her child out of wedlock in order to encourage the daughter to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling . . . and fill her place for the sake of humanity” (Allen 101), a goal Herminia sets initially for herself in hopes of changing societal attitudes toward conventional female roles. Her daughter’s subsequent rebellious rejection of such aspirations and blind submission to conventional gender norms of the period in the face of Herminia’s maternal sacrifices serve as bitter punishment as well. Since Herminia’s education forms such goals for herself as well as her daughter, it is also the basis for her narrative outcome.
Although Herminia’s death by suicide functions as yet further punishment, perhaps
the most stinging torment of all is the heroine’s regret over her choices and her eventual
abandonment of the ideology that drove her to bear a child in the first place under the
circumstances she chooses. Herminia eventually submits to Alan’s wishes to pass as a
married couple, a compromise to which she voices strong objection and one she initially
rejects absolutely:

for her own part, she hated the merest appearance of concealment, and would
rather have flaunted the open expression of her supreme moral faith before the
eyes of all London. But Alan had pointed out to her the many practical
difficulties, amounting almost to impossibilities, which beset such a course;
and Herminia, though it was hateful to her thus to yield to the immoral
prejudices of a false social system, gave way at last to Alan’s repeated
expression of the necessity for prudent and practical action. (68)

In a move similar to Hardy’s Sue and Jude, Herminia finds herself employing such
concealment for her own ends at a later point in the novel, being “forced to describe herself
as Mrs. Barton” to obtain lodgings for herself and her child (93). Herminia’s regret
concerning her principles as a young woman compounds the narrative punishment for her
transgression. Although she hopes her child will share her vision and be the harbinger of
liberation for women, she never explains the circumstances of Dolores’s birth to her, an
explanation necessary if her daughter is to take up Herminia’s cause. When Dolly learns of
her illegitimacy as a young woman, she confronts Herminia, who demonstrates physical
discomfort and embarrassment at having to explain. Herminia “flushes scarlet at the
unexpected question,” and the narrator compares the question to “dangerous quicksand,”
which Herminia has to negotiate (119). Herminia’s confession drives Dolly from their
household and causes Dolly to wish for Herminia’s death since Dolly cannot marry a man of
good birth while Herminia still lives. The education that has formed Herminia’s tenets as a New Woman has ultimately caused her the suffering and death she endures. Allen has Herminia articulate this very idea early on in the narrative when she acknowledges that society “won’t allow others to be wiser and better than themselves unpunished” (44). Thus, the New Woman’s education ultimately leads to her suffering and retribution.

While Allen’s intention was to present a female character easily identifiable to his audience as a New Woman by her educationally-driven ideology and then punish her for that education, Ella Hepworth Dixon’s narrative strategy in demonstrating the punishment due an educated woman was decidedly different in *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894). While Dixon unquestionably demonstrates the negative consequences of desiring and pursuing an education for females in this novel, her heroine is less conspicuously a New Woman than Allen’s heroine is. For this reason, the appropriateness of considering Dixon’s novel New Fiction has been debated by both modern and contemporary critics and reviewers alike. Kate Flint observes that contemporary critics questioned the categorization of the novel as New Woman fiction: “[y]et reviewers were generally reluctant to align Hepworth Dixon’s work whole-heartedly with that of her more outspoken contemporaries” (xiv). One reviewer from *The Athenaeum* found Dixon’s protagonist, Mary Erle, to be too gentle and feminine and not assertive enough to be “modern” (“Review of *The Story of a Modern Woman*” 770). This reviewer alleged that Dixon’s heroine had almost no similarity to other fictional New Women, whom he claimed were “self-assertive,” “heartless,” and “sexless.” Margaret Stetz believes that at the close of Dixon’s novel, Mary Erle still has not risen to the standing of a New Woman: “even at the novel’s conclusion she appears to be only a ‘modern woman’ rather than a ‘New’ one, still more influenced and acted upon than she might be, seemingly
incapable of analyzing the political dimensions of her personal experience, and disinclined to work with others to effect change” (106).

If political consciousness and alliance are necessary for and expected of a discernible New Woman, then certainly characters that scholars hold as exempla of fictional New Women, those such as Sue Bridehead in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, would fail to meet the criteria as well. As Penny Boumelha points out, Sue assuredly allies herself with no unifying cause (137), and, as I would argue, Sue serves as the epitome of a female who lacks self-awareness. Furthermore, Mary Erle’s refusal to betray another woman by having an affair with that woman’s husband, I believe, is irrefutable evidence that Mary stands for a cause. Her refusal surely indicates an awareness of her own personal experience as well as the desire for a political alliance. Mary’s own words confirm this fact:

“[b]ut it’s the other woman—your wife. I can’t, I won’t deliberately injure another woman. Think how she would suffer! Oh, the torture of women’s lives—the helplessness, the impotence, the emptiness! And Vincent, she is the mother of your child. *Your child,* dear,” she went on after a pause. “I could not bear that she should grow up and hate me. All we modern women mean to help each other now. We have a bad enough time as it is,” she added, with a faint smile; “surely we needn’t make it worse by our own deliberate acts!” (Dixon 254-55)

Mary’s reference to herself in relation to women as a whole constitutes an allegiance to an ideology and solidarity with a larger group in spite of the attenuated feminism of which many critics accuse her. Dixon’s damping of her character’s feminism is in full keeping with the arc of her work in general, which demonstrates a clear and purposeful strategy to make the New Woman more palatable to a repeatedly hostile Victorian audience.23

The task of making the New Woman appealing in the latter part of the century is apparent in Dixon’s contributions to the fashioning of the image of the woman *writer* at the
fin de siècle. In Valerie Fehlbaum’s study of contemporary photographs of New Woman writers published in Lady’s Pictorial in 1894, Fehlbaum demonstrates the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) ways in which images of the period attempted to “package” the woman writer to make her more acceptable to fin de siècle society, which frequently viewed her as masculine and, therefore, monstrous. Fehlbaum notes Dixon’s participation in such attempts, with Dixon habitually feminizing woman writers in her submissions to Lady’s Pictorial. These submissions included descriptions of social events female writers attended. Within her columns as editor of The Englishwoman, a journal whose intent was to provide domestic advice to a middle-class, female audience, Dixon challenged the rough and manly portrayals of the woman writer that became commonplace in the 1890s: “Small wonder, therefore, that Ella Hepworth Dixon would appear to be deliberately writing against such stereotyping and would, whenever possible, insist upon the feminine attributes of women writers” (Fehlbaum “Ella Hepworth Dixon: New Woman, New Image” 55). In much the same way that Dixon fashions the woman writer of the period in her editorial submissions to periodicals, she also fashions her New Woman heroine in her fiction. Not coincidentally, Mary Erle becomes a woman writer within the narrative. Rather than presenting the rigid character Victorian journals would easily lampoon in caricature, Dixon softens the distinguishing New Woman features, even bifurcating the figure of the New Woman by displacing some of her hallmarks onto another female character in the novel. Flint recognizes complementary traits in Mary Erle’s friend, Alison Ives (x).

This strategy of muting the heroine’s participation in the movement differs from other authors’ strategies as a result of Dixon’s hyperconsciousness of the criticism the New Woman was garnering in contemporary periodicals. This is not to say that authors like
Gissing and Allen were unaware of the almost violent reaction the New Woman figure was generating in Victorian culture; however, as the daughter of William Hepworth Dixon, editor for *The Athenaeum* from 1853 to 1869 (Margaret Stetz 100), Dixon undoubtedly understood, and was acutely aware of, the necessity of catering to market demands in a way that other authors were not. For this reason, Dixon seems more interested in shaping her fiction for her audience than authors such as Allen, who wrote *The Woman Who Did* “for the first time in my life wholly and solely to satisfy my own taste and my own conscience” (Allen epigraph 22), or Olive Schreiner, who refused to rewrite the character of Lyndall at Frederic Chapman’s request so that W. H. Smith’s Bookstore and railway stations would carry *The Story of an African Farm* (Ruth First and Ann Scott 119). In damping the intensity of her heroine, Dixon aimed to make her character more tolerable, and she, therefore, complied with these demands more readily.

Although Dixon refrains from illustrating some of the harsher attributes of the character that disturbed Victorian culture, she does indeed represent the New Woman in *The Story of a Modern Woman*, a point Kate Flint eventually concedes, alluding to the forced self-sufficiency Mary Erle eventually must adopt (iv). Mary espouses some of the tenets of the typical New Woman, although much of the accompanying strident rhetoric has been given to Alison Ives, Mary’s more affluent and aristocratic friend. Mary desires education, despite a childhood that offers her little in the way of formal training. Throughout the text Dixon consistently juxtaposes Mary’s education and the education of her brother. In one of the initial chapters, the narrator comments that “Mary was yet too soon for the time when parents begin to take their responsibilities seriously, and when the girl is sometimes as carefully prepared, as thoroughly equipped, as her brother for the fight of life” (14).
Notwithstanding the governess and the French tutor her family hires, most of Mary’s education comes from the books she reads as a child:

[t]he child was incorrigibly idle. A mild, non-descript, unimaginative governess and a fat, bald Frenchman who came once a week to instruct her in the Gallic tongue did nothing to take away the inherent unattractiveness of the ‘lessons.’ She could read, and that was enough. The child read all day long. She lay concealed among the footstools under the long dining-room table, poring over The Ancient Mariner—her favorite poem—or thrilled with the lurid emotion of Wuthering Heights. A little later Villette became her cherished book. (23)

Clearly Mary gains the majority of her education through independent reading.

Because of its haphazardness and lack of direction, Mary’s education is problematic. Novels, along with the Romantic Poets, become her educators, but the lessons in the books she reads are not lost on Mary. She manages to glean the sexual double standard Dickens plots in David Copperfield: “[w]hat is a lost woman really, Miss Brown?” demanded the girl, with her tense look. ‘Dickens says that little Em’ly is a lost woman, because she goes to Italy with that Mr. Steerforth. Was Mr. Steerforth a lost man, too?’” (Dixon 26). During her adolescence, Mary becomes aware of

questions of marriage, of maternity, of education. The girl had learned French by now, and the chance fingering of a small, last-century volume made her approach those supremely feminine subjects under the somewhat insecure guidance of Jean Jacques Rousseau. She had imbibed indeed, the Swiss philosopher’s diatribes on virtue before she had comprehended what civilized mankind stigmatises as vice. Emile: ou, de l’Education was wearily, conscientiously toiled through for the sake of posterity. (25)

Mixed in with the nineteenth-century novelists Mary reads is Rousseau’s Emile, significant because the work concerns itself with education (and in Book 5, specifically what is acceptable for women’s education). This text, along with the other novels Mary reads, is of
particular importance in considering the foundation of Mary’s attitude toward her own tuition. Rousseau’s outline for the education of women in *Emile*, though progressive for its time, was considered outdated when placed in context with treatises many late nineteenth-century thinkers wrote concerning female education and employment. While Rousseau does stipulate women’s reasoning capacity and endeavors to promote the cultivation of women’s minds, he also upholds the notion that men’s and women’s educations should be distinct—specifically that women should learn to read, write, and draw, but only in the service of the proper female goals in life, which are to please men and bear children. (I need not mention here that this program of study does not match what Rousseau outlines in great detail for male education). As Mary matures, the choices she makes in becoming educated reflect Rousseauian concepts, and her *raison d’etre* for study again harkens back to Rousseau’s ideas of the proper female role of subservience and procreation.

Conflicting with Rousseau’s philosophy on female education as fitting for women only in preparing them for wifehood and maternal responsibilities is Mary’s reading of Bronte’s *Villette*, which recounts the trials of a character whose fate limits her to the life of a professional woman, her prospects for marriage being foreclosed by the end of the novel. Dixon’s narrator goes to considerable length in describing Mary’s adolescent empathy for Lucy Snow:

> [p]oor drab, patient, self-contained Miss Snow! How the child’s heart ached for you in your bare, dismal, Belgian schoolroom, when Dr. John grew fickle; how she rejoiced when you found your ugly be-spectacled Fate; how choky she felt at the throat when she read those last pessimistic despairing words—words full of the sound and fury of angry seas and moaning winds. Why, poor patient hypochondriacal soul, were you destined never to be happy? And all these people were real to the child, much more real than the people she saw when she went out to tea-parties in her best frock and sash. (Dixon 24)
If Mary’s understanding of the proper role for women is founded in *Emile*, then her sympathy for Lucy Snow is understandable. Yet Mary absorbs something else besides simple compassion for Bronte’s character; she gains an alternate and conflicting view of womanhood that foreshadows her own life to come. The tension between the two divergent narrative trajectories Rousseau and Bronte outline—marriage and profession respectively—in the books Mary reads as a child gets played out in Mary’s own adult life.

Though she is offered the possibility of marriage by way of Vincent Hemming’s proposal, and very much wants to marry, she also expresses somewhat subdued desires of being educated, subdued perhaps because Dixon excised an entire chapter devoted to the heroine’s education, as noted by Valerie Fehlbaum:

> [t]he primary difference [between the serialized version of the novel and the Heinemann’s edition] is the deletion of the whole of the original third chapter, entitled “Wonderings”, which describes the heroine’s education in Germany. This was in fact highly autobiographical, as the author [Dixon] reveals in her memoirs decades later, and her motivations for suppressing this section may have been an attempt to distance herself from the literary text.

*(Ella Hepworth Dixon: The Story of a Modern Woman* 128)

A German education, as noted by Matthew Arnold’s letters to the Taunton Commission, was far superior to that of any education one could receive in Britain, and therefore would confer distinction to Dixon’s heroine intellectually. Instead of giving her heroine the education Fehlbaum recognizes in Dixon’s previous draft, Dixon alternately represents her attenuated desire for it. Though these desires are not as emphatic in Dixon’s text as in other New Woman novels, Mary’s longing for education is implicit in her ruminations on her brother’s comparatively easy life. Mary supports her brother financially by writing, barely eking out a living that sustains her. After her father dies, she constantly sends Jimmie money
while he acquires an Oxford University education permitted only males at the time, certainly reminiscent of Margaret Oliphant’s prolific writing in her attempts to support her brother and his children with the proceeds from her literary career. Though Mary struggles financially herself, she ensures that her brother does not want for anything, sending him money whenever he requests it. She thinks “he will always be comfortable and happy. He will never have to go out on a wet day,” as Mary is about to do to submit the article she has just finished (154). The comfort she refers to is a consequence of the education her brother is receiving, and her comment comes on the heels of a conversation in which Mary learns that Jimmie’s school schedule allows for him to sleep late most days, a luxury she is never afforded if she can find time to sleep at all. In such a subtle way, Mary’s desire for education is reflected in her desire for an easier life, one she sees her brother living. As an adult, she becomes painfully aware of the double standard she notices as a child.

Mary’s desire for education is also reflected in her active pursuit of becoming an artist. Prior to taking up writing in order to survive, Mary has also unsuccessfully attempted another career, attending The Central London School of Art, a state-supported institution. There, she spends six months stippling a reproduction of Laocoon in order to compete for a place at the Royal Academy. Though Mary takes her education there very seriously and is crestfallen when she is not rewarded by becoming a successful probationer at the Academy, she is chided in the novel for this endeavor. Several of Dixon’s characters relay the second-rate status of British art schools to French ateliers. One complains that, “[n]o one at the Central London had ever been known to have a theory to express, or if he had, it remained locked in his own breast” and calls the education Mary receives at the school a farce (Dixon 69-71). As a result, Mary’s friend, Alison Ives, persistently encourages Mary to abandon her
studies there to attend social events. Trying to calm herself while waiting for the list of
successful candidates who have been accepted into the Academy to be posted, Mary reflects
on how important becoming an artist is to her:

[i]t meant so much to her, so much more, she thought, than to any of the
others. It meant independence, a profession, a happy union. How many
hoped-for marriages she had seen fail among professional people just for the
want of a mere hundred or so a year. If she were good enough for the
academy schools, she felt that there was a future before her. She saw herself,
in imagination, working, earning, helping. (Dixon 94)

Mary sees her education as essential to the success of her prospective marriage; however, her
education is not rewarded, either by her acceptance or by the fulfillment of her marriage
plans. The art education Mary pursues leads her to a dead end, and she must fall back on her
educational foundation, a substantial enough one to allow her to write and to earn a living
through it.

Although Dixon removed a significant portion of Mary Erle’s education, as Valerie
Fehlbaum notes, the childhood education that remains in place in the text has Mary imbibing
ideas that present her with the problems she encounters as an adult, problems that are
responsible for the suffering she endures. Mary is idealistic, and this idealism is fostered by
the books she reads as a child, education she receives in her formative years. The Rousseau
she reads leads her to conclude that the proper role for women is that of marriage and
maternity. However, the Brontë she reads also leads her to conclude that she can live alone
and forge a career that sustains her if she cannot marry, as Lucy Snow does in Villette. Such
reading material shapes her ideas about supporting herself on her own, a decision that
ultimately leads to flagging health for Mary and a consultation with a doctor who
recommends a different mode of living for her in order to spare her health.
Mary believes she is destined to be married throughout the first portion of the novel to Vincent Hemming, a man who proposes to her in the early chapters of the novel and one for whom she feels great affection. However, Hemming defers their engagement and their marriage until he can secure a position in Parliament, one that allegedly would allow him to provide financially for a wife. In pursuing such a career, he leaves for India, and Mary tacitly agrees to wait for his return, though, as the narrative wears on, she sees less and less of Hemming and hears from him only rarely. His physical absence causes her much distress, though she is determined to wait for Hemming. A part of her knows that something is amiss in this relationship. During the interim, she receives a marriage proposal from Perry Jackson, a prominent artist who loves Mary and would provide well for a wife. Mary refuses this proposal, leading Jackson to inquire whether there is someone else with whom she is involved:

‘Is—is—there any one else that you care for?’ stammered Perry forlornly, just as she was going.

‘Yes,’ she said, but she did not meet his eyes, and as the word left her lips a sharp foreboding seized her. (161)

Clearly, the avowal is not without some hesitation, for Mary senses that something is wrong. Surely she knows that her refusal of Jackson’s proposal may lead to a solitary and fraught existence for her. The narrator foreshadows such an existence for Mary, asserting of Jackson:

[h]e would like to have saved her from the struggle of the woman who works, the fret and fever, the dreary fight for existence. As he turned back down the clear white passages, with their soft glowing carpets, and his eye caught the masses of transparent flowers within, the sumptuousness of his home struck him for the first time as ludicrously incongruous. (162)
The foreboding Mary senses is not unwarranted. In the very next chapter, Mary learns that Vincent Hemming has taken another woman as his wife.

As a result of the disappointment, Mary’s already flimsy emotional health takes a nosedive. She consults the doctor who describes her as a “bundle of nerves” (175). His prescription is the same one he gives all his female patients: “I should like to have all you young ladies living a healthy out-of-door life, happily married, and with no mental worries. There is something wrong somewhere,” he muttered to himself, ‘with our boasted civilisation. It’s all unnatural. Not fit, not fit for girls’” (176). The marriage the doctor prescribes for Mary and the one Perry Jackson offers her would spare her the mental and physical anguish she endures throughout the latter portion of the text. However, that option is no longer available to her. For the rest of the narrative, Mary struggles financially to support herself and the brother she puts through Oxford.

As if this struggle were not difficult enough, in the closing chapters, Hemming reappears on the scene only to request that Mary run away with him to France to be his mistress. Prior to this point in the novel, Mary has endured her allotted portion of suffering silently, as a “good Victorian woman” would—passively. However, when Vincent propositions her, Mary finally breaks down, voicing her despair: “[y]ou’re not hurting anyone—but me! You’re hurting me—me! You’re doing your best to make me a miserable woman’” (251). Mary’s principles keep her from acceding to Hemming’s wishes to elope, but they also keep her from the very happiness she desires. The misery she endures at being alone leads to a frightening self-reflection. In a chapter titled, “The Woman in the Glass,” Mary engages in a dialogue with herself in front of the mirror, a dialogue leading her to contemplate ending her own life:
Mary dropped her head on her arms. The night was mysteriously still. The breeze had dropped, and an uncanny silence hung about the house. The window was shut now, the blind drawn. The two candles on the dressing-table were burning low in their sockets. When she raised her head again, the eyes were no longer triumphant, they were reproachful. ‘Who am I? Why am I here?’ they asked: ‘To live is to suffer; why do you let me live? Must I go on looking back at you until I have run through the gamut of mental and physical pain? I am a living, suffering entity,’ said the woman in the glass, ‘in a world of artificial laws; of laws made for man’s convenience and pleasure, not for mine. Have I one thing for which I have longed? Have I a human love, have I the hope of immortality, have I even tasted the intoxication of achievement? Human life is but a moment in the aeons of time, and yet one little human lifetime contains an eternity of suffering. Why, since you take joy from me, why do you let me live?’

Here, indeed, was a greater temptation than the one from which she had just escaped. She sprang up, horrified, afraid of the haunting eyes... Was that to be the end? (265-65)

Although she entertains the idea of suicide, she never succumbs to the relief of her misery in such a way as Herminia does. Unlike Herminia, Mary chooses to remain and live out the apportioned suffering she endures because she allies herself with a cause that has the good of the entire female sex at its core. As in Gissing’s and Allen’s novels, Dixon’s heroine is punished. Her education serves as the underpinning of the ideology that forces the punishing choices her character makes, choices that resemble those of other heroines in these respective narratives.

While all three authors, Gissing, Allen, and Dixon, punish their characters for education—and some of the three certainly punish more severely than others—none pushes the punishment so far as to have their female characters engage in masochism, as I will argue characters in the following chapters of this study do. Such restraint in punishing the New Woman stems from these authors’ respective, but similar, educational backgrounds. Each of the authors in this chapter was formally educated at an early age and is classically trained.
Very early on, Gissing showed promise as a brilliant scholar and was encouraged to pursue education. As Jacob Korg notes, Gissing’s father

often read poetry aloud, taught little George to recite 'Break, Break, Break,' and called his attention to a vivid line from 'The Passing of Arthur.' Certain of his blind spots puzzled his son when he later came to think about them. For example, in spite of his interest in natural science, he had no notion of applied science, and did not realize that a steam engine ran by mechanical action. He was so ignorant of classical languages that he did not know that Greek and Latin poetry lacked rhyme. . . . This last deficiency seemed fairly serious to young George, whose bookish tastes flourished in the literate, if unsophisticated, environment of his home.  (7)

However, Gissing’s exposure to such advanced ideas was not merely fostered at home.

Gissing attended school in Wakefield as a young child and well into early adolescence:

Every one of these early cultural impressions had a lasting influence upon Gissing's interests and his work as a writer, but none aroused his imagination so powerfully as his study of Greek and Latin authors at Harrison's Back Lane School. It is clear that, before he left Wakefield at the age of thirteen, Gissing had already developed the passionate interest in classical literature that absorbed him throughout his life, amounting at times to a kind of mania.  

(Korg 8)

In addition to the early education Gissing received, he also attended “Lindow Grove School, a Quaker establishment at Alderley Edge, Cheshire, where he and his brothers were sent after his father's death” (Korg 10-11).

Like George Gissing, Grant Allen had similar access to formal education as a young boy. Allen was born to a father, “J. Antisell Allen, sometime scholar of Trinity College, Dublin . . .” (Edward Clodd 3). Allen’s father attended college himself and took pains to ensure that his sons were exposed to the classics through his own efforts:

[u]ntil the family left Canada, the father was tutor to his sons. He tells me that “Grant began Greek six weeks before he was seven years of age. He commenced writing a book, as he called it, at the same age’’ . . . If his
boyhood was enviable, so was his school life and training, since it ministered to a temperament which was cosmopolitan. (Clodd 10)

By the age of 13, Allen and his brothers had moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where he and his siblings were tutored by a scholar from Yale (Clodd 11-12). From there, Allen was dispatched in 1862 across the seas to France, where he was sent to school at the College Impériale, Dieppe. Then about a year before his parents’ return to Canada, he was transferred to King Edward’s School, Birmingham. His progress and promise justified an effort on the part of his family to give him a university training, and in Michaelmas term, 1867, he matriculated at Merton College, Oxford. (Clodd 11-12)

Like Gissing, Allen was being groomed for a university education.

Very little is known of Ella Hepworth Dixon’s early childhood. Valerie Fehlbaum notes that Dixon purposely censored many of the events of her own life in writing her autobiography, *As I Knew Them*, by focusing on the people she met throughout her life (6). Fehlbaum does acknowledge, though, that

> [a]s in more traditional autobiographies, childhood is presented, albeit briefly, as formative. From the outset Ella Hepworth Dixon recognizes her privileged position within the family and society in general: “I was born the seventh child, and the youngest of three sisters; therefore by all the laws of fairy-land, bound to be lucky.” “The little girl with hair hanging down her back” clearly benefited from “being brought up in a literary and social milieu of the best class”, but “the fat schoolgirl in pigtails” equally enjoyed the “warlike” company of her siblings. (17-18)

What Fehlbaum admits is that Dixon had privileges that most girls her age did not regarding access to education, as she points out here: [h]er avant-garde parents gave her access to the same education as her brothers including study abroad, so, unlike some women writers such as Virginia Woolf, who was also born into a literary family, she grew up with no sense of
exclusion” (18). Margaret Stetz concurs, acknowledging that Dixon’s mother was also responsible for raising six children in an atmosphere that promoted feminism and creative arts with a salon (100). Stetz asserts that

[t]hanks to her progressive family, Dixon received both a lady’s education and one that was more intellectually and socially unconventional. Like Mary Erle in The Story of a Modern Woman, she contracted typhoid fever while studying with a private tutor in Heidelberg, where she was sent to learn German language and philosophy, as well as how to play the piano. She also attended the London School of Music and, more daringly for a young woman of her class, studied painting in Paris, working in the ateliers of two French artists.

What is most striking about these authors, however, is not only their early childhood educations, but also their attendance at university or, if not actual attendance, their preparation to attend. Allen took a B.A.:

[a]t Merton, he won the Senior Classical Postmastership (the technical term for Scholar at Merton), which was tenable for five years, and carried with it a stipend of £80 per annum. In the teeth of many difficulties as will be seen presently, he gained a first class in Mods. in Trinity Term 1869, and a second class in Greats in Trinity Term 1870, returning for a day or two in 1871 to take his B.A., when he removed his name from the College books. (Clodd 12)

Allen went on to become a teacher of Latin and Greek verse at Brighton College, Cheltenham College, and Reading Grammar School, but he eventually took a position as “Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at the newly-founded Government College in Spanish Town, Jamaica,” at which institution, he eventually assumed the position of Principal (Clodd 35-7). George Gissing never quite made it to university, “[i]n 1874-75 he took the matriculation examination of the University of London, for which he had been preparing intensively for more than a year, and matriculated as B.A. with high honors, winning exhibitions in Latin and English” (Korg 11). Gissing’s inability to attend University
of London hinged on his dismissal from Owens College the year before for the theft of books, money, and coats, an offense of which Gissing was charged as guilty, thus ending his scholarly career (Korg 11). Dixon attended some of the finest French ateliers and was apprenticed to a journalist to foster her career as a writer (Stetz “Turning Points” 2).

The education, and particularly the higher education, of these authors is contradistinguished from the educations of Olive Schreiner and Thomas Hardy, authors I discuss in subsequent chapters. Schreiner and Hardy punish their characters much more severely than Gissing, Allen, or Dixon, having their heroines participate in masochistic strategies as a consequence of their education. The educational background of Schreiner and Hardy, I will argue, informs their treatment of their respective heroines, correlating an author’s educational experiences with the representation of education in their respective novels. Thus, the social class of an author, conferred through education, may inform an author’s predisposition toward the kind of punishment a character receives at the hands of that author.

END NOTES

12 Born in 1857 in Wakefield, George Gissing is a nineteenth-century British author famous for his portrayal of the working class in novels such as New Grub Street (1891), Born in Exile (1892), and The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft (1901). His critical study of Charles Dickens also makes him noteworthy in literary circles.

13 Canadian born in 1848, Grant Allen emigrated to and was educated in Britain. He became a popular novelist whose primary education was in the sciences; however, he turned to novel-writing to support himself and his invalid wife shortly after his marriage and is famous for The British Barbarians (1895) and Philistia (1884).

14 Daughter to William Hepworth Dixon, editor of The Athenaeum from 1853 to 1869, Ella Hepworth Dixon was raised among some of the most prominent literary minds of the century. She became a contributor to the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph and served as
art critic to the Westminster Gazette before turning to writing fiction. She has also published pseudonymously under the name “Margaret Wynman.”

The list of New Woman authors is extensive, but perhaps some of the most well-known authors include Grant Allen (The Woman Who Did), Mona Caird (The Daughters of Danaus), and Sarah Grand (The Heavenly Twins) to name a few.

It is interesting that the concept of the shopgirl has recently resurfaced in popular literature, and film as well, in Steve Martin’s novella and screenplay Shopgirl. In the film, Mirabelle’s boredom leads her to an extended encounter with the Widdowson-like figure, Ray Porter. Fortunately, in Martin’s screenplay, Mirabelle is spared the same fate as Monica Widdowson by Ray’s confession that he could never marry or be faithful to Mirabelle, and Mirabelle goes on to find a more compatible companion for herself and to develop her own career as an artist, though only through the financial support Ray provides for her.

For a salient discussion on Ruskin’s influence on Gissing, please see Carolyn J. Perry’s “A Voice of the Past: Ruskin’s Pervasive Presence in Gissing’s The Odd Women.” According to her argument, Gissing based the views of his character Widdowson on the doctrine of separate spheres Ruskin outlines in Sesame and Lilies.

In formulating this idea, I am relying on Patricia Comitini’s argument that the female clerical worker was replacing the male office worker between the 1850s and 1900s largely due to the lower wages employers could pay women. Consequently, women became more attractive hires to employers who were looking to increase profit margins by displacing higher paid male workers. Please see Comitini’s “A Feminist Fantasy: Conflicting Ideologies in The Odd Women,” pp. 539-40.

I am consciously choosing the Freudian terminology here because Freud’s hypothesis of cathectis seems most appropriate for the connection Rhoda and Everard have to each other. Rhoda seems more interested in the idea of what Everard represents—a chance for her to test her own ideology and to get rid of the stigma of being unmarriageable—than in Everard as a prospective marriage partner for love and for the pleasure attached to that love. Similarly, Everard is not interested in Rhoda for love, but more to test her feminism. Their feelings for each other are an attachment of psychic energy to an idea, not to the actual love object. For further discussion on the concept, please see Sigmund Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, and Studies in Hysteria.

According to Carolyn J. Perry, the Micklethwaites represent Ruskin’s outline in Sesame and Lilies of how gendered roles in marriage work optimally, particularly according to female behavior. She contrasts Gissing’s rendering of the Micklethwaites to that of the Widdowsons with respect to Ruskin’s precepts: Ruskin’s first objective, to make a woman healthy and beautiful, is also Widdowson’s. Then, after freeing her from the difficult labor which threatened Monica’s health, Widdowson begins to “make a butterfly” of her,
believing that “a beautiful woman ought to be beautifully clad” (Gissing 151). After making her beautiful, Ruskin suggests that a husband “fill and temper her mind with all knowledge and thoughts which tend to confirm its natural instincts of justice, and refine its natural tact of love” (Sesame 86-7). With regard to the extent to which a woman should understand the work of men, Ruskin claims she should be able to “feel, and to judge” the nature of his work, but there is no need for her to “know” it. She need not learn languages, but kindness to all people, not science, but “the loveliness of natural laws,” not historical fact, but spirit—to sense why man fails and how to encourage godliness (Sesame 87). In essence, a woman’s education is “not for self-development, but for self-renunciation” (Sesame 85). However, it is the progressive notions of independence and a self-directed life suggested by Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn that Monica’s mind claims; in the presence of “a woman who irresistibly proved to him her claims as a human being” (Gissing 197), Widdowson is rendered powerless. (Perry 66)

The Micklethwaite marriage represents Ruskinian ideology much more closely in that Mrs. Micklethwaite matches more accurately the temperament Ruskin hypothesizes for a woman according to Perry. Sharon Aronofsky Weltman provides a more extensive reading of Ruskin’s ideology and his intent to reform gender proscriptions during the Victorian period, arguing that Ruskin’s Sesame and Lilies attempted to revise more conservative roles for women:

While vigorously supporting Victorian culture's strict separation of spheres for the sexes, Ruskin nevertheless encourages women to do things that other suffocating 'woman worshippers' with whom he is normally conflated, such as Coventry Patmore, opposed. As a political entity with constitutionally defined powers, Queen Victoria seems far removed from Ruskin's mythmaking. But for Ruskin nothing is too real, too historical, or too ordinary to be mythologized and imbued with metaphorical significance. . . . While ostensible opposites, both mythic and political images of queenship add agency to Ruskin's conception of nineteenth-century women. By aligning mythic and political queenship in the age of Queen Victoria herself, Ruskin elevates politically powerless housewives to rhetorically empowered queens. Ruskin uses the category of 'queen' in ‘Of Queens’ Gardens’ and The Queen of the Air to stretch the boundaries of domestic ideology and to explore the newly defined possibilities for women within Victorian culture" (Ruskin’s Mythic Queen 104).

Perhaps the agency Ruskin’s ideology gives the housewife, according to Weltman, explains why the Micklethwaite marriage is the only successful rendering of marriage in the many Gissing offers in The Odd Women. For an even more detailed discussion of how Ruskin subverts gender roles by endorsing female education and attempting to create parity in male and female education through performance, please see Sharon Aronofsky Weltman’s Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theater, Science, and Education, in which she argues:
'Of Queens’ Gardens’ erases gender from student identity by creating a curriculum for girls that is identical to that of boys and initiates girls into the fundamental rituals of the scholar. In *Ethics of Dust*, Ruskin subverts traditional pedagogical hierarchy by couching all the mineralogy lessons in the form of dialogues, decentering his own authoring, and questioning the very notion of self-hood. Likewise, by presenting education as performance, Ruskin hints that the roles the girls learn to play both in their classroom theater and in life are malleable. (Performing the Victorian 84)

For a less positive interpretation of Gissing’s use of Ruskinian ideology, please see Seth Koven’s essay, “How the Victorians Read *Sesame and Lilies*,” in which he asserts: [even at the peak of his influence among advanced women and men in the 1880s and 1890s, some suspected that Ruskin's gender ideology was incompatible with the new physical, social, economic, and psychological freedoms women were claiming for themselves. The novelist George Gissing, unlike so many Victorian spinsters, was quite sure that *Sesame and Lilies* was not a tool of women's emancipation but their oppression. In his 1893 novel about the lives and loves of *Odd Women*, the odious Widdowson demands that his free-spirited and beautiful young wife Monica conform to Ruskin's strictures in *Sesame and Lilies*. “Never had it occurred to Widdowson,” the narrator explains, “that a wife remains an individual, with rights and obligations independent of her wifely condition.” As Widdowson's despotism drives Monica to ever more desperate measures, he gently explains his vision of the home. “Woman's sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately, girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious.” In Gissing's hands, the message of *Sesame and Lilies* constrains women's freedoms and can offer educated spinsters only “pity” for their “odd” lives. (187)

21 William T. Stead gained fame in journalist circles as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*; however, he was much better known for his abortive attempts to reform child prostitution in publishing his series of articles, “The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon,” (1885) in which he “purchased” Eliza Armstrong, a chimney'sweep’s daughter in order to do “field research” into the issue. While the series was successful in bringing attention to the problem of child prostitution, his pieces did not halt the practice. He was eventually imprisoned for the “purchase” of the child. For a more detailed discussion of his endeavors, please see Joseph Kestner’s *Mythology and Misogyny* and Judith Walkowitz’s *City of Dreadful Delight*.

22 In Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, Sue refuses to marry Jude despite his constant desire to marry her and despite the societal censure they meet with as a result of their living together outside of wedlock. The pressure on them to conform forces them to prepare for a civil ceremony, and Hardy leaves the reader to assume through periphrases that they have indeed been married. However, the reader learns several chapters later that the two actually chicken out and have been deceiving their landlords and neighbors about their actual marital
status. In other words, they come back from the ceremony they prepared for leading others to believe they have been married when, in fact, they have not.

23 Sally Ledger is by no means the only critic to assert that the figure of the New Woman posed a threat to Victorian conservative readership that resulted in a counter-attack against her in the journals of the era. She is, however, the most succinct in explaining the source of anxiety that provoked such a response: “[t]he elusive quality of the New Woman of the fin de siècle clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently self-identical culture of Victorianism which could not find a consistent language by which she could be categorized and dealt with. All that was certain was that she was dangerous, a threat to the status quo” (Ledger “The New Woman and the Crisis” 24). Ledger also asserts that, “[t]he fictional New Woman was almost certainly a victim of the moral rearguard action which followed the Wilde trials” (24) and that “the series of attacks on the New Woman and the decadents in the periodical press of the 1890s effectively prised open a discursive space for both of them” (25). For an enlightening view of the reaction the New Woman generated in the press of the decade, see Ledger’s “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism.” See also Valerie Fehlbaum’s study of Ella Hepworth Dixon’s attempts to counter the typical portrayals of New Women as monstrous in her submissions to Lady’s Pictorial in “Ella Hepworth Dixon: New Woman, New Image.” Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis have included illuminating illustrations of how the New Woman was depicted in lampoon caricature as well. Please see their Introduction to The New Woman in Fiction and Fact.

24 John Roach notes Arnold’s observations in comparing England’s educational system to that of France, Germany, and Switzerland, emphasizing Arnold’s dissatisfaction with the English educational system in comparison to Continental education:

[i]f curriculum was one major issue of contemporary debate, organization was another. The best-known critic of the disorder of English education and of the harmful results for the middle classes which resulted from it was Matthew Arnold. England lacked a concept of the national interest rising above the conflicts of the classes and based on rational principles. In France, Germany and Switzerland, he argued, education was a matter of state organization. It was planned centrally, though wide latitude was left to local administrators, and in consequence educational opportunities were available which did not exist on a comparable scale in England. Arnold thought that the middle classes suffered greatly from England’s lack of system, so that they could be judged the worst educated in the world. England possessed a few public schools which were excellent, but below that level there was nothing to compare with the state secondary schools of France and Germany. As the result of its educational deficiencies England was not ready to meet the demands of the modern epoch. (278)

See his A History of Secondary Education in England 1800-1870, pp. 276-77. For corroboration that Arnold was disappointed with England’s educational system, see also Christopher Stray’s Classics Transformed, pp. 173-4.
The education Mary Erle pursues in Dixon’s novel is actually historically accurate. The life of an artist was a viable occupation for women at the time, and women attended ateliers in the hopes of becoming prominent artists, one of the few professions a woman could pursue without censure. For a discussion of female artists, see Jan Marsh and Pamela Nunn Gerrish’s *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*. 

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“A woman must march with her regiment. In the end she must be trodden down or go with it; and if she is wise she goes.”
(Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm, 189)

While most New Woman novelists offer versions of the feminist that became such a threatening figure to late Victorian society, versions that coincided with urbanity and city-dwelling, Olive Schreiner offers a distinctly different version, though still recognizably a New Woman in The Story of an African Farm. Because African Farm was written and published early in the development of the New Woman genre (1883), and because, unlike other New Woman novels, the setting is in the rural plains of a colonized territory, Schreiner’s heroine struggles not only with her humble class origins, like her subsequent British counterparts, but also with a harsh natural landscape with which her other counterparts do not contend. The differences in Schreiner’s character, however, do not preclude an inherent desire to be educated, and the theme of education surfaces throughout Schreiner’s novel as a driving force for her heroine, Lyndall, as well as others. Schreiner presents Lyndall as a markedly recognizable New Woman character in search of the consequent New Woman education. Like other fin de siècle heroines, she is severely punished for this desire. Her character lacks the access to education that many other New Woman characters enjoy by virtue of geography, yet this character manages to obtain an education nonetheless and to suffer equally if not more severely for her desire to become
educated than the heroines we have seen in Gissing, Allen, and Dixon. As Stephen Gray points out: “education does not liberate, in Schreiner's view of the colonial world; it is merely part of a general oppression of the spirit which the landscape, the isolation and the irrelevance of fame and fortune reinforce” (48).

Although Schreiner creates arguably the first recognizable New Woman figure, her vision of the New Woman character was quite fully developed for the earliness in the genre, so developed that her characters exhibit manifestations of psychopathology usually reserved for the most extreme renderings of feminism in the New Fiction, characteristics such as the tendency toward masochism. Schreiner’s ability to presage the violence other New Woman authors would appropriate relies not only on her post-colonial position as a missionary’s daughter in the Transvaal region but also on the religious crisis she experiences as a young woman. It is, however, difficult to attribute all the New Woman tendencies her characters exhibit to the life events that other critics have explored in her biography, though these events certainly cannot be ignored. John Kucich argues that Schreiner was quite aware of the political implications masochism carried as a strategy to evoke political change, using the violence expressed in masochism to advance feminist causes. These implications include a complete overhaul of class structure. Kucich is correct in asserting that, “contemporary critics need to engage the full political dynamics of fin-de-siècle feminist masochism—including its attempts to renovate bourgeois culture at colonial peripheries—before hastening to indict its complicities with racism and imperialism” (105).

However, what Kucich fails to address is feminist masochism’s complicity, first and foremost, with sexism. It fails to advance the feminist cause while, perhaps, promoting the national and class ideology Kucich discusses. If Kucich is correct, that Schreiner deploys
masochism as a means of inscribing bourgeois culture in the peripheries of colonial territories, then surely she inscribes that class structure at the expense of gender, not in its service, thus subverting the feminist cause her novels explore. Kucich argues that in Woman and Labour, Schreiner “endowed feminism with tremendous social and psychological authority by representing women’s demands as the antithesis of self-interest and as crucial to the survival, not just of women, but of the entire human race” (91). Schreiner’s rhetorical flourishes in The Story of an African Farm do appear to pay lip-service to the female autonomy she discusses in Woman and Labour and its necessary role in liberating not just women, but humanity in general. The narrative structure of the plot of African Farm, however, belies both the rhetoric she employs in her fiction as well as the ideology she espouses in her tracts.

Masochism as a narrative strategy merely serves as a coping mechanism—and not a very successful one at that. The female heroine cannot merge her desire for identity (formed through formal education) with a culture that will systematically deny her a rightful place as an agent with volition, voice, and subjectivity, such culture as proliferated in late Victorian society. Michelle Massé has compellingly argued that “masochism, like repetition compulsion, can be a psychic strategy that makes the best of a bad business, that insists on wrestling identity and self-affirmation from the biased social contract [marriage] that traumatizes women” (42). In the same way that a masochistic psychic strategy effectively divests women of their identity, a narrative strategy employing masochism robs women as a social group of the means for advancing by containing the very seeds of subversion the narrative sows. David Waterman’s skepticism on the success of masochism to liberate in
*The Story of an African Farm* emphasizes the political ends of masochism in a narrative such as Schreiner’s:

> While Schreiner may sometimes fall short of arguing for the entire dismantling of the system of dominance and submission, her ambivalence in *African Farm* also seems to suggest that resistance within a system of binary opposition, in this case a binarism based on gender, is ineffective. The characters' masochism and gender subversion do not challenge the system of binary opposition in the first place, in effect making those who resist confederates in the reproduction of the very system which oppresses them. (61)

Waterman would seem to suggest that, in such systems of gender binarism in which masochism exists, that the masochist is consciously responsible for his own suffering. I cannot agree with Waterman’s indictment of the masochist as a conscious participant in the disciplinary system that punishes him or her. Society surely acculturates women to perform this role compulsively. I do agree that the outcome of the masochistic behavior is the same: the consequence is the perpetuation of oppression for the characters in the story.

Schreiner’s efforts clearly demonstrate a political objective, but one that falls short of Kucich’s claims in regard to feminism. The ideology he finds in Schreiner’s treatises (and in her fictional texts) definitively calls for societal transformation. I would argue that the narrative strategy of masochism in Schreiner’s fiction ultimately conflicts with her consciously stated philosophies in *Woman and Labour*, thus undermining the feminist cause by subverting the novel’s emancipatory potential. Masochism as a narrative strategy in Schreiner’s text ultimately sacrifices female advancement and functions to create a text that serves as a nineteenth-century conduct manual instructing the potential New Woman on what she can expect to endure if she pursues feminist causes. Such a text forecasts her prospective unlikely success in emancipatory pursuits, one being education. Thus, what she can expect
to find, unsurprisingly, is punishment, and Schreiner illustrates this punishment as a self-administered one earlier and more forcefully than many of her contemporary female authors, perhaps as a result of her own tendencies toward masochism.  

While Schreiner’s text unquestionably subverts the feminism it explores, its subversiveness demonstrates a restraint that some New Woman authors abandon. This restraint lies in Schreiner’s minimalism and in her treatment of masochism. Both Schreiner and Hardy, as I will argue in the next chapter, figure masochism in their fiction, though Schreiner restrains herself from eroticizing and/or pathologizing the masochist in *The Story of an African Farm* by excising melodrama from the novel and by curbing any tendency toward sensationalizing it, as Hardy does. Ruth First and Ann Scott note that Schreiner’s earlier novel, *Undine*, serves as a draft for the later novel, *African Farm*, whose manuscript incorporated substantive changes that not only merge and bifurcate characters but also expurgate the melodrama Schreiner initially deemed necessary (85). First and Scott describe in Schreiner’s later text a break with “exaggerated intricacies of plot that characterized her first novel in favour of a combination of mysticism, allegory, and realism that allowed her to explore states of being and consciousness” (92). Such expurgation results in a narrative starkness that matches the scant landscape in the text, and an examination of the earlier text, *Undine*, will illuminate the self-discipline Schreiner applied in deploying masochism in *The Story of an African Farm*, making the punishment the New Woman received as a consequence of her education present, yet less intense, and perhaps, making the subversion of the New Woman less severe than other authors whose treatment of masochism materializes unchecked. While Schreiner’s characters engage in seeking out punishment that borders on
the self-inflicted, they do not display the full blown masochism that results in physical
deformity that later New Woman novelists employ, novelists like Thomas Hardy.

Schreiner’s *Undine* was published posthumously in 1929, although, like *Story of an
African Farm*, it was written in the eight years preceding 1881 before she emigrated (Ruth
First and Ann Scott 83). Having given the manuscript to Havelock Ellis for advice on how to
shape the story once she arrived in England and befriended him, she eventually abandoned
pursuit of revising the novel for publication because she found it too closely aligned with her
own biography. Only after her death and the reading of her will did her husband, Samuel
Cronwright-Schreiner, discover that the manuscript existed and that it was, in fact, written
prior to *The Story of an African Farm* (Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner 5). Cronwright-
Schreiner determined that the novel should be published as his wife originally crafted it,
making no revisions to the manuscript himself. Because Schreiner did not continue her work
on the draft, the text of *Undine* remains in an unaltered and unrefined state, and,
consequently, *Undine* is not the seamless narrative devoid of the typical rough-draft bumps
and nods. As one might expect, there are inexplicable gaps in the text and elisions in the
narrative that indicate Schreiner’s intent to discontinue her efforts. Her apparent shifts back
and forth from first-person to third-person exposition, her characters who are introduced and
summarily dismissed without ever being developed, and those who are killed off in one
setting only to appear later in the novel resurrected from the dead in another location all
indicate that the draft still needed much work. Perhaps for this reason, critics have largely
ignored *Undine*. However, it is clear that First and Scott’s assessment of *Undine* as a kind of
draft of *African Farm* is accurate. The setting and landscape, the plot trajectory, and the
heroine, Undine Bock, undoubtedly parallel *The Story of an African Farm*, and can influence
the reading of the later text, particularly with respect to the masochism Schreiner clearly intended.

Like Schreiner’s heroine Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*, Undine Bock possesses beauty and allure that draw men to her; however, she also rejects those who would provide her with a stable life and mutually satisfying heterosexual ties. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall is pursued by several suitors: Gregory Rose, her cousin Waldo, and the stranger whose child she eventually bears. Similarly, *Undine’s* cousin, Jonathan, and three other men from the same family (George, Henry, and Albert Blair) pursue Undine. Schreiner does incorporate a disinclination towards marriage in the heroine of *Undine*, just as she does in *African Farm*, but Undine does eventually marry, though she weds a man who is much older than she is as a prospective financial arrangement to help the man she pathologically falls for, a man who loses interest in her once she has professed her love to him. What is distinctly different about *Undine* is the manner in which Schreiner treats the female characters in the earlier novel. In *Undine*, Schreiner’s heroine does not bear a child out of wedlock as the heroine in *African Farm* does; instead, Schreiner assigns such a fate to a seemingly minor character, Alice Brown, whose illegitimate child dies shortly after birth, the mother disappearing never to return after its death. Although Undine, herself, gives birth to a child who dies also, she does so within the confines of marriage. Such a change alters the narrative punishment that appears later in *African Farm*, whose heroine is disciplined with the death of her child clearly because she chooses to forego marriage and the help such familial ties would afford her. Thus, while Undine is punished, the consequences she suffers are not related to the ideology she espouses as a result of an education she acquires, and Undine does not die in giving birth to the child as Lyndall does. What is also distinct in
*Undine* is the absence of a foil for the protagonist, a function Em serves in *African Farm* for Lyndall. Em represents the conventional womanhood against which Lyndall’s rebelliousness is defined. Em wants marriage and a family, and she waits patiently for Gregory Rose to overcome his infatuation with Lyndall so that Em, herself, can settle down with him. Em acts as the rural equivalent to the “angel in the house,” a woman who quietly bides her time and passively accepts what comes her way. She does not pursue education as Lyndall does and states plainly that she “should not like to go to school” (45). Furthermore, she rarely, if ever, questions authority. No such character exists in *Undine*, and Schreiner’s attempts in *African Farm* to underscore her heroine’s transgression against established norms in that novel clearly indicates her intent to connect her character’s punishment to the respective choices Lyndall makes in the later novel, choices that present themselves in the narrative as masochistic and as overdetermined by her intellectualism.

The transformation of the characters from *Undine* to *African Farm* demonstrates Schreiner’s intent to incorporate masochism in the later text as a consequence of education. However, the intensity of this pathological behavior in her character is dampened by the excision of melodrama in the later draft of the text, a stylistic alteration that affects the way in which Schreiner renders masochism. Schreiner’s narrator in *Undine* articulates the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the text with more detail and exaggerated emotion than she does in the later text. Undine has a mother with whom she argues. Their disagreements are drawn extensively through Undine’s emotionally intense reactions under such duress. Undine’s mother calls her “the hardest child to manage” and tells her that she has “no need to put on that look of proud indifference” (Schreiner *Undine* 16). Undine’s
response is the typical temper tantrum of a child, but it is punctuated with unusual intensity by the invective of the narrator in describing the reaction:

[a]fter a time she lay down and tried to close her eyes and drop asleep; but now it seemed as if already she had passed into that unknown land, prepared by God for the souls at whom He laughs. In Dante’s hell there were fire and fellowship, earth and pain, but in hers there was nothing so merciful or so material. She seemed in a wide void in which there was only endless space and blackness, and she had not even two hands, the one of which might touch the other and in touching find fellowship; and when she cried aloud her voice fell dead upon the air. There was only emptiness and black space above, around, below, and she was one alone. Oh, how the silence ached! One throb of pain, one touch, one sound, how blessed they would be.

(Schreiner *Undine* 18)

The narrator’s overstated description of Undine’s pain at being called a difficult child, while quite possibly an accurate representation of childhood angst at being misunderstood, is indicative of the melodramatic flourishes Schreiner attempted to eradicate in the later text.

In stark contrast to the melodrama in *Undine* and the tendency to eroticize masochism, which I will argue Hardy incorporates in the next chapter, is Schreiner’s narrative technique in *African Farm*, a narrative that makes use of formal rhetoric through the dialogue of her characters but has been purposely stripped of all exaggeration and didacticism through narrative intrusivity. Ruth First and Ann Scott attest to the deliberateness of Schreiner’s artistic choices, referring to differences Schreiner notes in her later novels in which she abandoned earlier techniques she had used in writing *African Farm*: “[s]he rejected the form she had used in *African Farm*—of ‘the life we all lead, [in which], nothing can be prophesied,’ in favor of a more didactic, propagandistic text” (First and Scott 172). What First and Scott refer to here appears in a section of the Preface to *African Farm* wherein Schreiner acknowledges her own technique:
[h]uman life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed; we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and, when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. But there is another method—the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows. If there sits a spectator who knows, he sits so high that the players in the gaslight cannot hear his breathing. Life may be painted according to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other. (African Farm 27)

Schreiner accedes here that in the method she chose for African Farm, there will be no narrative commentary to help the reader interpret, no prophet-narrator appearing to elucidate the events in the text, and she indicts any ordering principle—the “spectator who knows”—for distancing himself from the players who could use assistance in crises. Thus, not only does Schreiner’s narrative technique differ from Hardy’s, her religious philosophies are manifested in the text differently. In this way, her text, like the setting and landscape in African Farm, has a starkness, one in which, perhaps, not even a Creator exists. While this kind of technique in which desolation abounds can be punishing to its characters, its retribution is mild in comparison to the kind Hardy employs.

In African Farm, an exchange similar to the one Undine has with her mother takes place between Lyndall and Bonaparte Blenkins (not Lyndall’s mother since she is an orphan), one in which Lyndall refuses to attend the classes he conducts on the farm. Instead of the intrusive, third-person omniscient narrator describing the torment of the heroine, the conflict is described with equanimity by a third party. Em explains the altercation between Lyndall and Blenkins, answering Waldo’s query regarding why she is crying:
‘Lyndall made him [Blenkins] angry’ said the girl tearfully; ‘and he has given me the fourteenth of John to learn. He says he will teach me to behave myself, when Lyndall troubles him.’

‘What did she do?’ asked the boy.

‘You see,’ said Em hopelessly turning the leaves, ‘whenever he talks she looks out at the door, as though she did not hear him. Today she asked him what the signs of the Zodiac were, and he said he was surprised that she should ask him; it was not a fit and proper thing for little girls to talk about. Then she asked him who Copernicus was; and he said he was one of the Emperors of Rome, who burned the Christians in a golden pig, and the worms ate him up while he was still alive. I don’t know why,’ said Em plaintively, ‘but she just put her books under her arm and walked out; and she will never come to his school again, she says, and she always does what she says.’

(Schreiner African Farm 76)

The passage here lacks the vitriol conveyed by the protagonist in Undine, the narrative immediacy distilled from the actual event by the report from another character after the incident transpires. Lyndall’s behavior contrasts sharply with Schreiner’s prototype in Undine. Lyndall recognizes injustice and chicanery for what it is, but instead of demanding justice and protesting vocally, she quietly absents herself. Lyndall’s reserve is a function of Schreiner’s purposeful moderation in technique. There are instances of melodrama in African Farm; however, they are reserved exclusively for grotesque characters, like Blenkins, to intensify their comic deformity. Blenkins’s attempts to dupe Sannie into believing he has lost a wife he has, in reality, never had are underscored by Blenkins’s overacted dismay at the feigned loss. Sannie attempts to calm Blenkins with liquor, but again Blenkins protests too vociferously at the idea of drinking it: “[o]h, I can’t, I can’t! I shall die! I shall die!” said Bonaparte, putting his hands to his side” (80). The moderation Schreiner demonstrates in illustrating her heroine, juxtaposed against the initial draft of Undine, strips the novel of a narrative richness, and this stripping mimics the change in setting between the two novels. The setting of African Farm shares the starkness of the narrative. This too represents a
change from the original draft in which Undine leaves South Africa as a child and spends a significant portion of the narrative in England with lush verdure, a nearby forest, and a beach.

Notwithstanding the cautionary message contained within *The Story of an African Farm*, education is a prominent feature in Schreiner’s text. Several of the childhood characters on the farm are cognizant of the necessity for education, but Schreiner’s Lyndall is probably the most ideologically driven and outspoken of them all on the theme. As a child, Lyndall reads voraciously, constantly cloistering herself in a corner with a book. As an adolescent, she expresses a strong inclination to become educated, partially because she wants to be clever, but also in part because, as she acknowledges to Em, her adolescent friend in the novel who serves as a foil, she will have no inheritance as a young woman. This admission of Lyndall’s concerns over how she will support herself is a strong indication of her intention not to rely on a man to support her, consequently signifying that she is unconcerned with upholding conventional roles assigned to women in getting married, despite the many options potential suitors present her. Lyndall is sought after for her unusual beauty, unlike Em. This inclination to avoid marriage by becoming educated and relying on herself for financial stability is strong enough to withstand the deterrent of her guardian, Tant’ Sannie, and the obstructionism Sannie adopts in thwarting Lyndall’s efforts to become educated. Lyndall tells Em that if Sannie attempts to deny her an education, Lyndall will force Sannie to accede (45).

What Lyndall is facing in squaring off with Tant’ Sannie is the qualitative difference between a formal education and a rural instruction, with rural instruction basing its pedagogy largely on superstition, succinctly illustrated by Sannie’s reaction to Waldo’s copy of John Stuart Mill’s *Political Economy*:

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’Dear Lord!’ said Tant’ Sannie, ‘cannot one hear from the very sound what an ungodly book it is! One can hardly say the name. Haven’t we got curses enough on this farm?’ cried Tant’ Sannie, eloquently: ‘my best imported Merino ram dying of nobody knows what, and the short-horn cow casting her two calves, and the sheep eaten up with the scab and the drought? And is this a time to bring ungodly things about the place, to call down the vengeance of Almighty God to punish us more? Didn’t the minister tell me when I was confirmed not to read any book except my Bible and hymn-book, that the Devil was in all the rest? And I never have read any other book,’ said Tant’ Sannie with virtuous energy, ‘and I never will!’ (113)

Sannie’s, her aunt’s, idea of the necessity and quality of education differs radically from Lyndall’s, a difference that forces Lyndall to confront authority in pursuing the education she desires.

Lyndall’s interests in the kind and quality of education she receives are not limited to confrontations with Sannie. They extend to her unlikely instructors as well. Schreiner frequently illustrates Lyndall’s conflicts with authority figures fraudulently representing themselves as educators. Bonaparte Blenkins’s function in the novel is symbolic of the societal obstacles women face in gaining access to education. Lyndall’s expressions of disgust with Blenkins’s gatekeeping and incompetent instruction are made manifest in her refusal to return to the makeshift classroom set up for the children on the farm after Blenkins fails a series of intellectual challenges she sets up for him. She exhibits this same perspicacity later in the novel when she explains to Waldo why she essentially abandons her educational pursuits within the confines of the boarding school she defies Tant’ Sannie to attend. She sharply criticizes this kind of institution for the limited and useless curriculum it passes off as education. Being interested not only in receiving education, but also the quality of that education, Lyndall discontinues attending many of the classes offered at the boarding school and finds work to subsidize the limited education she receives there. The money she
earns goes toward books and newspapers. Lyndall effectively becomes an auto-didact within the confines of the boarding school. Her determination to be educated is articulated succinctly in her own words as a grown woman: “Long years ago I resolved to be sent to school. It seemed a thing utterly out of my power; but I waited, I watched, I collected clothes, I wrote, took my place at the school; when all was ready I bore with all my force on the Boer-woman, and she sent me at last” (216). Lyndall’s desire for formal education, an education mainly reserved for males at this time, puts her at odds with her society and forces her to confront opposition from all sides.

Lyndall is not the only character who desires education in *African Farm* and certainly is not the only character to be punished for that desire in the text. Waldo also pursues education in ways similar to Lyndall’s and pays dearly for it, very much like Hardy’s Jude in *Jude the Obscure*, a novel I explore in the next chapter. Schreiner’s punishment of a male character for his desire for education makes it difficult to assign punishment exclusively to female education. This problem gets played out in several New Woman novels, and we see the phenomenon in particularly striking ways in such authors as Hardy. Schreiner introduces Waldo’s affinity for learning in the initial chapter of the novel, when Waldo takes advantage of an opportunity to practice his arithmetic by whipping out a slate on his breaks between work when the weather is too hot on the kopje to drive sheep. Like Lyndall, he has dreams (and daydreams) that center around books and a persistent quest for knowledge. Waldo carries books on his person seemingly at all times, jealously guarding them. Schreiner points out that he carries the Mill text “in his breast” (111). Thus, Schreiner establishes very early in the narrative Waldo’s desire and quest for education.
Just as Lyndall and Em do, Waldo attends “school” on the farm, but as with Lyndall, his real education comes from independent scholarship. He and Lyndall share their insights on the books they read. Such is the case when Lyndall instructs Em regarding some reading she has done on Napoleon Bonaparte, then asks whether he has read the same book. Waldo answers that he has read that book and others but confesses that “what you want to know they [books] never tell” (48). Waldo admits to having many questions that remain unanswered: questions of “physical geography,” that would explain how the kopje on which they live came to be and questions of history and evolution (49). Waldo possesses the natural curiosity of a budding scholar, just as Lyndall does. His desire to become educated is strong enough to lead him to a loft in a lumber room on the farm containing books that Tant’ Sannie has hidden away from the children. Waldo’s finding these books and his experience with them are described in terms similar to a first sexual experience:

[under a pile of sacks he found it—a rough packing-case, nailed up, but with one loose plank. He lifted that, and saw the even backs of a row of books. He knelt down before the box, and ran his hand along its rough edges, as if to assure himself of its existence. He stuck his hand in among the books, and pulled out two. He felt them, thrust his fingers in among the leaves, and crumpled them a little, as a lover feels the hair of his mistress. The fellow gloated over his treasure. He had a dozen books in the course of his life; now here was a mine of them opened at his feet. After a while he began to read the titles, and now and again opened a book and read a sentence; but he was too excited to catch the meanings distinctly. At last he came to a dull brown volume. He read the name, opened it in the centre, and where he opened began to read. ‘Twas a chapter on property that he fell upon—Communism, Fourierism, St Simonism—in a work on Political Economy. He read down one page and turned over the next; he read down that without changing his posture by an inch; he read the next, and the next, kneeling up all the while with the book in his hand, and his lips parted. . . .

The boy’s heavy body quivered with excitement. So he was not alone, not alone. He could not quite have told anyone why he was so glad, and this warmth had come to him. His cheeks were burning. (108-9)
Waldo’s pleasure in books rivals that of desires sexual in nature. Schreiner’s description is clearly meant to evoke such a pairing with the frank language she uses in her description of the boy’s reaction to the reading material. Waldo is as adamant about learning and is punished for stealing into the loft to look at the books. In a move similar to the one Brontë has John Reed perform on Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Tant’ Sannie finds one of the books Waldo has taken from the loft and throws it at his head.

However, Waldo will be punished even more fiercely for his desire to learn through the same method that thwarts Lyndall’s access to education initially—Bonaparte Blenkins’s sadistic discipline and his gatekeeping. Blenkins ties Waldo to a post and lashes him with a horsewhip for stealing into the loft, accusing him of filching Sannie’s store of dried peaches, goods stored next to the books Waldo covets. The beating Blenkins administers is so vicious that it strikes terror in Waldo:

> [t]he first cut ran from the shoulder across the middle of the back; the second fell exactly in the same place. A shudder passed through the boy’s frame. ‘Nice, eh?’ said Bonaparte, peering round into his face, speaking with a lisp, as though to a very little child, ‘Nith, eh?’—
> But the eyes were black and lusterless, and seemed not to see him. When he had given sixteen Bonaparte paused in his work to wipe a little drop of blood from his whip. ‘Cold, eh? What makes you shiver so? Perhaps you would like to pull up your shirt? But I’ve not quite done yet.’
> When he had finished he wiped the whip again, and put it back in his pocket. He cut the rope through with his penknife and then took up the light. ‘You don’t seem to have found your tongue yet. Forgotten how to cry?’ said Bonaparte, patting him on the cheek. The boy looked up at him—not sullenly, not angrily. There was a wild, fitful terror in the eyes.

John Kucich has argued that this beating reenacts the beating fantasy of an oedipal script, wherein “Blenkins accuses Waldo of forbidden desire for the dried fruits—stored in an
accessible attic—that belong to the woman Blenkins himself desires sexually” (84). He argues that this beating is eroticized and triangulated, with Sannie serving as the object of desire and Lyndall as the vicarious sufferer. However, it is not the fruit, per se, Waldo is after. Waldo is beaten for his desire for education in sneaking into the loft to procure books, items not belonging to Tant’ Sannie but to Em’s father. For Blenkins, perhaps, this is an oedipal drama. For Waldo, however, it is something quite different, and certainly not eroticized as indicated in his reaction of terror subsequent to being horsewhipped. Waldo is punished for his desire for education, just as Lyndall is punished.

This punishment for a male who desires education seems problematic in that males are traditionally encouraged to become educated. However, according to Waterman, Schreiner feminizes Waldo in pairing him with Lyndall: "[t]hough both [Lyndall and Waldo] are children (even as they grow older, they are represented as children), Waldo is inhibited, feminine, and masochistic, while Lyndall is outspoken, masculine and more openly resistant" (71). Waldo and Lyndall participate in a sexual role reversal in relation to each other, much as I will argue Jude and Arabella do in Hardy’s Jude the Obscure. When Blenkins beats Waldo, it is eventually Lyndall who frees him from the solitary confinement Blenkins has relegated him to by obtaining the key from under Blenkins’s nose. In such a situation, Waldo is in the “feminine” position of needing rescue, and Lyndall is in the “masculine” position of being the rescuer. Waldo demonstrates an affinity for animals when he attacks a fellow clerk for killing his horse by riding it too hard, and he downs the transport rider for his cruelty to an ox (258). Such an affinity for animals is commonly seen in male characters who are feminized, as with Hardy’s Jude, who is fired for feeding the birds he is hired to scare off for Farmer Troutham. Because Schreiner feminizes Waldo, particularly in relation to Lyndall,
his punishment for desiring education seems in keeping with Schreiner’s mode of punishing females for desiring or acquiring education.

Just as Waldo experiences punishment for his efforts to acquire knowledge, Lyndall does also. However, if Lyndall experiences opposition in attempting to gain access to education, she encounters it threefold after acquiring it. Like other New Woman novelists, Schreiner illustrates that education comes at a price—that one pays dearly for anything that may be perceived as gains made in this domain. While her New Woman character is not a solitary sufferer in the novel for the education she receives, Lyndall delivers what is tantamount to a sermon on the consequences education engenders for females at this time. Of all the characters we have yet analyzed, Lyndall is the most proficient at articulating the connection between female education and punishment. She functions in the novel as Schreiner’s rhetorical device, delivering monologues that pronounce female education a farce. Lyndall admits that, for all the “advances” her society claims to have made at this time for females in that they are allowed to receive education, the education women acquire will not help them in the least. Lecturing to Waldo, she explains the differences in cultural expectations for males and females:

> the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says—*Work!* And to us it says—*Seem!* To you it says—As you approximate to man’s highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labour is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says—Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labour.  

(188)

If knowledge will not help a woman, clearly the education that imparts that knowledge is utterly useless. Here Lyndall indicates that education becomes merely an adornment, an ornament for a woman. Later she admits that education actually becomes detrimental,
acknowledging that “the less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for climbing. I once heard an old man say, that he never saw intellect help a woman so much as a pretty ankle; and it was the truth” (189). This later admission comes close to Lyndall’s and perhaps Schreiner’s truth—that education actually impedes a woman’s prospects, thus acting as a kind of punishment if she pursues it.

We see this punishment abundantly displayed throughout the novel. Lyndall’s pursuit of formal education changes her demonstrably. She comes back from the boarding school in different clothes and spouting her protofeminist diatribes on the inequality of the sexes to various characters in the novel. In addition to her changed appearance and her outspokenness, we also see a marked change in the way she conducts herself. In a letter to his sister, Gregory Rose comments on Lyndall’s behavioral eccentricities:

She gets the wildest horses in that buggy, and a horrid snappish little cur belonging to the German sitting in front, and then she drives out alone. I don’t think it’s at all proper for a woman to drive out alone; I wouldn’t allow it if she was my sister. The other morning, I don’t know how it happened, I was going in the way from which she was coming, and that little beast—they call him Doss—began to bark when he saw me—he always does, the little wretch—and the horses began to spring, and kicked the splash-board all to pieces. It was a sight to see, Jemima! She has got the littlest hands I ever saw—I could hold them both in one of mine, and not know that I’d got anything except that they were so soft; but she held those horses in as though they were made of iron. When I wanted to help her she said, ‘No, thank you; I can manage them myself. I’ve got a pair of bits that would break their jaws if I used them well,’ and she laughed and drove away. It’s so unwomanly. (206)

It is not just her behavior toward animals and her dress that are changed by her education; Lyndall’s views of sexuality have been fashioned through it as well, as indicated in Gregory’s reference to the unchaperoned jaunts to her lover’s abode. The unsupervised visits
to the man who eventually becomes the father of her child are the fruition of her altered sensibilities yet also produce the punishment for those altered sensibilities.

Schreiner makes abundantly clear both in her fiction and treatises that it is a woman’s biological function that impedes her advancement. Lyndall’s behavior and her unconventional attitudes towards established gender roles in her culture—both a byproduct of her formal education—instigate the punishment she ultimately receives: bearing a child out of wedlock, losing that child, and then losing her own life from grieving the loss of that child. Female education and improvement inevitably revolve around procreational issues, pithily articulated in one of Lyndall’s invectives: “‘[a]nd then, when they [men who oppose female education] have no other argument against us, they say—‘Go on; but when you have made women what you wish, and her children inherit her culture, you will defeat yourself. Man will gradually become extinct from excess of intellect, the passions which replenish the race will die’” (194). Schreiner’s use of Lyndall as a rhetorical device in this instance clearly embodies the argument of the period for denying women education: if women pursue formal education, they can be sure to extinguish mankind as a consequence. Lyndall’s reaction to and her disdain for this popularly held Victorian sentiment would indicate that she disagrees with such an argument and believes those who hold such contentions responsible for the plight of female oppression.

However, Schreiner seems to find some validity to this argument herself, agreeing with its foundations in her treatise, Woman and Labour. There she seemingly argues for the necessary, though unfortunate, renunciation of motherhood for women who have chosen to educate themselves in an effort to avoid the “sex parasitism” she so vehemently castigates:
It is this consciousness which renders almost of solemn import the efforts of the individual female after physical or mental self-culture and expansion; this which fills with a loft enthusiasm the heart of the young girl, who, it may be, in some solitary farmhouse, in some distant wild of Africa or America, deep into the night bends over her books with the passion and fervor with which an early Christian may have bent over the pages of his Scriptures; feeling that, it may be, she fits herself by each increase of knowledge for she knows not what duties towards the world, in the years to come.

It is this consciousness of great impersonal ends, to be brought, even if slowly and imperceptibly, a little nearer by her action, which gives to many a woman strength for renunciation, when she puts from her the lower type of sexual relationship, even if bound up with all the external honor a legal marriage can confer, if it offers her only enervation and parasitism. This consciousness enables her often to accept poverty, toil, and sexual isolation (an isolation more terrible to her than to any male), and renunciation of motherhood, that crowning beatitude of the woman's existence, which, and which alone, fully compensates her for the organic sufferings of womanhood.

This passage is clearly meant to echo its fictional counterpart in *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall. In such a scenario, the educated girl who cloisters herself allegedly aspires to martyrdom, the kind of martyrdom that incorporates the mortification of the flesh so intimately tied to self-renunciation and, consequently, self-punishment. Lyndall’s indictment of society for its doomsday pronouncements on the fate of mankind once females become educated is offset by what seems to be Schreiner’s implicit agreement with Victorian contentions about female education.

Thus, Schreiner’s position on female education appears somewhat conflicted, and Kucich’s seemingly nonchalant remark that “Schreiner always directed her relentless, annihilating authorial intelligence against characters with whose deepest desires she clearly identified or against beliefs that she herself appears to have held” (88), gives Schreiner more conscious consistency than I am willing to concede, though it does support the assumption that she did punish her characters relentlessly. *African Farm* presents the reader with no
consolation for the woman who makes such concessions as described above in *Woman and Labour*. In fact, it demonstrates that female abstention is both impractical and unattainable. For the woman who attempts to subdue instinctual drives, to eschew “sex parasitism,” and to educate herself, there is no just compensation. The novel renders visible the more probable consequences of female education and its contingent martyrdom, consequences that do not affect the entire race but merely the woman who follows such pursuits.32

If education results in punishment, and if Lyndall is as aware of that connection as she professes to be in her monologues, then her desire for education is problematic in that it becomes masochistic. Her character’s inclination toward masochism is consistent with both the masochistic and sadistic behaviors she exhibits in the novel, her overtly masochistic behavior having elements of sadism intermingled in it. Freud provides a clear explanation for the workings of masochism and also the sadism contained within it: “what is involved [in masochism] is a need which is satisfied by punishment and suffering” (169). However, Freud contends that the masochist also be a sadist: “[i]t can hardly be an insignificant detail, then, that the sadism of the super-ego becomes for the most part glaringly conscious, whereas the masochistic trend of the ego remains as a rule concealed from the subject and has to be inferred from his behavior” (169). By implication, Freud acknowledges that the ego of the subject be the masochistic recipient of the super-ego’s sadism, and this is precisely what occurs in the case of Lyndall.

Even her purportedly sadistic behavior ultimately serves a masochistic end. In one of the earliest instances in the novel of Lyndall’s unequivocally pathological behavior, she purposely hurts her own dog, Doss, by kicking a rock at its foreleg while she is talking to Gregory Rose. When Gregory brings the injury to Lyndall’s attention, telling her she has
hurt the dog, Lyndall’s response lacks affect: “‘Have I?’ she replied indifferently and re-opened the book, as though to resume her study of the play” (230). This seemingly incidental and sadistic behavior toward a creature that is in complete submission to her is, however, actually an act of masochism when this passage is viewed in the larger context of the narrative. This attempt to demonstrate power over a weaker creature by administering pain and failing to register the injury she has inflicted functions as a message to Gregory Rose, who is by this time in the novel, clearly an interested pursuer of Lyndall, even though Lyndall has made apparent that she wants little to do with him. Lyndall’s act of hurting a weaker creature is deliberately performed for the benefit of drawing Gregory Rose in so that he may see what he can expect if, like Doss, he advances his pursuit of Lyndall. Lyndall is confident this strategy will work, evidenced in her response to Gregory’s query regarding how Lyndall views him and in his persistent need to obtain an answer to the question he poses to Lyndall: “And what do you think I am like?” Her response categorizes him as the masochist he is: “Like a little tin duck floating on a dish of water, that comes after a piece of bread stuck on a needle, and the more the needle pricks it the more it comes on” (231). Her assessment of him seems reasonable, given that he has professed his undying love to her and a need to efface his own identity in order to assist her: “I thought I loved before, but I know now! Do not be angry with me. I know you could never like me; but if I might but always be near you to serve you, I would be utterly, utterly happy. I would ask nothing in return! If you could only take everything I have and use it; I want nothing but to be of use to you” (231-2). Gregory’s willing submission to Lyndall’s every whim indeed seems masochistic.

Accurately assessed by Lyndall, Gregory’s willingness to destroy himself in her service works to her advantage. As a suitor and marriage partner, he would be of great
benefit in that he loves her and flatly professes a need to serve her in any way she deems fit—his feelings become abundantly apparent in the end of the novel as he tends her sickbed disguised in women’s clothes. In recognizing his suitability in being able to provide a stable home and legitimacy for her and her soon-to-be-born child, Lyndall unconventionally proposes marriage to him, the proposal including the terms under which she will agree to allow Gregory to serve her. Her terms employ the language of sadomasochism:

“Yes. You wish to serve me, and to have nothing in return!—you shall have your wish.” She held out her fingers for Doss to lick—“Do you see this dog? He licks my hand because I love him; and I allow him to. Where I do not love I do not allow it. I believe you love me; I too could love so, that to lie under the foot of the thing I love would be more heaven than to lie in the breast of another. . . . I may yet change my mind about marrying you before the time comes. It is very likely. Mark you!” she said, turning round on him; “I remember your words:—You will give everything, and expect nothing. The knowledge that you are serving me is to be your reward; and you will have that. You will serve me, and greatly. The reasons I have for marrying you I need not inform you of now; you will probably discover some of them before long. (232)

Such an agreement places Lyndall in the dominant position in this proposed relationship between Gregory and her, not in the masochistic scenario I would argue exists. If Gregory Rose agrees to serve her and ask her for nothing in return except the reward of serving Lyndall, then Lyndall assumes the dominant position in this relationship, forcing Gregory Rose into the submissive and subservient role. However, as indicated in her warning to Gregory, Lyndall consciously chooses to abandon the very plans that would ensure her own and her child’s safety and security. Marriage to Gregory Rose would afford her the safety from societal censure and the comforts convention would extend. It would also ensure the help she would require in raising the child she is carrying in addition to giving the child legitimacy and safety. She could also be sure that Gregory Rose would be a faithful partner.
in serving her, but she reneges on the plan she devises with Gregory, a conscious decision that conspires in her self-punishment. In refusing to wed Gregory Rose, she refuses the help such a marriage would confer on both her and her child, and she leaves herself open to the stigma of unwed motherhood.

Instead of choosing a relationship with Gregory in which she maintains a sense of autonomy and identity, ideals she professes to value, she further entangles herself in the relationship she has begun with her unborn child’s father, agreeing to flee the farm with him but refusing to marry him. Her relationship with her child’s father (a character never given a name and labeled only as “Lyndall’s Stranger”), like the hypothetical relationship with Gregory she devises, involves elements of sadomasochism; however, in this relationship, Lyndall functions in a more subordinate capacity, thus making her decision to break with Gregory masochistic in and of itself. Lyndall recognizes her submissive position in the relationship with her child’s father, ruminating on the nature of his feelings for her, again, in language suggesting unequal power relations. She professes that her love for him is based on a force he has over her that resides in his strength and in the fact that he is “the first man [she] ever was afraid of” (238). Her fear seems to emanate from what she deems in him an immature inability to love anything without purposely wounding it, as she states: “Your man’s love is a child’s love for butterflies. You will follow till you have the thing, and break it. If you have broken one wing, and the thing flies still, then you love it more than ever, and follow till you break both; then you are satisfied when it lies still on the ground” (238). This is her description of the man for whom she relinquishes her plan with Gregory. By her own admission, her stranger would break her, yet she flees with him instead of carrying out the
safer plan with Gregory. Her choices work against her own interests and perform a masochistic function in the text.

The punishment Lyndall receives for these choices is abundant. She bears her child alone as an unwed mother, sending its father, who initially accompanies her in fleeing the farm, away prior to giving birth. The child she bears lives only two short hours and nearly takes Lyndall to the grave with it. This event echoes the sentiments Lyndall has earlier railed against, cultural ideas used to thwart female education by prophesying its complicity in ending the human race. Lyndall buries the child near enough her lodgings that she may visit to grieve her loss in the days following the burial, days in which Lyndall seems to care even less for her own life than she has previously in the novel. In a move strikingly similar to one Victorian readers will reëncounter twelve years later in Hardy’s Jude the Obscure, Lyndall, moved by her grief, visits the child’s grave in the rain. Her compulsion to venture out in the weather in her weakened condition from the birth precipitates a more critical health condition that renders her bedridden, a condition from which she cannot recover. Thus, she receives her final punishment—a painful and protracted death. With Gregory Rose at her bedside, disguised in drag in order that Lyndall will allow him to nurse her without recognizing him, and under the supervision of a doctor, Lyndall begins her decline, though she seems either unaware of or in a state of denial about the gravity of her condition. The people caring for her withhold the seriousness of her condition from her by refusing to confront the situation plainly and inform her she is dying; likewise, Lyndall struggles to hide the amount of pain she is in from her caregivers, replying always that she is “better” to their queries about her state while squelching her winces.
Although the connection between Lyndall’s punishment and her education seems to have been obfuscated, Schreiner brings education back to the fore at the height of her death scene, thus connecting the two prominently for the reader who may have lost the point in the midst of the plot. Having no other choice, Lyndall’s doctor finally informs Lyndall she is dying. In a telling response, Lyndall suddenly seems to actively pursue life by making requests of Gregory Rose. First she asks for food, not the roaster cakes that seem to provide meager sustenance but eggs, toast, and meat. After receiving and valiantly attempting to eat the food he brings, she requests her clothes, announcing her intentions of getting out of bed and dressing herself the next day. Finally, after making what seem to be two life-sustaining and self-interested choices, she makes what the reader is clearly meant to interpret as the third and most important life-sustaining choice, requesting of Gregory Rose:

“Now open the shutter wide,” she said; “I am going to read.”
The old tone was again in the sweet voice. He obeyed her; and opened the shutter, and raised her up among the pillows.
“Now bring my books to me,” she said, motioning eagerly with her fingers, “the large book, and the reviews, and the plays; I want them all.”
He piled them round her on the bed; she drew them greedily closer, her eyes very bright, but her face as white as a mountain lily.
“Now the big one off the drawers. No, you need not help me to hold my book,’ she said; ‘I can hold it for myself.”
Gregory went back to his corner, and for a little time the restless turning over of leaves was to be heard.
“Will you open the window,” she said, almost querulously, “and throw this book out? It is so utterly foolish. I thought it was a valuable book; but the words are merely strung together, they make no sense. Yes—so!” She said with approval, seeing him fling it out into the street. “I must have been very foolish when I thought that book good.” (275-6)

Instead of reading the requested books, symbolic of the education Lyndall has actively pursued to her own detriment throughout the narrative, Lyndall significantly disposes of what
are arguably the bluntest instruments of her own destruction—the books, the education, and her pursuit of knowledge.

However, her palliative movement toward life comes too little, too late. The predominant Victorian arguments against educating women are borne out in Schreiner’s text, as echoed in her rhetoric through Lyndall’s prophetic pronouncements about the fate of educated women: “[y]our highly cultured women will not be lovable, will not love” (African Farm 195). Lyndall’s choices are those of such a woman. Educated, she is incapable of sustaining the requisite relational ties that would ensure her safety and security and spare her the punishment she endures at her own hands as a consequence of a society that offers her little alternative. As First and Scott note, “[t]he price she pays for her commitment to learning and rationality, to the development of her self, is her inability to accept or trust any loving feelings that others might have for her. In her mind they interfere with, distort or crush whatever chance of autonomy she feels she has” (105). The ideology she embraces as a consequence of her education makes it impossible for her to exist in a heterosexual pairing without the threat of losing her own identity, and, consequently, she bears her child illegitimately and without the help of the father. Again, Freud’s explanation for masochism seems to the point here when he holds cultural forces responsible for the work of the masochist: "The turning back of sadism against the self regularly occurs where a cultural suppression of the instincts holds back a large part of the subject's destructive instinctual components from being exercised in life. We may suppose that this portion of the destructive instinct which has retreated appears in the ego as an intensification of masochism" (170). In the Schreiner text, the destructive instincts become apparent; the female desire to become
educated and to have an identity threatens culture, therefore forcing the destructive instincts to manifest themselves through masochistic strategies.

According to John Noyes, “[w]hat the psychiatric profession has stubbornly regarded as a mental disorder [masochism] may in fact be an elaborate performance of the powerlessness of victims, which has its origins in social relations of power and whose aim is to neutralize or at least render tolerable the misuses of power” (17). If this is the case for masochism, and I am arguing it is (as an unconscious strategy the masochist practices in order to render cognitive dissonance endurable), it is hard to imagine that a strategy aimed at rendering tolerable the misuses of power could work in favor of liberating the powerless victim who practices such neutralization and/or toleration much less work toward the advancement of the entire group rendered powerless—that is, the female sex. Instead, masochism when pushed far enough does not turn the masochist into a saint, as Kucich suggests was Schreiner’s narrative aim. Lyndall’s “sacrifices” are not portrayed as such, and the scene in which she dies fails to translate into the martyrdom that Schreiner articulates in Woman and Labour and that Kucich picks up in his argument. As Lyndall is dying, she still searches for her identity, looking in a mirror while the narrator questions whether she has found what she has been searching for. This is a self-reflexive and introverted activity, one whose objective has not been turned outward to some higher or social purpose, as martyrdom traditionally is.

Schreiner’s own biography provides strong indication of her inclination towards masochism as noted by First and Scott. But perhaps her own painful experiences with education steered her to tie female education to the masochism toward which she seemed inclined. Unlike Grant Allen, George Gissing, or Ella Hepworth Dixon, Schreiner had no
access to formal education and came from a hugely different social class by virtue of both birth and geography. Although Fred and Theo, Olive’s older brothers, were sent back to England to attend Taunton College, a school for Wesleyan ministers’ sons, Olive and her sisters remained in Wittebergen, at that time a mission station that had limited resources (First and Scott 43). What early education Olive did receive came solely from her mother, a figure described as emotionally removed who beat Olive to inculcate lessons:

Olive was later to recall two great whippings in her childhood which she considered did her immense harm ‘and made me hate everything in the heavens above and in the earth beneath.’ One beating was administered on the occasion when she was swinging on a doorhandle of the Wittebergen house and said ‘Ach, how nice it is outside.’ Because ‘Ach’ was Dutch she was taken down the little passage into the bedroom where she was born, laid out on her mother’s knee, and given about fifty strokes with a bunch of quince rods tied together. ‘The bitter wild fierce agony in my heart was against God and man.’

(48)

By the time she was six, her older sister, Alice, took over her instruction, and by the age of 12, Olive got the closest thing to formal education she would ever receive: "Theo, who had returned to South Africa from his English education, taught in Grahamstown from 1866, and the following year he became headmaster of a school in Cradock. He then took in the three youngest children, Ettie, now seventeen, Olive, barely twelve, and Will, the youngest at ten" (First and Scott 49).

Olive studied under her brother for approximately three years before the family’s financial destitution forced her to find work governessing. Despite the poverty of the family, Olive aspired to go to college:

. . . there was always anxiety about money. This did not prevent her from dreaming about travelling to far places, and she wrote to Kate that Theo had promised to send her to America, if he got a very large diamond, to study ‘at one of the large colleges that they have there for ladies.’ It was the great wish
of her life, she continued, but she was determinedly—and rather formally—subdued. (First and Scott 68)

As a voracious reader in her teen years, she gained access through friends to medical journals and John Russell’s *History and Heroes of the Art of Medicine*, the reading of which inspired her desire to attend medical school. Not having the requisite classical education for such a pursuit, Olive applied to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh for a nurse training program, which she dropped after only three days. Attempting to pursue her initial goal and enroll in medical school, she had an uphill battle in compensating for the deficits in her education and spent the summer of 1881 learning Latin and algebra in order to take preliminary exams (First and Scott 111-14). Her attempts to self-educate were for naught; “[s]he had failed to stay the course in both nursing and medicine” (First and Scott 115). Unsurprisingly, First and Scott note that her novels consistently treat the same themes, one being “the difficulties of the self-educated” (84). Schreiner, like Thomas Hardy, was largely an auto-didact, and the self-doubt that accompanies such striving seems linked to educationally-related masochism in the fiction of auto-didact authors. It is, perhaps, for this reason, that education and punishment take the form of masochism in Schreiner’s texts, though not as forcefully as some *fin de siècle* New Fiction.

Although masochism is evident in Schreiner’s work, Schreiner tempers the masochism she deploys in *African Farm* by virtue of the behavior of her heroine. Although Schreiner is careful to illustrate the choices Lyndall makes as self-destructive and clearly against her own interests, Lyndall never once verbally requests punishment as the Hardy heroine does, even though she seems cognizant of the choices she makes as punishing. Additionally, Schreiner never lingers on the self-destructive choices or fetishizes Lyndall in
herit masochistic behavior the way an author like Hardy does. For this reason, Schreiner’s masochism, while clearly present in the text, is not presented as forcefully or as intricately as other authors, particularly when examined against the earlier text of Undine that incorporates more to linger over.

END NOTES

26 The vast majority of New Woman fiction begins toward the latter part of the 1880s and early 1890s. I am thinking here of Sarah Grand’s Heavenly Twins (1893), Mona Caird’s The Daughters of Danaus (1894), George Gissing’s The Odd Women (1893), et. al. Even the plethora of journal lampoons occurs closer to the turn of the decade. According to Carolyn Christensen Nelson, “[t]he New Woman fiction did not begin in 1894 when Sarah Grand first used the phrase. Olive Schreiner’s novel The Story of an African Farm (1883), with its unconventional heroine, is one of the first such novels” (xii). For a discussion on the inception of the genre, please see Nelson’s A New Woman Reader, pp. xii-xiv.

27 The basis of Kucich’s argument is that Schreiner uses “feminist masochism” as a purposeful strategy to establish a middle class in colonial South Africa, one that as closely as possible resembled British middle-class culture. He argues that she was aware of the potential political consequences of employing such a strategy and that she used it to impose not only class but a sense of nationalism as well. For a full discussion on Schreiner’s usage of “feminist masochism,” see John Kucich’s “Olive Schreiner, Masochism, and Omnipotence: Strategies of a Preoedipal Politics.”

28 I would like to clarify here that Michelle Massé does not argue that all marriage is a biased social contract that unfairly persecutes women but merely the kinds of marriages that get represented in Gothic fiction. For an illuminating discussion on the function of marriage in the Gothic Novel and its detrimental effects on female characters, see Michelle Massé’s In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic, pp. 20-29).

29 Ruth First notes that correspondence between Schreiner and Havelock Ellis clearly indicates Ellis’s conclusions that Schreiner had masochistic tendencies that manifested themselves in her relationships with the opposite sex: “Ellis acknowledged perfectly neutrally an element of masochism in her personality” (132). For further evidence of her masochistic proclivity, please see Arthur Calder-Marshall’s The Sage of Sex: A Life of Havelock Ellis, p. 91 and Yaffa Claire Drazin’s My Other Self: The Letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, 1884-1920.

30 This episode seems reminiscent of the Biblical fruit Eve sought in plucking the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The ensuing punishment banishes her and eventually Adam from Paradise, a punishment for pursuit of knowledge like the one Waldo receives from Blenkins.
It seems as though Kucich has participated in the same willful misreading of Waldo’s actions Bonaparte Blenkins has.

It is inconceivable that Schreiner would purposely contradict herself in such a way as to reinscribe the punishment for behavior she allegedly endorsed while trying to promote feminist causes and deliver females from the oppression they endured. Certainly, this does not advance the feminist cause.

Kucich argues that Lyndall’s desire to entangle herself with this stranger, to whom she is clearly subordinate, has her engaging in preoedipal fantasy. However, I fail to see how her consciousness of the danger she places herself in, as indicated in the previous quote from *Story of an African Farm*, implicates the search for primary processes that would suggest a preoedipal linking here.
CHAPTER 4


While Olive Schreiner’s punishment of the education the New Woman was demanding is readily identifiable in *The Story of an African Farm* and clearly drawn in masochistic terms in the text, Schreiner’s narrative technique in employing masochism differs immensely from the technique of other authors who punish their characters for education with unprecedented viciousness. Authors such as Thomas Hardy seem to linger narratively over the punishment heaped on their heroines who desire or receive education. Both Schreiner and Hardy portray the psychopathology of their respective heroines; however, Hardy eroticizes the masochist by drawing attention to the sexual characteristics of his New Woman heroines and pairing that sexuality with a mental instability, thus heightening the punishment of female characters who pursue education and subverting the feminism in the genre even more intensely than authors who strip their narratives, as Schreiner did in making the alterations to her subsequent draft of *Undine*, the draft which later became *African Farm*. Schreiner refrains from both fetishizing Lyndall in the way Hardy does Tess in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), and desexualizing Lyndall in the way Hardy does Sue in *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Like the absent Creator in *The Story of an African Farm* for whom the characters in the text unsuccessfully search, Schreiner neglects her protagonists narratively. In contrast, Hardy allows his paganism to overtake his texts, and lavishes painstaking attention on his characters, particularly in disciplining them through narrative masochism.
Hardy’s use of melodramatic tactics is instrumental in the accentuated care he uses in depicting such punishments. This chapter explores the means by which Hardy narratively punishes his characters in order to create the pathos he intends his audience to experience—specifically in relation to those characters that serve as what Mary Jacobus calls “arguments” (319). I suggest that the “argument” Hardy elicits for female education ultimately fails to stem the backlash against the New Woman due to Hardy’s ambivalence regarding his own educational background.

Many critics have noted Thomas Hardy’s sadistic and vengeful tendencies in his fiction toward punishing characters well beyond the scope of their crimes. Wayne Booth cites Hardy’s narrator in “The Three Strangers” as evidence that Hardy consciously employed punitive measures toward his characters in order to gain readerly sympathy. Hardy’s narrator comments on the sheep-stealer in the story: “But the intended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country-folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvelous coolness and daring . . . won their admiration. . . .” (Booth 196). Hardy creates a character with the ability to garner support from characters he transgresses against in the story through the extent of the punishment meted out to him at the hands of Hardy’s other characters. That punishment takes the form of melodrama and ultimately results in the advocacy of the fictive audience for this character. Such advocacy extends analogously to Hardy’s larger reading audience. The correlation between punishment in the narrative and audience sympathy is, thus, made metafictionally explicit by Hardy himself.

One of the primary means by which Hardy evokes pity is by punishing a character’s receipt of or desire for education in his novels. In some cases, education is actually
employed as the method of administering punishment, thus conflating the two. The thematic correlation between education and punishment seems most fully articulated in the female characters of his later novels, specifically those of Tess Durbeyfield in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. The “narrative punishment” these characters receive at the hands of their author is directly related to their education. The sense of injustice for educationally-related punishment jars the reader into a kind of allegiance with the oppressed character. When the punishment outweighs the transgression for which the character receives retribution, the audience feels the scales have been tipped against the character, frequently unjustly in Hardy novels: in an ideal world, no one would be punished for desiring or receiving an education, and those who are punished would merit sympathy. The natural reaction of the reading audience is, therefore, to identify with these characters. Hardy’s narrative strategy draws the reader into a kind of emotional alliance with the character. Booth discusses Hardy’s manipulation as a structuring of “emotional interest of the kind” in a dramatized injustice that implicitly calls for “a strong pull toward the restoration of justice or a tragic denouement” (196). In relation to the later novels that treat education, however, Hardy’s pull toward punitive technique and the tragic denouement seems to exceed the frequently opposing tendency to restore justice. This predisposition toward punishment and tragedy, in effect, provides a lens through which to study the cultural milieu surrounding female education and the role of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle* in the Hardy novel.

In *Tess* and *Jude*, the themes of education and punishment reach a crescendo. Sue and Tess receive education and are punished both psychologically and physically with an unprecedented fierceness. Education in these novels is a precondition for any kind of hope
for class mobility. Hardy uses it to demonstrate the plausibility of such a move by raising
reader expectations for his heroines. However, he dashes these hopes with the punishment he
administers, demonstrating the impossibility of transcending class boundaries, a move that
Hardy was clearly ambivalent about in his own life and one he could not consciously and
wholeheartedly endorse narratively in either of these two novels, quite possibly because he
felt his own education held him back from such a move. Hardy’s educational background
shares similarities with Olive Schreiner’s, although Schreiner seems to have had the benefit
of an English-trained governess early on, while Hardy received childhood instruction only
from his mother, who encouraged him to read but could not teach him to write because she
lacked the skill herself: “Jemima [Hardy’s mother] is said, like her mother, to have ‘read
omnivorously,’ but she seems not to have had any facility with a pen” (Michael Millgate 39).
His mother was responsible for his education until he reached the age of 8, when she sent
him to a National School in Bockhampton, only to pull him out the next year to travel to
Hatfield with her. In Hatfield, he attended a day school, but only until Christmas, when they
returned to Bockhampton. It was only at the age of 10 that Hardy began his formal schooling
in earnest at a British School kept by Isaac Glandfield Last. Last left the school 3 years later
to begin his own commercial school, taking Hardy with him.

At the age of 16, Hardy’s formal education was finished, and he was apprenticed to
John Hicks, a Dorchester architect at the behest of his mother. However, Hardy never
reconciled himself to leaving school. As Michael Millgate observes:

On 11 July 1856, shortly after leaving school, Hardy was articled for three
years to John Hicks, a Dorchester architect, to receive instruction ‘in
architectural drawing and surveying’—Jemima Hardy characteristically
persuading Hicks to knock down the standard premium of £100, payable in
mid-term, for £40 cash. She no doubt saw the step as a logical one for a boy
with a sound technical education, some connections in the building trade, and a capacity for social and economic advancement. Hardy allowed himself to be carried along by his mother's energetic scheming. He knew that Last had given him an unusually good grounding for a boy of his time, place, and class. But he also knew that his imperfect knowledge of Latin and almost total ignorance of Greek left him ill-prepared for that university admission which was essential to advancement of his private 'dream,' and that his future progress towards an adequate level of classical education must depend upon his own energy and perseverance. That process of self-education was to prove slow and painful, the hope of being admitted to study for the ministry was not fulfilled, and Hardy never quite lost the sense of inferiority and resentment stemming from the incompleteness of his schooling—especially as symbolized by the lack of a university degree—and from his bitter memories of the long hours of sterile private labour he had wearily invested and the social barriers he had had to confront. He never forgot, in particular, the humiliation of sitting in Stinsford Church at his mother's side in that early summer of 1856 while the Revd Mr Shirley preached against the presumption shown by one of Hardy's class in seeking to rise, through architecture, into the ranks of professional men. (53)

Hardy’s disappointment and public humiliation at his efforts to raise himself are borne out in his treatment of his female characters who attempt to better themselves through education. His own experiences, in addition to the cultural milieu from which he produced *Tess* and *Jude*, inform his rendering of their narrative punishment.

The characters of both Tess and Sue are indicative of the progressively worsening punishment trend for New Woman characters that appears toward the end of the century. Hardy employs education, like other New Woman novelists, to intensify this punishment. However, Hardy’s treatment of the educated woman, the means by which he punishes her, exceeds those of his predecessors. He creates these two characters, emphasizes their educational backgrounds, and punishes them equally severely but in radically divergent ways. Both Tess’s and Sue’s punishments take the form of masochism, and Hardy pushes this masochism to an extent that Schreiner, whose characters also displays masochistic
tendencies, never portrays. Hardy exaggerates his heroines’ pathological behavior to such a
degree that the melodrama augments their suffering. He additionally eroticizes Tess’s
masochism, a narrative technique not seen in the previous writers in this study.

**TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES**

Hardy ascribes Aristotelian principles of tragedy to Tess through his attempt to
elevate her from the rural working-class to the status of a middle-class, comely woman.
Tess’s class aspirations seem possible because Hardy endows her with the physical beauty
necessary to attract a good (moneyed and educated) husband, the only means by which a
nineteenth-century woman can truly rise in class, as Mary Wollstonecraft notes in the latter
part of the eighteenth century in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). Additionally,
Hardy creates viability for these class aspirations through Tess’s aptness as a pupil, thus
attributing characteristics of the New Woman to her. Tess falls outside the typical
parameters used to define the New Woman in that the New Woman was almost exclusively a
city and middle-class phenomenon. The typical New Woman character shuns marriage.
Although Tess resists Angel’s insistence on marriage, this resistance is not characterized by a
determination to hold steadfast to a set of principles that makes the New Woman more
worthy or too worthy for legal union, but more because she feels her unworthiness.
Notwithstanding these deviations from the typical delineation of New Women characters,
Tess can be considered a New Woman because her character is allied so closely with many
of the principles of the New Woman, quite possibly making her a rural equivalent. Tess
aspires to something higher, desiring to acquire a true vocation in becoming a teacher. She
considers birth control a necessity for women (or her own mother, at least), even though she
has no understanding of the means by which reproduction occurs. She notes the effects of
reproduction on lifestyle, ruminating on her parents’ need to adopt a Malthusian approach to population control. But most telling is the fact that she feels absolutely no compunction about refusing to marry the man who has fathered her child, thus thumbing her nose at moral conventions regarding marriage and family. As such, she functions as a variation of the urban feminist, and for this reason, I would like to discuss her in terms of a type of New Woman as Penny Boumelha does. Hardy creates Tess’s character within the cultural matrix producing the New Woman and therefore lends attributes of the New Woman to his character.

In order to examine how education plays a role in the intensification of punishment for Hardy’s New Women characters, it becomes necessary to look at the means by which he employs and underscores education in the novels. Hardy accomplishes this manipulation in Tess by introducing his audience to Tess in terms of her educational merit. Even before we know what she looks like, before we get a physical description of her—and Hardy has frequently been censured and critiqued for his overly-interested and fetishistic emphasis on her physicality—we are directed to her intellect and made aware that she has been attending school, thus receiving education. This same introduction refers to her language, specifically her regional dialect, which Hardy repeatedly relies on throughout the narrative to reflect the extent of her education, decreasing the intensity of her rural accent to indicate her increasing level of scholarship. His narrator asserts in the opening pages of the text that, “the dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school” (21). The distinction in her education frequently gets represented linguistically in her conversations with her parents and the narrative commentary accompanying these conversations. Tess has been educated “under an infinitely Revised Code” using “National teachings and Standard knowledge,” while her
mother operates under the guidance of a “fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads” (28). Hardy accentuates Tess’s “leading place in the village school” (40) by setting Tess’s language in direct opposition to her mother’s: “(Mrs. Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the sixth standard in the National school under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality)” (26). The use of dialect distinctly corresponds to the amount of education, as observed by Hardy’s narrator, who notes Tess’s passing of the Sixth Standard and her ability to choose at will the manner in which she will speak in any given scenario.

The juxtaposition of these two characters early in the novel, whose speech among other things differs so radically, provides a foundation for the instances in the second portion of the novel in which Tess’s education is again brought to the fore through her speech. The linguistic manifestations of Tess’s education resurface with her exposure to the influences of Angel Clare, the university-educated man from whom Tess first takes informal instruction and with whom Tess eventually falls in love and marries. Hardy’s narrator comments that Angel believes Tess to be “wonderfully well-informed,” while in the same sentence noting that she has acquired Angel’s language: “her natural quickness, and her admiration for him having led her to pick up his [Angel’s] vocabulary, his accent, and fragments of his knowledge” (177). The “fragments of knowledge” denote a kind of education. Later in the novel, after Tess’s tutelage has come to an abrupt halt and her marriage to Angel has failed miserably, the difference Angel has made in her education becomes apparent even to Alec, who questions where she has acquired such refined speech: “How is it that you speak so fluently now; who has taught you such good English” (302).
Language is not the only means by which Hardy turns his focus on education. In addition to dialect and usage Tess picks up as the novel progresses, Hardy also qualifies the different kinds of knowledge characters possess, seemingly privileging the official kind of scholarship Tess acquires over the kind of knowledge other less formally educated characters hold. Again, the scenes with Tess and her mother suggest such a privileging, when Hardy sets Tess’s schooling in opposition to Mrs. Durbeyfield’s reliance on superstition and folklore. The difference in the type of knowledge in these two female characters is clearly meant to emphasize Tess’s superiority. Tess’s approach to “knowing things” seems infinitely more logical and pragmatic when placed alongside her mother’s reversion to folklore and superstition, a practice which ultimately harms Tess by placing her in situations beyond her reasoning capacity and comprehension. Tess’s mother appears ridiculously childish in referring to “the Compleat Fortune-Teller” to predict Tess’s destiny, a book Mrs. Durbeyfield relinquishes to the outhouse for fear of indistinct and implausible repercussions (28). In scenes such as this, Hardy places formal education in dialectical opposition to superstition, pitting them against each other almost as forcefully as he pits Tess’s reluctance to go to Trantridge against her mother’s designs to the contrary.

Both Tess and the reader see the differences between mother and daughter, and Tess’s painful awareness of these differences leads to her heightened awareness of the irresponsibility of her parents:

[a]s Tess grew older, and began to see how matters stood, she felt quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them. Her mother’s intelligence was that of a happy child: Joan Durbeyfield was simply an additional one, and that not the eldest, to her own long family of waiters on Providence. (40-41)
This cognizance also makes Tess appear more deserving of sympathy because, despite it, she is still at the mercy of the irresponsible will of uneducated parents who are, consequently, less rational than she is. As a result she is frequently forced to assume positions of responsibility that clearly belong to parental figures. Such scenarios were not uncommon at the time Hardy sets his novel, and the assumption of such responsibilities frequently conflicted with female education during the period. As June Purvis observes:

[t]he experiences of one working-class girl shows [sic] some of the constraints of their lives. Hannah Mitchell, born in 1871 to poor farming parents in the Peak district of Derbyshire, enjoyed only a fortnight’s schooling. The journey to school was long and rough, and when winter arrived and Hannah and her sister fell ill, they were kept at home. Hannah never returned to school again, despite her deep desire to do so. She recounts how her mother resented the daughter’s wish to be a scholar. So Hannah was kept at home, doing a host of household chores until she became an apprentice seamstress. (79)

Tess consents to such chores in addition to farm-labor tasks of driving a cart to market when her father’s drinking incapacitates his ability to do it. She watches the children with more care than her mother, and she performs chores that her mother has purposely deferred so that Tess will have to do them. Distinguishing her education and making her painfully aware of the differences between herself and her parents, Hardy provides for the anagnorisis necessary for the tragic character’s fall.

Hardy uses the dichotomy he sets up between education and superstition, an antithesis that appears in other texts such as Schreiner’s African Farm between Sannie and Waldo. However, Hardy uses it to instill a sense of pity and awe for Tess’s character by presaging her victimhood in a subsequent chapter that almost negates the intellect he has given her in her previous interactions with her mother. After her meeting with Alec, Hardy specifically describes her as “steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions” when a thorn from one of
the roses Alec d’Urberville showers her with during her visit to Trantridge pricks her chin, an act symbolically foreshadowing her defloration (47). In this instance, Tess’s superstition is played up and her education played down in relation to Alec’s worldly cunning, making her prey to his machinations. Tess’s education is further downplayed when, after returning to Marlott raped and pregnant, she blames her defenselessness against Alec on her lack of knowledge. She, thus, directly implicates her mother in complicitly denying her that education and in being responsible for her rape: “‘Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me’” (87). Hardy manipulates Tess’s education in relation to other characters to directly influence the amount of sympathy he wants his reader to feel for Tess and links Tess’s later circumstances, the very circumstances that drive the tragic plot and the punishment in that plot, to her lack of education. In this way, Hardy establishes the correlation between education and punishment.

Although there are juxtapositions such as these early in the novel in which Tess’s education is minimized and presented as disadvantageous, Hardy subsequently places her in situations in which her education is markedly beneficial and provides her with opportunities she might not otherwise have, economic advantages that work through the romantic plot, in order to raise her again, to intensify the hope of her triumphing over her misfortune, and consequently to punish her even more severely. The frequency of these prospectively elevating situations for Tess reinforces the reader’s expectation of a positive outcome for her. The potentiality of her union with Angel would indisputably raise her in station, alleviating her need to perform the kind of physical labor we see her engaging in toward the middle of the novel at Flintcomb-Ash. In relation to the other dairymaids at Talbothays, Tess is clearly
the most educated, making her the obvious choice for Angel’s affections. Marian remarks that Tess is “best for’n [Angel]” because she is “more ladylike, and a better scholar than we, especially since he has taught ’ee so much” (195). Here Tess’s knowledge and learning capacity are added to the dialect and language she picks up from Angel to distinguish her from the other dairymaids. Of course, Tess’s physical beauty draws Angel’s attention, but her intellectual aptitude and potential as an educated equal make her a suitable prospective wife for him. In a telling passage, Angel remarks that her class status means less to him (but possibly more to society) than her education: “and this fact of your extraction may make an appreciable difference to its acceptance of you as my wife, after [emphasis mine] I have made you the well-read woman that I mean to make you” (190). Angel again emphasizes Tess’s education in arguing her worthiness to his parents: “she’ll be apt pupil enough, as you would say if you knew her” (166). However, Tess’s education has implications beyond making her well-read; in making her a suitable wife, her education will ultimately make her acceptable in “polite society.”

Paradoxically, the very education Tess possesses that distinguishes her from other characters who are represented as inferior causes Tess also to be punished repeatedly. Car Darch attacks Tess because Car is envious of Tess not only because of her standing with Alec, but also because Tess’s superiority differentiates her from the rest of the girls at Trantridge, as is indicated in Tess’s assessment of the group of girls as “whorage” and again by the difference in her language as a result of her education. Car’s dialect is almost
indistinguishable as English in comparison to Tess’s language. Hardy uses dialect and language here as an indication of educational levels as well as class status, placing Tess well above the others, a distinction that causes her to be mistreated by them. “’Ah—th’st think th’ beest everybody, dostn’t—because th’ beest first favorite with He just now! But stop a bit, my lady, stop a bit! I’m as good as two of such! Look here—here’s at ‘ee!’” (70). Michael Millgate notes Hardy’s fascination with dialect and its capacity to reflect social stature and class distinction—both tied intimately to education. He relates Hardy’s reflections on his own family members’ speech patterns:

[t]here were perceptible speech differences, too, at a time when the Dorset dialect was still a distinctive linguistic form, although Hardy’s observation that the dialect was “not spoken’ in his mother’s house, but only when necessary to cottagers, & by his father to his workmen”, rather slides over the fact that both his parents spoke with strong local accents—so much so that their father’s speech became, for Hardy and his elder sister, a shared source of affectionate humour, and their mother’s, in her old age, an occasion of amusement to outsiders. When Hardy told a friend in 1888 that he had heard the Dorset “Ich” (for “I”) just the previous Sunday, it was almost certainly from his father’s or his mother’s lips. The reality of such class and speech distinctions is vividly evoked in the pages of Under the Greenwood Tree, where there is a marked difference in the ways in which the Dewys conduct themselves towards their social equals (such as Mr. Peny and Uncle James) and towards those inferiors to whom, as loyal members of the choir, they are benevolently extending their hospitality. (26)

These differences in dialect are also manifest in Tess, demonstrating the class distinctions Millgate recognizes in Hardy’s earlier fiction.

In a more heavy-handed passage, Hardy unmistakably draws our attention to education and its role in punishing Tess. In sacrificing what she has refused to sacrifice throughout nearly the whole narrative, she succumbs to Alec’s proposition to prostitute herself in exchange for the education of her younger brothers and sisters. Alec’s argument is
punctuated by what he understands to be important to Tess: “Come to this cottage of mine. We’ll get up a regular colony of fowls, and your mother can attend to them excellently; and the children can go to school” (342). Prior to this passage in the novel, Tess has endured the most physically punishing circumstances rather than consent to become Alec’s mistress. However, the mention of education for her siblings finally coerces Tess into entertaining the terms he suggests. Tess willingly relinquishes her body to the ultimate punishment of being virtually raped again repeatedly for the opportunity to give her siblings the education she has been denied. Alec understands, as does the reader, what is important to Tess, placing his most convincing argument last in a line of reasoning designed to pressure her into submission. Hardy painstakingly emphasizes Tess’s interest in education and its importance in raising her class status. In his illustration of education concerns, he also demonstrates its potential in inciting punishment, thereby linking the two concepts intimately for the New Woman who pursues such goals.

**JUDE THE OBSCURE**

Unlike Tess, Sue Bridehead is recognizably and distinctly a New Woman. Hardy quotes in his Preface to the 1912 edition of *Jude the Obscure*, a German reviewer who describes Sue as just that:

. . . the woman of the feminist movement—the slight pale bachelor girl—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves as superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises.

(Hardy *Jude* Bantam ed. 7)

Penny Boumelha takes issue with this identification of Sue as a prototype of the New Woman, arguing that Hardy created Sue subsequent to a number of New Fiction novels,
some of which Hardy was surely aware. To further this line of thinking she argues that Sue lacks certain idiosyncratic features belonging to the New Woman: “Sue Bridehead, with all her hesitations, evasions and tentativeness, has none of this messianic sense of purpose which distinguishes her contemporaries, and in fact she consistently refuses to speak for women as a group, posing herself always as a special case” (137). Sue’s refusal to affiliate herself with any particular faction and her claim to special case status alienate her not only from any particular group of women, but also from the whole of her society in the novel and, not infrequently, from the reading audience as well. Her separatism often manifests itself in the form of a superiority, which lies not in Sue’s insistence on a “license to be loved on the premises” but in her resistance to that license, as the German reviewer observes.

This superiority, the quirks and deviations Boumelha refers to in her character, and her initial inability to assess the part she plays in her own demise are what render her sometimes less sympathetic than a character like Tess, who unremittingly denigrates herself, proclaiming her unworthiness with consistency throughout the text. Hardy never allows the audience to pass judgment on Tess; Tess always beats us to the punch. On the other hand, Sue often behaves irrationally and irresponsibly, blaming and punishing others for the ensuing results of her behavior while self-righteously pitying her own circumstances. In such scenes, Sue’s pity for herself obviates empathy elicited from an audience, thus making sympathy for her character more complex yet no less intense than the sympathy we feel for Tess. Hardy’s evocation of sympathy in Sue’s case stems more substantively from the clear portrayal of her as a woman whose neuroses make her incapable of consistency, constantly asserting herself and then retreating, never knowing exactly what her own mind is.
Eventually this neurosis develops into a kind of violence, masochism, that serves as punishment for her education.

Jane Wood discusses the kind of neuropathology seen in New Woman fiction, specifically neurasthenia, asserting that late nineteenth-century culture attributed this medical phenomenon predominantly to “the strains of modern life”: “Industrialization, urban expansion, the mechanization of the workplace, and the railways were variously or collectively blamed for producing the phenomenon of nervous exhaustion” (184). While these aspects of late nineteenth-century life were undoubtedly cofactors in the production of the neurasthenic, Wood largely neglects the role education, and the cultural backlash against it at the time, played in the creation of the psychopathology she discusses in the works of Gissing and Hardy. Education, particularly university education and its reasonable facsimile, figures largely in the development of neurobiological disease in the New Woman of the Hardy text. Implicit in this education is a class system. While Wood discusses the contribution of what she terms “refinement” to this malady, her use of the term signifies a kind of neurological hypervigilance, rather than the heightened intellect I am positing. Peter Logan’s discussion of the cluster of neuroses being studied at this time stresses the class-specificity involved in these maladies: "Nervous conditions thus became an index of wealth and of the breeding that produced delicate sensibility" (19). By extension, education is implicit in the wealth and breeding to which Logan refers. Sue’s education, part and parcel of her breeding and her ambiguous class status, is at the root of her “nervous condition.”

The extent of Sue’s education and intelligence is consistently commented on by all who have contact with her. Phillotson concedes Sue’s superior intellect and education, telling his friend Gillingham: “I can’t answer her arguments—she has read ten times as
much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds while mine smolders like brown paper. . . .

She is one too many for me” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 183). Like Phillotson, Jude also has difficulty contending with Sue, referring to her as a “refined creature,” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 271) and “quite a product of civilization” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 111). He charges her with being “very philosophical,” remarking that her use of the word “negation” is “profound talking” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 117). While much of Sue’s quickness may reside in an inherently agile mind, it is clear that her educational experiences contribute considerably to the reasoning faculties Jude and Phillotson discern.

The education Sue manages to obtain prior to the opening of the novel is extensive for a female character representing a working class fin de siècle woman. Essentially, it amounts to the university education of a middle-class man. Sue owes the benefit of her education to a life “entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them—one or two of them particularly—almost as one of their own sex” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 118). Sue’s reference here to one or two particular men alludes to the undergraduate in Christminster from whom she acquires a vicarious education before her abstemious nature allegedly kills him. He apparently has introduced her to elements of classical antiquity by lending her books she would not have access to under normal circumstances (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 118). We are led to believe that her interests in this area and her knowledge of the authors she familiarly quotes (Mill, Shelley, Swinburne, Gibbon, Arnold, et. al.) are fostered by him. She acknowledges the anomalous nature of her education:

“I have had advantages. I don’t know Latin and Greek, though I know the grammars of those tongues. But I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations, and other books too. I read Lemprière, Catullus, Martial,
Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible, and other such; and found that all interest in the unwholesome part of those books ended with its mystery.” (Hardy *Jude* Oxford ed. 118)

Sue has uncharacteristic access to, and is therefore able to read, portions of texts that have been excised from mainstream editions of works. Such knowledge is additionally indicated in her ability to direct Jude to *Cowper’s Apocryphal Gospel* when he asks her for such a recommendation (Hardy *Jude* Oxford ed. 161).

In addition to Sue’s admission of such advantages as access to formal education through informal instruction, she has also been a teacher for two years in London, a plan shared by Tess, though Tess is never fully able to complete it. Sue’s professional experience signifies that she has had actual training over and above the vicarious training she gets through her undergraduate acquaintance. Although Wendy Robinson’s account of teacher-pupil training schools in London indicates that girls who entered these institutions were woefully young and undereducated and left these establishments little better prepared than when they arrived, her description of the London Pupil Teacher Association (LPTA) Centers, developed and fostered by Sarah Jane Bannister, indicates that trainees who attended these centers were exposed to a number of academically and culturally enriching experiences, including lectures on art, music recitals, and book and play readings (135). The likelihood that Sue has had the benefit of such exposure during her tenure as a teacher in London seems probable considering her knowledge of the art of Lely and Reynolds. Additionally, Sue has passed the examination for a Queen’s Scholarship, suggesting she possesses superior scholarly aptitude. June Purvis substantiates the exclusivity of such an honor, noting that “a Queen's Scholarship was awarded only to a minority of very able pupil teachers. In 1863
only 542 pupil teachers and in 1867 as few as 224 were admitted to training colleges” (38). Unquestionably, Hardy means to distinguish Sue’s education as extensive.

Hardy punishes Sue, much as he punishes Tess, by consistently correlating her education with suffering. One of the most striking incidents in which Hardy pairs education with punishment occurs in the Melchester Normal School Sue attends in order to acquire certification to become a pupil-teacher to Phillotson. The descriptions of Sue’s misery under the severe constraints the school imposes underscore the punishing nature of education in the text. Sue is only able to receive visitors there under limited circumstances, effectually making the school a kind of prison. Sue’s body and comportment reflect this confinement: “all her bounding manner was gone; her curves of motion had become subdued lines. The screens and subtleties of convention had likewise disappeared. . . . Her hair, which formerly she had worn according to the custom of the day, was now twisted up tightly, and she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 105-6). This is the same kind of literal clipping and pruning we will see Tess perform on herself when she removes her eyebrows. In addition to Sue’s bearing reflecting the restrictions imposed on her, she, admitting to being ravenously hungry in her meeting with Jude, is not fed sufficiently at the school. Sue endures these hardships at the expense of her need to obtain necessary schooling to pursue a vocation.

Sue’s punishment at the training college is compounded when she returns to the institution after breaking evening curfew to visit with Jude. She is more severely punished, not only by being placed in solitary confinement, but also by being made an example of to her fellow classmates who are warned not to speak to her, a scene reminiscent of Jane Eyre’s experiences with Brocklehurst in Brontë’s novel. Even her classmates see Sue’s treatment as
harsh, regarding it as “punishment for the pleasure of being kissed by such a kindly-faced gentleman” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 112). However, this punishment would not occur outside the confines of the school, again suggesting that the persecution is related to her education.

In later passages, Sue is bereft of her reasoning faculty (an attribute owing to her exposure to education), this deficit expressing itself in the form of a hysteria that keeps her from displaying any kind of behavioral consistency. H.B. Donkin’s “‘Hysteria’, A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine” (1892) lists "exaggerated self-consciousness dependent on undue prominence of feelings uncontrolled by intellect" and “evidence of intellectual disturbance" (247) as hallmark signs of the disease, symptoms that Sue possesses in abundance. In parting with Jude at a train station and staunchly refusing him a passionate kiss, Sue quickly relents, returning to allow Jude the kiss she has prohibited just moments before. Later, on the train ride back to Shaston, she evades culpability for the kiss, blaming Jude for what is unmistakably her own weakness:

[m]eanwhile Sue, after parting from him earlier in the day, had gone along to the station, with tears in her eyes for having run back and let him kiss her. Jude ought not to have pretended that he was not a lover, and made her give way to an impulse to act unconventionally, if not wrongly. She was inclined to call it the latter; for Sue’s logic was extraordinarily compounded, and seemed to maintain that before a thing was done it might be right to do, but that being done it became wrong; or, in other words, that things which were right in theory were wrong in practice. (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 173-4)

The vacillation here is indicative of Sue’s inability to reason through her emotional misgivings and Hardy’s attempt to portray the New Woman as hopelessly conflicted, not able to put the education she receives to adequate use. Her intellectual overanalysis actually
produces her emotional disturbance here. She is “contradictory to the point of schizophrenia” as Martin Wilson has noted (90).

Frequent debates at the end of the century focus on the propriety of an intellectual/university program education for females, specifically arguing that the kind of education befitting a woman was one in which her maternal functions were not jeopardized. Henry Maudsley’s “Sex in Mind and Education” (1874) argues that educating women in the same manner as men impairs female reproductive functionality, and, in turn, this impairment causes a breakdown of the mental faculties as well:

> meanwhile, the consequences of an imperfectly developed reproductive system are not sexual only; they are also mental. Intellectually and morally there is a deficiency, or at any rate a modification answering to the physical deficiency; in mind, as in body, the individual fails to reach the ideal of a complete and perfect womanhood. (46)

This imperfection renders itself evident in Sue’s character in her inability to sustain any kind of moral or intellectual conviction throughout the text from beginning to end, itself a kind of punishment based on the hysteria of Maudsley’s argument to which Hardy gives fictional embodiment.

Punishment of the New Woman for desiring or receiving education in the Hardy novel becomes problematic given that the titular male character in *Jude the Obscure* is himself desirous of education and unquestionably punished for this desire. However, Hardy treats Jude as a variant of the New Woman in the text by virtue of his working-class status and by frequently feminizing him and having him engage in a kind of sexual role reversal with both Sue and Arabella, just as Schreiner feminizes Waldo in *African Farm*, having him participate in a similar role reversal with Lyndall. In these gender inversions in Hardy’s
Jude, the female characters become masculinized in relation to Jude’s feminization. Arabella’s interactions with Jude frequently position her as the dominant and assertive partner, typified in her first meeting with Jude in which she possesses the phallus in the form of the “characteristic part of a barrow-pig,” a missile she launches at Jude in a move suggesting he assume an air of masculinity he does not appear to possess at the moment. A similar kind of sexual role reversal occurs in Jude’s interactions with Sue. Sue escapes from the training school in Melchester to take refuge in Jude’s lodgings where she dresses in male clothing professing her atrophied female sexuality, with Hardy’s narrator describing her as “boyish as a Ganymedes [sic]” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 123). Jude serves as a kind of nursemaid to Sue, comforting her in her anguish, hanging and drying her clothes by the fire, and feeding her. Ellen Sprechman notes this inversion in the major novels of Thomas Hardy, asserting that Hardy’s deëmphasizing of the heroes of his works and his accentuation of the heroines moves the female characters into the traditionally heroic roles and subverts the importance of the male characters (7-12).

While Jude is not a New Woman per se, his function as a variation allows Hardy to punish Jude for his desire in much the same way he punishes his female characters who pursue education. In a walk just prior to his introduction to Arabella, the event that alters Jude’s fate irrevocably, he reflects on how far he has come in his studies, convincing himself that he has “acquired quite an average student’s power to read the common ancient classics, Latin in particular” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 31). As he plans a move to Christminster and envisions his meteoric rise to Doctor of Divinity, he is smacked in the face with the missile Arabella uses to attract his attention. While actual contact with the missile does not physically injure Jude, it is the catalyst for the long series of tortuous events that constitute
his unhappy marriage to her, a punishment that ends in the slaughter of a pig, graphically-detailed and bloody, that afflicts Jude as fiercely as the animal because of his sympathy for weaker creatures. One could argue that Jude only need think of education to receive almost immediate retribution. Later in the text, Jude’s gravitation toward Christminster, the metonymic device Hardy uses to stand in for education in the novel, becomes a fatal attraction, causing Jude to attempt to relocate his family there once more. The move proves deleterious to the anonymity of his ambiguous marital status and eventually leads to the death of his children and the loss of Sue.

Punishment in relation to education for Jude is abundant in the text, but the letter Jude receives from T. Tetuphenay is probably the most damning of all because it makes him painfully aware that his aspirations toward education are in vain. The missive is meant to quash any further pursuit of education that still resides in Jude:

"BIBLIOLL COLLEGE
Sir,--I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. Yours faithfully,
T. Tetuphenay."
(Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 95)

The letter is described as a “hard slap” and drives him to drink and humiliate himself in a local tavern (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 96). In an editorial footnote to the text, Norman Page explains that the sender’s name—Tetuphenay—is meant to evoke corporal punishment: “[i]t has been suggested that Tetuphenay (whose name is based on a Greek verb meaning ‘to have struck’) was modeled on Benjamin Jowett, famous classical scholar and master of Balliol College, Oxford. It has also been claimed that the letter received by Jude is a transcript of a
letter sent to the young Hardy by Jowett” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 95 n7). Hardy ends this passage with Jude quoting from one of the most severely tried and punished figures in all of literature: Job. Ultimately, Jude is not allowed to desire education without the accompanying punishment. However, unlike Hardy’s female characters who are punished, he is at least able to articulate his desire to become educated, while the female characters must stifle their aspirations as well as suffer the punishment that is coupled with education. As Hardy’s aptly nuanced epigraph suggests, for Jude “the letter killeth” literally.

MASOCHISM

Like other New Woman novelists, Hardy means to punish his characters who desire education, but the punishment in the Hardy text reaches a level of intensity not seen in prior novels due not only to his incorporation of elements of masochism in this punishment, but also to having the female characters actually choose and occasionally verbally request this retribution. The infliction of bodily pain on Tess seems premeditatedly vicious, indicated a priori in the name Hardy chooses for her. Derived from “Teresa,” the shorter form “Tess” harkens back to St. Teresa of Avila, who punished herself bodily through self-flagellation, the nature of the self-inflicted punishment Teresa administers being a form of masochism. In an ironic passage, Alec preaches this kind of self-abasement to Tess: “‘[i]f you could only know, Tess, the pleasure of having a good slap at yourself, I am sure—’” (300). Tess stops Alec because she has all but mastered the masochism he is advocating. In an earlier passage, crying for the husband she has alienated, she kisses the wind in the direction he now resides. This event occurs, not coincidentally, at one of the most physically punishing settings in the novel, the Swede Farm (281), and after Angel has repeatedly rejected her as his wife actively through abandonment and passively through neglect. Although Tess administers her own
self-willed torture, she also enlists the help of others in this pursuit, indicated in articulated requests to be punished. In a later scene after losing her temper with Alec she orders him: “‘Now punish me!’ she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow’s gaze before its captor twists its neck. ‘Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick. I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim: that’s the law’” (321).

While Tess affirms her desire to be punished, her language in this passage would indicate more of an indictment of a Hardyesque “Nature” that works somnambulantly given the sarcastic tone she uses and her fatalistic expectation of the inevitability of the fulfillment of such a request. If this were an isolated scene, Tess’s potential sarcasm could be easily dismissed. However, it follows what are distinctly two of the most disturbing events in the novel, one in which Tess mutilates herself by removing her eyebrows, and another in which she euthanizes a flock of dying pheasants by twisting their necks. This is the same image Hardy’s narrator uses to describe Tess’s position in her interaction with Alec. Ironically, as Tess puts the birds out of their misery, she minimizes her own despair in comparison to that of the birds based on the fact that she is “not mangled.” Yet it is in the very next passage, when she reaches Flintcomb-Ash, that she actually does disfigure herself by cutting off her eyebrows (272), a self-inflicted and maiming punishment. The gauntlet she issues Alec in conjunction with the previous pheasant passage would seem almost to minimize any potential sarcasm and increase the viability of an interpretation for a kind of suicidal ideation, or at least a death-wish. Her depilation seems reminiscent of the kind of psychopathology associated with trichotillomania (273).
Hardy’s intent to punish Sue, like Tess, is also given expression through self-punishment and masochism. Sue’s psychopathology, her hysteria, is apparent early on in the text and this hysteria is episodically exhibited in mild forms of self-punishment. Sue’s existence as a “cluster of nerves” frequently causes her to attempt to punish others illogically; however, as Hardy’s narrator points out, her punishment of others ultimately ends in her own suffering. In asking Jude to give her away at the altar to Phillotson, she assumes the role of tormentor to Jude, but she also essentially wills her own unhappiness in the process: “... was Sue simply so perverse that she willfully gave herself and him pain for the odd and mournful luxury of practicing long-suffering in her own person, and of being touched with tender pity for him at having made him practice it” (Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 140). The effect of this passage seems to be that of an internal dialogue between the narrator and Jude in which Jude questions the logic, and consequently the mental soundness, of Sue’s motives. This perverse and purblind punishment resurfaces when Sue, again intent on punishing Jude for the improper kiss at the train station, determines not to write him in order to cause him suffering:

“I have been too weak, I think!” she jerked out as she pranced on, shaking down tear-drops now and then. “It [the kiss] was a burning, like a lover’s—O it was! And I won’t write to him any more, or at least for a long time, to impress him with my dignity! And I hope it will hurt him very much—expecting a letter to-morrow morning, and the next, and the next, and no letter coming. He’ll suffer then with suspense—won’t he, that’s all!—and I am very glad of it!”—Tears of pity for Jude’s approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself.

(Hardy Jude Oxford ed. 174)

Although Sue consciously seems to want to punish Jude, she reflexively punishes herself in the process. Jude eventually brings this oxymoronic behavior to Sue’s attention in summarizing her motives for marrying Phillotson: “’You simply mean that you flirted
outrageously with him, poor old chap, and then repented, and to make reparation, married him, though you tortured yourself by doing it” (Hardy *Jude* Oxford ed. 193).

Hardy amplifies Sue’s propensity for punishing herself as the narrative progresses. Her drastic attempts to escape potential punishment leave her vulnerable to yet more punishment. Locking herself in a closet underneath stairs with the inhabitant spiders to avoid intimacy with Phillotson seems on the surface to be a kind of protection as does her escape through a window in which she risks bodily injury to evade what she believes to be Phillotson’s advances. Yet there is punishment in the avoidance. Although Sue seems to be unaware of her propensity for self-injury early on in the narrative, she comes to realize the extent of her pathological behavior after her marriage to Phillotson when she admits to Jude that being with her husband is torture for “her own wickedness”: “What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes . . . I wish he would beat me, or be faithless to me, or do some open thing that I could talk about as justification for feeling as I do” (Hardy *Jude* Oxford ed. 169). This confession prefigures the full-scale masochism she eventually develops by the close of the novel.

Sue’s misdirected punishment and susceptibility toward masochistic behavior are more fully developed than Tess’s. Although Sue is frequently described as a “disembodied spirit” or an “ethereal being,” she does, in fact, have a body. At the loss of her children, she begins to use it to chasten herself for her alleged offenses. Although Hardy has given Tess a namesake that implicates self-flagellation, it is Sue who actually mortifies her flesh, lying prostrate on the floor of St. Silas’s and preaching the annihilation of self: “Self-renunciation—that’s everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that’s in me” (273). Although Sue’s
desire to bleed herself is never fully realized, the mortification of her flesh is complete when she returns to Phillotson to fulfill her contractual obligation to him as a wife. In her return, she is conscious of the punishment she faces, a punishment she believes she deserves and one that demands penance: “But I am going to make my conscience right on my duty to Richard—by doing a penance—the ultimate thing. I must! . . . It is my duty. I will drink my cup to the dregs” (313). This “atonement” aptly gets described by the Widow Edlin as “a punishment to her poor self” (317). In returning to the husband who disgusts her, Sue returns to a “fanatic prostitution” (286). Much like Tess, Sue concedes to virtual rape.

Both heroines in *Tess* and *Jude* display characteristics of masochistic behavior along with other psychopathologies of neurosis, neurasthenia, and hysteria, particularly in Sue’s case. It is no coincidence that such mental conditions appear in the texts in which female education occurs. *Fin de siècle* writers were familiar with contemporary debates on the subject of female education and the purported detrimental effects such education could allegedly incur, as Henry Maudsley hypothesized in 1874, when he postulated the nervous conditions that arose as a consequence of attempts to educate the female of the species:

> [f]or a time all seems to go well with her studies; she triumphs over male and female competitors, gains the front rank, and is stimulated to continued exertions in order to hold it. But in the long run nature, which cannot be ignored or defied with impunity, asserts its power; excessive losses occur; health fails, she becomes victim of aches and pains, is unable to go on with her work, and compelled to seek medical advice. Restored to health by rest from work, a holiday at the sea-side, and suitable treatment, she goes back to her studies, to begin again the same course of unheeding work, until she has completed the curriculum, and leaves college a good scholar but a delicate and ailing woman, whose future life is one of more or less suffering. For she does not easily regain the vital energy which was recklessly sacrificed in the acquirement of learning; the special functions which have relation to her future offices as woman, and the full and perfect accomplishment of which is essential to sexual completeness, have been deranged at a critical time; if she is subsequently married, she is unfit for the best discharge of maternal
functions, and is apt to suffer from a variety of troublesome and serious disorders in connection with them. In some cases the brain and the nervous system testify to the exhaustive effects of undue labour, nervous and even mental disorders declaring themselves. (42-3)

Allegedly, as women attempted to educate themselves, the strains of doing so would exhaust them physically and mentally. Even if they could rally for a period, the damage would eventually recur, manifesting as psychiatric illness, and, more importantly, unfit motherhood.

According to Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, those who attempted to theorize sexuality and its repercussions—and I would argue that Maudsley certainly participated in such attempts—understood the marginality of their discourse and endeavored to legitimate it by catering to groups who would use the theories for policy-making (291). However limited these groups may have been, Ledger and Luckhurst attest that these beliefs permeated Victorian culture and became influential nonetheless:

[O]n the other hand, the new beings in these accounts (nymphomaniac, masochist, invert) were incredibly influential as models well into the twentieth century, acting well beyond the tiny minority that might actually have been able to read these works. The accounts of ‘perversity’ they offer can be transparently normative and moralistic against any form of activity outside heterosexual, procreative marriage. (290)

As I have asserted in Chapter 1 and repeatedly elsewhere in this study, female education was an antithetical pursuit to marriage and procreative activities. The representation of an educated woman who displayed the nervous and mental disorders Hardy characterizes in Tess and Jude can be clearly attributed to such a character’s education as Hardy most certainly linked the two.

Maudsley was not the only physician in the psychiatric profession to weigh in on the subject of the deleterious effects education posed for women. Again female education was
indicted as a cofactor in psychiatric maladies in 1892 by Gustave Bouchereau, who attributed female sexual dysfunction to experiences of early childhood education:

[op]n the one hand, a pathological predisposition, wisely restricted, may even be turned to the benefit and preservation of the species whilst on the other hand, if not moderated, it terminates in the premature extinction of the individual, or in the degeneration of the race. The final result often depends on accidental causes: the woman, as a child or an adult very easily receives impressions from her environment; she unconsciously receives the motive of her actions from her reading, from pictures, statuary, plays or daily scenes. (294)

If women were this easily impressionable—and clearly Sue is portrayed as impressionable in passages where she covers statuary that disturbs her—then inundating females with impressions by educating them formally would surely lead to the pathological predispositions to which Bouchereau alludes. These ruminations on female education were part of the zeitgeist that pervaded the fiction of the period in which Hardy and his contemporaries wrote.

In passages that involve masochism in both Tess and Jude, the actions of the female characters take on an exaggerated significance and intensity—a building of tension. The essence of melodrama has, at its core, this element of exaggeration, whether manifested in behavior, gesture, emotion, or plotted event. Elaine Hadley discusses the correlation between melodrama and psychopathology, arguing that George Meredith “expropriates melodrama” (206). In Diana of the Crossways, he “pathologizes the melodramatic mode, turning it into a psychic disturbance in need of a cure. As a psychic disturbance, the melodramatic mode becomes the gendered figure of difference—a hysterical ‘illness’ or ‘delusion’” (206).41 If, as Hadley argues, Meredith turns melodrama into psychopathology, then I would argue that Hardy conversely metamorphoses psychopathology into melodrama. Hardy’s attempts to incorporate melodrama in his texts, both in Tess and Jude, result in the progressive
exaggeration of the female character’s psychological illness. Hardy uses both Tess’s and Sue’s masochism as a psychological extreme. Like Meredith, he turns melodrama into a workable narrative strategy that ultimately evokes readerly sympathy for the sufferings of psychiatric illness.

The use of melodrama in enhancing the masochism and suffering in Hardy’s narratives constitutes a deliberate and cultivated technique Hardy exploited. Penny Boumelha notes that an author’s choice of narrative technique had the potential to augment the political dimensions of New Woman fiction:

[t]he characteristic narrative voice of the realist novel, that of the omniscient commentator who circumscribes and thus ironises the consciousness of the hero, is disturbed by the appearance of other kinds of voice which throw into question this distance between author and character. The ‘New Woman’ novel was often perceived as a work of propaganda or a disguised tract for precisely this reason: not because its ideological project is any more visible or determining than in other kinds of fiction, but because of the sporadic punctuation of the narrative by meditation, harangue or lyric, by an informing commitment which constantly threatens the circumscribing narrative voice. (66)

Thomas Hardy’s intrusive narrator displays characteristics of such narrative technique, lingering over and exaggerating the sufferings of the characters, and thus employing melodramatic tactics in order to enhance the masochism in which his characters engage. His description of Sue’s actions after the loss of her children has Sue vowing she will follow the children to their graves. At the cemetery, she jumps into the grave with the children:

[t]he idlers who had followed to the spot by reason of the tragedy were all gone now. A man with a shovel in his hands was attempting to earth in the common grave of the three children, but his arm was held back by an expostulating woman who stood in the half-filled hole. It was Sue, whose coloured clothing, which she had never thought of changing for the mourning he had bought, suggested to the eye a deeper grief than the conventional garb of bereavement could express. (Jude 269)
Sue’s grief over the loss of her children is exaggerated beyond the usual depictions of bereavement. The narrator’s indication that she has lost all sense of propriety dramatizes the event in such an exaggerated way as to suggest Sue’s mental breakdown. Her subsequent requests to the gravedigger to be allowed to get into the coffins with her children push her breakdown even further. The melodrama involved in such a scene augments the masochistic wish she entertains. Hardy’s technique here emphasizes the psychological suffering through melodrama and forecasts Sue’s fully developed masochistic tendencies yet to come in the narrative.

If Hardy’s narrator in *Jude* augments Sue’s psychopathology through melodrama, his narrator in *Tess* not only uses the same melodramatic tactics to emphasize Tess’s suffering, he also eroticizes the masochism by fetishizing Tess. His description of Tess’s thoughts prior to mutilating herself exemplifies this technique:

> [s]he thought of her husband in some vague warm clime on the other side of the globe, while she was here in the cold. Was there another such a wretched being as she in the world, Tess asked herself; and thinking of her wasted life said “All is vanity.” She repeated the words mechanically, till she reflected that this was a most inadequate thought for modern days. Solomon had thought as far as that more than two thousand years ago: she herself, though not in the van of thinkers, had got much further. If all were only vanity who would mind it? All was, alas, worse than vanity—inequality, punishment, exaction, death. The wife of Angel Clare put her hand to her brow, and felt its curve, and the edges of her eye-sockets perceptible under the soft skin, and thought as she did so that a time would come when that bone would be bare. “I wish it were now,” she said. (270)

Hardy’s narrator focuses on specific areas of Tess’s body here, describing her soft skin and the curve of her brow in voluptuous terms at the moment Tess determines she will engage in
self-mutilation. In essence, Hardy eroticizes Tess’s masochism in this passage, while at the same time using melodrama in Tess’s internal dialogue.

While Hardy’s intent to punish his female characters through and for education seems overwhelmingly clear, his motives for employing such a narrative strategy seem more opaque. Tess’s misfortune comes about largely because she is undereducated at a critical juncture in her life. In this instance, Hardy seems to be arguing for female education, making Tess suffer as a consequence and using that suffering to evoke a cathartic response. However, Hardy punishes Sue for being hyper-educated. It would seem Hardy’s message here is that not only education but the desire for it is a punishable offence for females. Inherent in this assumption that Hardy is arguing for or against any particular cause, as Jacobus contends, is the implication that through “arguments,” Hardy could enact reform. However, there is little evidence in the extensive narrative commentary throughout either of these texts that Hardy believed in the possibility of reform. Such forces as “The President of the Immortals” and “the gins and springes” that work upon his characters negate the agency required to ameliorate the conditions Hardy explicitly indicts. Hardy’s paganism, in stark contrast to Schreiner’s potential atheism, leaves his characters at the mercy of warring factions. An ostensible paradox lies, then, in the coexistence of his drive to author seemingly reformist texts and his underlying skepticism that raising consciousness concerning such issues would evoke change.

The cultural backlash against the New Woman figures largely in the chasm between Hardy’s ideologies and his fictional embodiments. Hardy wants his audience to feel for his characters, evidenced in the severity of the punishment he administers. However, this same narrative technique that draws readerly sympathy also demonstrates the consequences the
New Woman can expect in failing to conform to the norms of Victorian society; her end is inevitably tragic, and tragic to the extreme of bodily and psychic punishment. Thus Hardy’s novels lose their subversive potential, cancelling any “argument” he may (or may not) be advancing. Instead, the texts serve more as conduct manuals. Hardy’s narratives have the feel and flavor of subversion, but they ultimately reinforce the very social mores against which his narrators level charges. Victorian readers reacted violently toward these texts, characterizing them as immoral. Sally Ledger has rightly pointed out that "[t]he perceived threat to marriage was exacerbated by the appearance in 1895 of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, notably for Sue Bridehead's vehement opposition to legal marriage, and of Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, whose heroine similarly refuses the legal tie between man and woman" (*The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* 12). Ledger also acknowledges the moral fervor the publication of *Tess* generated for its challenge to sexual ideology of Victorian society (*The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* 113).

But in ignoring the portrayal of education, these contemporary critics missed the very didacticism inherent in the narrative, and I would argue that the masochism, intensified by the narrative technique of melodrama Hardy employs, aids the cause of containing female education thus fundamentally reinscribing the oppressive trend of denying females education. The education of women, because it changed the landscape for marriage and vocation for them, destabilized not only marriage, but also the class and gender hierarchies that had served as the bedrock of Victorian culture for the greater part of the high and late Victorian Period. Depicting the failure of that education in New Woman texts, therefore, worked in conjunction with the backlash against the New Woman and New Woman fiction to contain the overthrow of these hierarchies. Such renderings of the New Women in Hardy’s texts
reflect Hardy’s conflicted sentiments toward education and his efforts to self-educate. Pierre Bourdieu discusses “the insecurity which haunts self-made men” (330), an insecurity that manifests itself in the way in which such a man treats his objects, particularly women. Hardy confers his own anxieties regarding class and auto-didacticism to his female and feminized characters, thereby punishing them and thwarting the subversive potential of his novels.

END NOTES

34 While Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead are female characters who endure punishment in these novels based on their education, Jude Fawley in Jude the Obscure also endures similar punishment. Although Jude is male, I will argue later in this chapter that Jude functions as a type of New Woman character in his capacity as a feminized male.

35 Michael Millgate refers to Hardy’s ambivalence about his own class status surfacing in plots of his earlier novels that closely resonate with biographical elements of his own life as “tonal uncertainty” (136). However, this phenomenon occurs as readily and forcefully in the later novels that include biographical parallels to Hardy’s life.

36 I am indebted to Michael Millgate, from whom I have gleaned Hardy’s educational background. For a more extensive discussion of Hardy’s childhood education, please see his Thomas Hardy: A Biography, pp. 17-53.

37 Penny Boumelha also treats Tess as part of the “New Fiction,” arguing that “novels dealing with sex and the New Woman were already no longer a novelty” (119).

38 It is interesting to note that Hardy also manipulates his audience by making Tess just old enough to have reached “the age of consent” according to new statutes that were passed just 5 years before the publication of Tess.

39 For a compelling and insightful argument of Tess’s prospective class mobility and the way in which Hardy hypothesizes such a move for Tess, please see Elsie Michie’s “Dressing Up: Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Oliphant’s Phoebe Junior.”

40 According to Michael Millgate, the name of Tess was decided on in the few weeks prior to publication. Before that time, Hardy had intended her name to be Sue. See Millgate’s Thomas Hardy: A Biography, p. 295.

41 Hadley’s study looks at the pathologization of melodrama in George Meredith’s Diana of the Crossways. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Caroline Norton used melodrama as a widely accepted form of reformist political polemic; however, Meredith’s use of Norton as a
source for Diana’s character transforms Norton’s once acceptable strategy into psychopathological behavior in Meredith’s fiction. See Hadley’s *Melodramatic Tactics*, p. 206.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION
THE NEW WOMAN, THE SCAFFOLD, AND THE CLASSROOM

Anti-woman and anti-feminist sentiment has been ever present in British history. Part
and parcel of such negative attitudes is the punishment the New Woman received in the
English novel at the end of the nineteenth century. Particularly conspicuous in the literature
of the fin de siècle is the punishment the New Woman figure received with respect to the
education she was either lacking or seeking. Such a phenomenon appears in the fiction of the
late nineteenth-century as a direct response to the limited access women had to education
outside the confines of the fictional text. Although formal, public education flourished for
men in the Victorian period, education for women was much more limited. Females did not
begin to gain parity in education with men until the latter part of the century, and as these
educational opportunities began to present themselves for women, the punishment
represented in the novels this dissertation has explored concurrently intensified almost
simultaneously as a response to those opportunities.

This reactionary response to the opening up of female education occurred because of
the threat the educated female presented to Victorian culture. The New Woman seeking
formal education had the potential to transgress established gender roles, proscriptions that
upheld structures in Victorian society promoting a heterosexual agenda that included
marriage, a cult of domesticity, and reproductive mandates. If women became educated, they
could then unyoke themselves from the bonds of marriage, perhaps support themselves
financially without the aid of a husband, and, thus, destroy the sexual contract implicit in
those bonds. The backlash in fiction against the educated woman or the woman seeking
education has at its core, always, the regulation of female sexuality to achieve these cultural
imperatives. Therefore, in order to curb the possibility that such imperatives may be
subverted, a backlash against the female who desired or received education was represented
in the New Woman novel, a move that depicted the punishment the educated woman could
expect if she pursued such aspirations as education.

The punishment the fictional New Woman received with respect to education was
represented in a variety of ways, ranging from depression and melancholy to physical
maladies and death. However, one of the most severe types of punishment an author might
choose took the form of narrative masochism. This study has argued that authors who
punished their characters with such severity were byproducts of a punishing educational
foundation themselves, frequently becoming auto-didacts to make up for the deficits in what
their educations initially promised to provide as Pierre Bourdieu argues. Thus the education
authors received had the possibility to translate to the punishment they meted out for their
own fictional heroines.

As the authors in Chapter 2 demonstrate, female education is intimately tied to
punishment, and it is the New Woman who is desirous of such an education. Despite the fact
that not all the characters George Gissing creates in The Odd Women are New Women, many
of them have the germ of the ideology the New Woman came to espouse. The various
female characters discussed in this novel are all punished for needing, desiring, and/or
obtaining education, as are all of the heroines in this chapter. Through the many and varied
female characters Gissing proffers in The Odd Women, he illustrates that the strength of a
female character’s connection with education is directly proportional to the force of her
punishment, Rhoda Nunn and Virgie Madden bearing the heaviest brunt of narrative
punishment the text has to offer. While Monica Madden is clearly punished for the modicum
of education she receives through a plot trajectory that strikes her from the text by her death,
Virgie and Rhoda must live to endure the daily anguish, sorrow, and agony (and in Virgie’s
case, bodily torment) that accompany surviving the close of the narrative. This daily
punishment Rhoda and Virgie endure seems more extreme than the punishment Monica
receives in dying. Rhoda’s suffering is particularly striking because her staunch adherence to
a set of tenets formed through her education is incompatible with her romantic aspirations.
Rhoda and Virgie, the most educated women in Gissing’s narrative, therefore, are the
likeliest candidates for the most acute punishment.

Similarly, Grant Allen punishes his heroine in *The Woman Who Did*, Herminia
Barton, for her education. Demonstrated in her strict observance of the principles the New
Woman was associated with, principles carved out by her exposure to an intellectualism by
virtue of her birth and her participation in formal education at Girton, Herminia is a
representative New Woman. She also is punished for her exposure to education, an exposure
that leads her to bear a child outside of the legal bonds of marriage. This desire is fuelled by
her New Woman ideology formed by her education and the books she reads. Once she bears
a child out of wedlock, her reputation is destroyed. The legitimacy of the child is questioned,
and such questionable maternity has repercussions that affect not only Herminia but her child
as well. The child cannot prosper with the taint of such a birth hanging over her head, and
the only means Herminia has of rectifying the plight of her child reside in her own suicide.
Thus, through a plot designed to punish his heroine for the fruits of her education, Grant
Allen strikes the educated woman from the text entirely, a punishment shared by Gissing’s character, Monica.

Yet another heroine who clings to a strict code based on her education is Ella Hepworth Dixon’s Mary Erle in *The Story of a Modern Woman*. Although many have questioned Mary Erle’s status as a New Woman, she unquestionably shares the same philosophical vision other fictional New Women possess. Such vision is driven by her education, gleaned largely from the novels she reads as a child in the narrative. Her education leads her to believe she can forego marriage and rely on her abilities as a writer to support herself financially, but it also leads her to reject a man who, however unsuitable, would ease her financial and emotional burden. Thus, her education is linked to her punishment by virtue of the ideology it breeds in her, an ideology that forges her solidarity with other women and one that keeps her from betraying those females. All three of these novelists, Gissing, Allen, and Dixon, punish their characters in relation to education; however, none employs the use of masochism as a narrative strategy to censure these heroines in the way that Olive Schreiner and Thomas Hardy do. Perhaps this restraint lies in these authors’ comparatively privileged educational backgrounds.

In Chapter 3, Olive Schreiner presents the same punishment for education we see in the authors included in Chapter 2. However, Schreiner takes her illustration of this punishment further than any of the authors included in the previous chapter by having the punishment of her heroine, Lyndall, in *The Story of an African Farm* take the form of masochism. Lyndall is a female character who is clearly punished for her education. Her diatribes on the ills of a society that hampers women’s progress demonstrate her proto-feminist sensibilities, thus making her a rhetorical device for Schreiner’s own philosophies.
on female education. Lyndall’s cognizance of the negative consequences her desire to be educated produces makes her choices seem premeditatedly self-injurious, choices that are punishing enough to end her own life. The substantive alterations Schreiner made to the original draft of *The Story of an African Farm*—her novel *Undine*—indicate that Schreiner intended to punish her heroines fiercely in both of these novels, quite possibly owing to Schreiner’s own tendencies toward masochism and her own painful experiences with education. However, Schreiner’s expurgation of the melodrama in the final draft which was to become *The Story of an African Farm* demonstrates a restraint in the punishment of the heroine in her later novel. While the premeditation in Lyndall’s choices undoubtedly indicates masochistic tendencies, Lyndall never voices a clear desire to be punished in the way that Thomas Hardy’s characters do in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, nor does Schreiner eroticize or pathologize her characters as Hardy does.

In contrast to Schreiner’s restraint in illustrating narrative masochism in her female characters who desire education, Thomas Hardy depicts a fully developed masochism in his New Woman heroines. Chapter 4 shows that Hardy punishes his female characters with unprecedented ferocity in relation to their educations. Both Tess Durbeyfield in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* desire and receive education, and both are punished for the principles this education breeds in them. Similar to Schreiner, Hardy employs masochism in punishing these two heroines. However, unlike Schreiner, Hardy amplifies their masochistic tendencies by both eroticizing and pathologizing their self-punishing behavior. Such exaggeration serves as a narrative strategy to elicit readerly pity for the New Woman, thus drawing the reader into the narrative. However, this pity is undercut by the plot structure of both of these novels, which act as conduct manuals
demonstrating the consequences for females who desire education. Thus, Hardy’s views on female education are equivocal and paradoxical, seeming neither to advocate nor to oppose it. Such authorial ambiguity may be the result of Hardy’s inability to come to terms with the inferiority he felt regarding his own educational background, an education Hardy desired to further but was unable to because of his class limitations.

Some critics have asserted that Victorian readers frequently viewed such politically charged texts, ones that employed specific strategies to enhance their narratives, as a kind of propaganda. Penny Boumelha has made such an argument (66). However, Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* offers an alternate view of the way these texts should be read. Because the fictional New Woman’s quest for education was met with punishment, she becomes a *de facto* criminal of sorts, a renegade of the cultural edicts of the Victorian period that mandated she uphold societal conventions in becoming a passive, married, subservient, and uneducated woman. Thus, the fictional New Woman can be discussed in the same terms as the criminal Foucault outlines in the crime literature he discusses. Foucault’s position on such literature is clear:

> Perhaps we should see this literature of crime, which proliferated around a few exemplary figures, neither as a spontaneous form of ‘popular expression’, nor as a concerted programme of propaganda and moralization from above; it was a locus in which two investments of penal practice met—a sort of battleground around the crime, its punishment and its memory. If these accounts were allowed to be printed and circulated, it was because they were expected to have the effect of an ideological control—the printing and the distribution of these almanacs, broadsheets, etc. was in principle subject to strict control. But if these true stories of everyday history were received so avidly, if they formed part of the basic reading of the lower classes, it was because people found in them not only memories, but also precedents; the interest of ‘curiosity’ is also a political interest. Thus these texts may be read as two-sided discourses, in the facts that they relate, in the effects they give to these facts and in the glory they confer on those ‘illustrious’ criminals, and no doubt in the very words they use . . . (67-8)
Foucault describes the literature of crime here as a “two-sided” discourse, “true stories” that were part of everyday history, and as such, should not be read as propaganda. Many of the events contained in the narratives this dissertation discusses were based on actual events that occurred in the lifetimes of the respective authors, and readers received them as works containing a strong amount of verisimilitude. Ruth First and Ann Scott note the reaction of one Lancashire woman interviewed regarding the effect *The Story of an African Farm* had on “working people.” The interviewee, Mrs. Brown, recalled that she asked

> a Lancashire working woman what she thought of *Story of an African Farm* and a strange expression came over her face as she said ‘I read parts of it over and over.’ ‘What parts?’ I asked, and her reply was “About yon poor lass” (Lyndall), and with a far-off look in her eyes added ‘I think there is hundreds of women what feels like that but can’t speak it, but *she* could speak what we feel.’ (Ruth First and Ann Scott 121)

Similarly, many of the events Hardy narrates in his texts come from newspaper accounts. One critic, Margaret Oliphant, lambasted Hardy for his “solution of the great insoluble question of what is to be the fate of children in such circumstances” as Father Time and the progeny of Sue and Jude find themselves (385). However, Hardy harvested this incident, like many others he incorporated in his stories, from *The London Times*.

The novels contained in this dissertation, like the crime literature Foucault writes of, are such two-sided discourses, appearing neither as a concerted program of propaganda nor a form of popular expression. Instead, they work on the level of the political unconscious to create a literature of containment at a specific moment in history, one in which the two discourses form a Foucauldian battleground, and the psychology of the authors informs that battle. Frederic Jameson observes that “the forms of human consciousness and the mechanisms of human psychology are not timeless and everywhere essentially the same, but
rather situation-specific and historically produced” (152). The backlash against the New Woman in fiction of the fin de siècle is the product of such forms of human consciousness and mechanisms of human psychology. It is a moment in history in which authors of similar educational backgrounds who are products of a specific culture produce texts that war against not only each other, but themselves as well. Such texts function as a nineteenth-century scaffold masquerading as a classroom, a classroom in which all onlookers/readers become educated.
In the beginning of this dissertation, I alluded to an article in which Jeffrey Zaslow laid waste to the article that appeared in *Newsweek* in 1986—the piece that prophesied doom for educated women who also desired to be married. Zaslow presented evidence from census records that refuted the findings of the *Newsweek* article. He also boldly asserted that educated women today have an even better chance at finding a husband than ever before. Such findings would seem to suggest that the backlash (for American women, at least) has ended. However, as a teacher of female students and a female student desiring education myself, I wonder about the accuracy of his assertions, and, consequently, whether the literary texts we encounter today that represent educated women have changed all that radically. Has the either/or dichotomy Rachel Blau DuPlessis hypothesizes—quest or romance—been dismantled, or are we still stuck with the same model that limits women’s opportunities and that ultimately punishes them?

One of my female students this semester called me to set up a conference, intimating over the phone that she had something very serious to discuss with me. She did, in fact, have something of great import on her mind. When she appeared the next day during my office hours and sat down to talk with me, she explained that she would be dropping my class and withdrawing from the college, not because she hadn’t enjoyed the class immensely and not because she was doing poorly in school—she was one of the better students in the class and her GPA was stellar. The problem seemed to be her husband. He wanted her home, not in school when he got home from work. She had already worked out kinks that would prevent
him and their children from going without dinner after work, and the problem didn’t seem to be that she was neglecting her other household responsibilities. When pressed, she actually couldn’t articulate what the problem he had with her being in school was; he simply had told her he wanted her home. I assumed he couldn’t articulate his specific reasons to her either, but my suspicions about why she had to leave school were founded in my own research.

And what of the literary representations of educated women? A current example may help in answering this question. Thomas Harris’s novel Hannibal (1999) and David Mamet and Steven Zillain’s subsequent screen adaptation of the same work (2001) may provide some insight here about our own transindividual assumptions and values in the respective narrative outcomes of these texts. Differing radically, the culminations of each offer a means to assess the progress Feminism has made in the last century. These texts may also provide insight into the psychological replication and intensity of pathological behavior these texts perpetuate in our culture today. Challenging over 100 years of Feminism, Harris reverts to the romance plot as an “acceptable” narrative ending, even though this plot trajectory defies logic and verisimilitude. Plot spoiler: in the novel Clarisse, the Quantico-educated and seasoned veteran of the psych team, becomes the lover of and runs off with the serial killer to Brazil. There they pass as a married couple. Her career in the novel is so punishing that she seems able to overlook the multitude of his sins to become his paramour. In the screenplay version of the novel, Mamet and Zillain negotiate the romance plot, carefully deviating from Harris’s original text and producing an alternate conclusion based on the same diametrically opposed either/or proposition that plagued nineteenth-century heroines: the choice between education/career and heterosexual intimacy. Their conclusion offers an equally failed verisimilitude as well as a literature of containment for the potential feminist narrative and
cause. Clarisse returns to the punishing career with the FBI and must negotiate her way through the “boy’s club” bureaucracy that, by the end of the novel, has her suspended from her job. These texts demonstrate that women today have neither an either/or nor a both/and possibility regarding romance, education, or punishment. Do women and heroines have a choice? Are we still forcing them to choose, and are their choices, in the end, punishing?
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