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UNBECOMING WOMEN

British Women Writers and The Novel of Development

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CHAPTER ONE

Is There a Female *Bildungsroman?*

THIS is a book about girls entering the world, about how that difficulty is narrated by four women novelists writing in England between 1778 and 1860. Among the questions it raises are some concerning generic classification: what kind of novels are these, and how do they fit into the usual box marked "apprentice novel" or "novel of development" or, that mystifying term, *Bildungsroman?* I want to begin therefore by stating some of my assumptions about the practice of genre criticism. According to Northrop Frye, "the poet's intention to produce a poem normally includes the genre, the intention of producing a specific kind of verbal structure" (246). We may take Frye to represent that view of genre as something the poet deliberately "puts in" and that the critic at some later date "finds." The discovery may be mixed, a generic ore rather than pure substance, but it is seen to inhere patiently in the text. I am intrigued, however, by a passing remark Frye makes about Anthony Trollope—that his "novels" were read during World War II as "romances" (307)—for here he implies that genres are not in fact static and that what critics think they are reading depends on when they are reading it, on the agendas and antagonisms of a particular time. This is to say that Frye's essentialist theory of genres leans, at

points such as this, in a poststructuralist direction, toward a view of genre as not found but invented by critics to specific explanatory ends. Such a view collapses Tzvetan Todorov's famous distinction between "historical" and "theoretical" genres by insisting that all generic categories are to some degree theorized. It argues that critics never just stumble across "the novel" and carry it gently, still intact, into the museum of literary history. Rather, they construct a theory of the novel that selects a few features of certain texts as fundamentally defining, and while these are rendered legible and meaningful, other features and other texts recede from sight. Nor is there any such thing as a strictly theoretical genre in Todorov's abstract, "scientific" sense, since critical workers occupy a place in history and society that necessarily inflects their generic schema.[1]

It is this view of genres as constructed and ideologically laden, particularly as it has been elaborated by feminist and Marxist critics, that informs the present study.[2] I will be assuming, for example, that genre criticism plays a key role in canon formation both by policing individual categories and by maintaining hierarchical relationships among categories; that it regulates not only which texts we read but also, by alerting us to some elements over others, how we are able to read them. The point is not that we should struggle free of genre altogether—as some champions of postmodern writing have implied[3]—for writing (like everything else) can hardly escape the discursive habit of sorting into "kinds," is indeed only readable in terms of these kinds. What we can do, however, is examine the patterns of inclusion and exclusion fostered by a given category, consider the explanations it is capable of yielding, identify the ideas and values on which it relies and that it reproduces, and evaluate these in relation to our own political commitments. My preliminary purpose here is an ideological analysis of the category *Bildungsroman* as it has been used in discussions of the English novel. I do this by way of clearing some space for my own readings of novels about female development—readings that suggest a swerve from ruling definitions of the genre. Frye remarked that "the forms of prose fiction are mixed, like racial strains in human beings, not separable like the sexes" (305), apparently rejecting gender as a figure for genre. I, however, will be taking for granted that the forms of prose fiction are frequently in some sense "female" or "male." Certainly the *Bildungsroman* has been defined in terms of works by, about, and appealing to men. One goal of this project, like that of much feminist criticism, is to see how attention to works by, about, and appealing to a female readership transforms our thinking about narratives of growing up.[4] Yet this is not to perceive the sexes as essentially "separable," and if our lived gender is more complex than this, so inevitably is fiction. What I produce from novels by Frances Burney, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot is never an entirely "other" story of becoming adult—in Nancy K. Miller's phrase, never an "exclusive alterity" ("Emphasis," 342). Instead I will be tracing out a messy rivalry of stories, many significantly "female," others engaged by and struggling with the conventional *Bildungsroman*.

II

The term *Bildungsroman* is said to have been suggested by Friedrich von Blanckenburg's discussion of *Bildung* in his 1774 "Essay on the Novel," and Karl von Morgenstern actually coined it around 1820 in two lectures on the "Essence" and "History" of this contemporary form. But the person most often associated with its origin is the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, whose 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher certainly popularized, if it did not actually introduce, the German genre. Elaborating on this in 1906, Dilthey offered what has become the most frequently cited definition of the type.[5] Most important, in both 1870 and 1906 he yoked the *Bildungsroman* firmly to Goethe's 1795 novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Subsequent theorists of the German *Bildungsroman* include Hans Heinrich Borcherdt (1955), Fritz Martini (1961), Hartmut Steinecke (1975), and Martin Swales (1978), to name only a few. At what point, however, and on what terms did the *Bildungsroman* begin to organize our thinking about the British novel? How was its transposition from one national literature to another accomplished and with what ideological consequences? We could, of course, return all the way to Thomas Carlyle, who in 1824 translated Goethe's novel as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. But while Carlyle made Goethe (hitherto known primarily for *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) more widely available to the English, the gathering around Wilhelm Meister of his "English kinsmen," the explicit nomination of an

English family of texts seen to descend from *Wilhelm Meister*, did not happen for another hundred years. Focusing on this neglected moment of the *Bildungsroman*'s emergence into English critical discourse, I hope to offer a vantage point from which to look back toward Dilthey and Carlyle as well as forward to common usage in the Anglo-American academy.

In 1930 Susanne Howe published *Wilhelm Meister and his English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life*. The term *Bildungsroman* would still not appear in English-language dictionaries or literary handbooks until the 1950s, yet the novels Howe affiliated with the German paradigm—by Carlyle, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Benjamin Disraeli, John Sterling, G. H. Lewes, J. A. Froude, Geraldine Jewsbury, and Charles Kingsley—would lay the groundwork for ensuing English claims to Goethe's legacy. In fact since Howe, these claims have generally been assumed rather than systematically argued; casual appeals to the English genre have been many, formal attempts to codify it few. And those formal studies that do exist, notably G. B. Tennyson's essay (1968) and Jerome Buckley's book, *Season of Youth* (1974), owe much to Howe—if not for their selection of texts, then for the principles underlying their selection.[6] But I will concentrate on Howe not only because she put into place a working definition of the English category; more than this, her landmark book also began to test the limits of this definition.

We may begin with Howe's rendering of *Bildungsroman* as "apprentice novel" (rather than as the more literal "novel of formation"), for this decision has several implications. *Apprentice* refers, first, to Carlyle's translation of Goethe's title. While insisting that for the English Goethe is mediated by Carlyle, it nevertheless perpetuates the German tradition of citing *Wilhelm Meister* as originary text—the significance of which will be apparent shortly.[7] Second, *apprentice* refers to a vocational practice and chronology. Its meaning for Goethe is illustrated by a passage from his *Ferneres über Weltliteratur*, which Howe reproduces:

> Let everyone ask himself for what he is best fitted, that he may develop himself zealously for this, and by means of it. He may regard himself as an apprentice, then as a journeyman, and finally, but only with great caution, as a master. (Howe, 25)

Mapping the apprentice novel in terms of this straightforward sequence, Howe defines it as an inherently optimistic form. G. B. Tennyson, too, will later stress that it posits a single, well-marked, "right" path and a protagonist who, finding this path, climbs predictably from stage to higher stage (137). Thus *apprentice* implies not only youth and inexperience, but also (what Wilhelm's patronym spells out) eventual *mastery* (Howe, 4). Becoming a master requires guidance, and Howe, like Jerome Buckley, further notes that *mentors* are necessary to the student of life (Howe, 3; Buckley, 19). While the *Bildungsroman* is usually distinguished by German scholars from the *Erziehungsroman* with its focus on formal schooling, in *Wilhelm Meister* the true mentors turn out to be members of a secret society who supervise Wilhelm's development in an organized, quasi-institutional way.

Finally, as the passage above suggests, apprenticeship seems to imply *choice*. It does not, as it did for so many years under the guild system, mean being indentured to one's father's trade, born to a particular kind of work and social status without having much to say about it. Nor does it mean the later, less familial, industrial relation of worker to capitalist and the hardly chosen binding of man to machine instead of master. Rather, Wilhelm and his kinsmen look around, ask themselves where their unique talents lie, and self-consciously determine to cultivate those talents. As Howe puts it, the form represents the hero "choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work" (4) and chronicles his educative wrong choices en route to right ones. Thematized thus, at least one of the genre's ideological functions seems clear: emergent in the late eighteenth century as surplus labor was being ever more efficiently extracted, this representation of apprenticeship helped to construct the normative, middle-class man whose skills and labor are his own. Whatever impact capitalization actually had on the organization of work, the Wilhelm Meister narrative participated in a mythology of vocational choice, of the worker as free individual—in effect rationalizing the shift from the first, residually feudal scenario to the second, factory-based one.[8] The continuing relevance of this mythology should be obvious, and perhaps it begins to explain the appeal of Goethe's paradigm for many twentieth-century American critics.

It may come as no surprise that another bit of ideological work accomplished by Howe's paradigm (influenced by Dilthey and elaborated by Tennyson and Buckley) is to define development in emphatically masculine terms—for the contemporaneous heroine's relation to choice, mentors, and mastery is rather different. Her finding of friends,

her picking of work are both subsumed by the single, all-determining "choice" of a husband, and even this (turning down a Mr. Collins, seeing through the blandishments of a Wickham) is a mostly negative prerogative. The myth of bourgeois opportunity has little place for the middle-class female protagonist, and to reinvent the genre around her is to recognize a set of stories in which compromise and even coercion are more strongly thematized than choice. Of course the Wilhelms and Pips get buffeted around as well and feel themselves in the hands of some higher power, but willful self-making is still the keynote of their stories, and self-regard is still the decisive factor. The heroines I will consider have, by contrast, a clearer sense that formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them. The typical girl also has trouble with mentors. She rarely has a formal education, mothers are usually either dead or deficient as models, and the lessons of older men are apt to have voluptuous overtones; though she may spend the whole novel in search of positive maternal figures, it is too often true that her one mentor is the man who schools her in order to wed her. And finally, consequently, when the mentor is a husband and when apprenticeship reduces to a process of marital binding, it never leads the heroine to mastery but only to a lifetime as perennial novice. That the usual parameters of Georgian and Victorian womanhood preclude the goals of progress and mastery suggests to me that the female "apprentice" novel is split at the root; divided over what female formation is and uncertain about what it should be. The following chapters construct the novel of development precisely in terms of conflict and uncertainty, of dissenting narratives that break away and stray beyond the bounds of Howe's formulation and of those modeled after hers.

I would like to look more closely at Howe's description of the classic developmental path. First and foremost, like those precursor genres the picaresque and romance (5), it involves travel.[9] As Howe says, "Going somewhere is the thing. And there—in all sorts of tempting variety—is your story" (1). Whether a soldier like Xenophon's Cyrus, a bourgeois boy on a bohemian ramble like Wilhelm, or one of Bulwer-Lytton's dandies on a grand tour of Europe, the hero begins his *Bildung* by leaving home and going abroad—a point repeated by Buckley, who gives it an oedipal twist (*Season*, 17–20). Needless to say, middle-class

heroines can do this only at the risk (or in the aftermath) of infamy; as Burney's last novel, *The Wanderer*, argues, if the roaming protagonist happens to be a woman, the subtitle of her life is sure to be *Female Difficulties*. Mobility is difficult for women not only in their own stories but also in Howe's male-centered texts, where static female figures, "more or less symbolic of the stages he has reached on his pilgrimage" (50), measure out the hero's progress.[10] This making of women into milestones is, moreover, replicated and further naturalized by Howe's own recounting of the lives of male writers. She writes of Goethe, for example, stalled on *Wilhelm Meister*: "The connection with Frau von Stein was broken; Christiane Vulpius, according to many opinions, was not adequate to share Goethe's ideas about his literary work" (48); and similarly of Carlyle in the spring of 1819: "He had not met Jane Welsh as yet. . . . [He] was still languishing a little for Margaret Gordon, and reading Kant and Fichte and *Faust*" (84).

As their serial encounters with women suggest, for Wilhelm and his peers heterosexual adventures are favored in the world's curriculum. Buckley says that "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" are typical of male *Bildungsromane* (17), and Howe notes that "both [Wilhelm and Wieland's Agathon] are irresistibly attractive to women. They have a way of letting things happen to them" (30). In the formation of their female counterparts, by contrast, sex plays a less positive role. In fact the female protagonist's progress, at least until the twentieth century, is generally contingent on avoiding the abyss of extramarital sexuality, on successfully preventing "things" from happening to her. Her paradoxical task is to see the world while avoiding violation by the world's gaze.[11] Appearance on the theatrical stage, for instance, an important chapter in Wilhelm's story, contributes to a heroine's development only insofar as she resolutely shuns it, as Fanny Price does in *Mansfield Park*. It is true that Goethe himself was ambivalent about theater; while it is Wilhelm's ultimate mission in an earlier version of *Meister* (*Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*), in the final edition theater is but the brief means to a nobler end, and later *Bildungsromane* seem to drop it entirely. I would argue three things, however. First, theater remains a nonetheless significant trope in *Wilhelm Meister*, central to a cluster of essentially Romantic themes. Second, Howe and her followers, looking reflexively to Goethe, have in-

variably seized on this Romantic cluster (if not on theater itself) in characterizing the English *Bildungsroman*. And third, for a variety of reasons, not least among them its aura of immorality, this Goethean motif becomes highly problematic in the context of novels about bourgeois female development.

During his theatrical interlude Wilhelm dedicates himself to Shakespeare, starring in the company's production of *Hamlet* and evincing, in his devotion to the bard, the reverence for "genius" characteristic of the Romantic period in general. And while Tennyson and Buckley both remark that in England the *Bildungsroman* does not arise until the early Victorian period (Tennyson, 139; Buckley, 13), Buckley follows Howe in depicting its heroes as "more sensitive and more gifted than the average young man" (Howe, 6), reiterating just this Romantic infatuation with the anomalous artist. In fact, much of Buckley's book goes to proving the autobiographical nature of the English *Bildungsroman*, so that its protagonists tend to be writers or artists of some kind, and the category itself slides into the *Künstlerroman* (13). If critics of the English genre look back to Goethe for his elevation of poets to a spiritual elite, they do so also for his culture's interest—again like Wilhelm's own—in self-staging, in taking one's formation into one's own hands, theatricalizing one's life. Yet both this cult of the genius and this mania for narrating one's own origins run up hard against nineteenth-century views of proper female development. For a girl taught that to be exceptional is to be morally suspect, that "the happiest women," in George Eliot's words, "have no history" (*The Mill on the Floss*, 335), such Romantic notions are only partly available. Of course, there were women cultivating their genius and scripting female destiny at this time, Austen and Eliot among them, but the conception of artistic selfhood augured by Wilhelm's identification with Shakespeare was, nevertheless, distinctly male. Indeed as Marlon Ross, among a host of critics now exploring the gender politics of the Romantic period, has argued:

> Romanticism is historically a masculine phenomenon. Romantic poetizing is not just what women cannot do because they are not expected to; it is also what some men do in order to reconfirm their capacity to influence the world in ways socio-historically determined as masculine. The categories of gender, both in their lives and in their work, help the Romantics establish rites of passage toward poetic identity and toward masculine empowerment. (29)

Wilhelm Meister has, in short, been delivered over to a Romantic ideology about the forging of poetic identity that turns out to be intrinsically male, and the effect of continually harking back to this text is to elide the other kinds of more hesitant and conflicted narratives that may bring young girls to womanhood. I would argue, further, that the Anglicizing and Victorianizing of Goethe by Carlyle only intensifies this effect. For Howe tells us that what Carlyle drew from *Wilhelm Meister* was a lesson in "the sane and corrective power of action" (10), so that he tips the German ideal of balance between the inner and outer life in favor of the latter. If the figure of Hamlet is offered as a prototype for the young Wilhelm, Carlyle's *Meister* is the story of a Hamlet who shakes off his moodiness and turns from introspection to useful work. And though Wilhelm is never so reflective as the character he plays, he still encounters the interpolated "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul" as a cautionary tale; Howe notes that this dead woman's autobiography, tracing her departure from the material world on a path of exclusively spiritual development, serves as a negative example for Wilhelm (55). As a result of her intervening story, the contemplative, unworldly, too earnestly spiritual, not to mention writerly, is gendered *female*, and Wilhelm reaches manhood by looking down this path in awe—before going another way. It is tempting to see this as a staging of the male writer's own anxiety as he himself displays traits commonly coded as "feminine"; at the very least, it specifies the masculinity of the work-oriented *Bildung* Carlyle gleaned from Goethe, while it repudiates female development as ghostly, reclusive, and short.[12]

Tennyson's and Buckley's extension of Howe's basic paradigm to the works of writers (particularly Dickens) more central to the conventional English canon was also an attempt to shift the category itself, previously of "marginal interest" (Tennyson, 142), closer to the center of the critical lexicon. While making broader claims for its occurrence, they followed Howe's precedent of deriving the form from Goethe and, reinforcing this derivation while heightening the genre's incantatory power in English-speaking circles, reverted to the untranslated German term.[13] The continual fetishizing of *Wilhelm Meister* as originary

text, even by many revisionist critics, has not only defended as normative the single path of middle-class, male development described above, eclipsing all others; not only established a canon of overwhelmingly male-authored and male-centered texts; it has also to a large degree fetishized Wilhelm himself. Indeed, as Howe's title suggests, there has been a tendency to think of the tradition as a family not of texts but of personages: Wilhelm and his kinsmen. The effect of this has been to define the genre in terms of a single heroic figure and to privilege an approach that emphasizes character. Thus, while critics note the influence of the picaresque on the *Bildungsroman*, the predominant models for reading it have been the confession, the autobiography, and the biography, with their interest in psychology over episode.[14] At the risk of simplifying a good many richly textured arguments, I would say that discussions of the genre have generally made it coextensive with the experience of the *Bildungsheld*, equating it with the destiny of this one figure, whose movements are tracked, detectivelike, to the exclusion of other movements or meanings.

Such a strategy of reading grows logically out of what has been seen as the *Bildungsroman*'s essential faith in the ability of individuals, however laboriously tried, to weather "plot" and affirm the sovereignty of "character." Yet as I have suggested, the stories of middle-class female protagonists rarely demonstrate this faith; on the contrary, they tend to insist that personal destiny evolves in dialectical relation to historical events, social structures, and other people. More than this, I find in my four novelists a blurring or decentering of the "major" narrative by alternative stories of female destiny, so that each text is less the telling of one life than a struggle between rival life stories. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the often reiterated tale of Elizabeth's enlightenment as to Darcy's true character and her own true feelings is countered, in my reading, by the overlapping tale of her "humiliation." The "other" stories I assemble are typically demystifications of this kind—rewriting the heroine's rise to happy maturity as a history of obstruction, imposition, and loss. In their tones of terror and rage, my counternarratives imply that the disreputable gothic novel may account more plausibly for the passage to bourgeois womanhood than the classic *Bildungsroman*. In addition, though less confidently, they may begin to reconceive a girl's progress as the building of solidarity between women or as the

scaling of an intellectual summit. Yet it must be remembered that the critiques and potential compensations implied by these alternative stories are only tentatively offered, for the dominant narrative continues, simultaneously, to retain tremendous power and appeal. Novels by Burney, Austen, Brontë, and Eliot suggest that, riven by contradiction, female development (and perhaps development generally) may be mapped onto antagonistic plots that are never finally reconciled.

Women writers (including three of my four novelists) and even several of my points about them are actually imminent in but also—with obvious effort—suppressed from Susanne Howe's analysis. Jane Austen surfaces on the very first page (regarding Howe's association of *Bildung* with travel) only to be set aside and indefinitely postponed: "After all—putting aside for the moment Miss Austen's *Emma* and a few other magnificent exceptions—no one can learn much of anything at home" (1). Austen reappears later, again as an exception to the rule, the only figure during the Romantic period unreceptive to foreign, and particularly German, influence (127). Madame de Staël, whose *Corinne* must have suggested itself as a splendid female *Künstlerroman*, comes up only in relation to Carlyle: he had read her *Germany* and remarked on her death that she was "very ugly and very immoral" but still the "loftiest" female soul of her day (83). Charlotte Brontë is mentioned because she received letters from George Lewes proving his critical acuity (224); *Jane Eyre*, difficult to ignore in this context, is cited because Geraldine Jewsbury read the novel and apparently preferred Lewes's *Ranthorpe* (240). (It is true that Dickens and Thackeray are also omitted, but their absence is carefully accounted for [14].) And finally George Eliot, the one woman whose *The Mill on the Floss* made it into subsequent canons (those of Wagner, Tennyson, and Buckley), is literally suspended in parentheses and effectively superseded by Goethe: "Before he saw Germany again (in company with George Eliot, many years later), Lewes had evidently read and studied Goethe carefully" (222).

I am persuaded that the frequent recurrence and forcible bracketing of these women amounts to an underlying, alternative narrative of female destiny in Howe's own text, which continually challenges the official premises of her study. Only with the treatment of Jewsbury does it finally break into the open, and at this point (much as Howe would link Jewsbury to Lewes instead of Brontë) two pieces of the pattern I

associate with female developmental fiction begin to be discernible. First, the primacy of relations between women in such fictions is neatly displaced from Howe's treatment of the novels onto her framing account of Jewsbury's own formation, in which Jane Carlyle figures significantly. Though embarrassed by its "childish" emotionality, Howe describes Carlyle's friendship as "the one great, abiding joy of [Jewsbury's] life" and comments gratefully on its preservation in letters (242). Second, unlike any of the works previously discussed by Howe, Jewsbury's *Zoe* (1845) and *The Half Sisters* (1848) are both explicitly bifurcated texts. Split between the destinies of two characters, they support my claim that formation for women, because uniquely controversial, tends to occasion narrative disunity. Howe goes so far as to remark that Jewsbury brought to the conventional form "her own passionate interest in the position of women, and gave the old pattern some fresh material to work upon" (251), and in this Howe begins to articulate the feminist project at hand. Texts interested in women do indeed rework the old *Bildungsroman* pattern, providing us as critics with fresh material and unsettling the ways we routinely think about narratives of development.

In the following chapters I will be reading some of this material not for how it pictures the dawning of coherent female selfhood, but rather for how it positions young women amid many incoherent and class-specific notions about girls becoming women. Instead of reconceiving the genre in terms of the different road taken by the female individual, I suggest we locate its multiple narratives within a larger, cacophonous discourse about female formation. I want, in short, to rephrase the usual questions—"How does the hero of this novel come of age? What are the stages that mark his passage to maturity?"—as "What are the several developmental narratives at work in this novel and what can they tell us about competing ideologies of the feminine?" To speak, as I will, of *plural formations* is to apply the lessons of recent critical theory in two respects: first, by seeing "integrated" selfhood as the clashing, patchwork product of numerous social determinations, the "I" as basically unstable and discontinuous; and second, by acknowledging that formation is differentiated in terms of, say, class, country, race, and time as well as gender, so that in this sense, too, it is no longer possible to speak

of a uniform fiction of female development. The rival narratives I discuss in *Jane Eyre*, for example, correspond to the bivalent class status of the governess. Finally, while I will be looking at "female" texts whose high degree of internal conflict seems to reward the approach I propose, I ultimately offer it as well for a reconsideration of "male" texts, which may evince greater, but by no means total, consensus about what makes a man.

III

If Howe is right that Austen was less indebted to German models than her male contemporaries, on what discourse did she draw (and to what did she contribute) in wondering what would become of her Elizabeths and Emmas? In the section that follows I want to look briefly at the narration of female development by a selection of "conduct" or "courtesy" books written between the 1760s and 1840s and to suggest that these popular guides, as much if not more than *Wilhelm Meister* and its kindred texts, mark out a discursive context for the novels that concern me here. Only for Eliot is *Wilhelm Meister* a primary intertext, and her imagination also continues to be shaped by those representations popularized by conduct books and similar materials addressed to women. And perhaps this is the time to jettison once and for all the notion of a "female *Bildungsroman*"—by uncoupling these two terms to release our discussion of female developmental fiction from so much Goethean baggage and relinquish the appeal to any single, authoritative because originary, novel of formation, whether female or male. We recur to the *Bildungsroman* from now on as but one among many narrative models; attractive but problematic for female protagonists, it is invoked by my women writers only to be broken up and dispersed by other arguably more compelling accounts of entering the world. I turn to conduct literature then—in particular to the works of Sarah Pennington, Ann Murry, Hester Chapone, and Sarah Stickney Ellis—to identify an additional, widely available, and demonstrably salient set of stories about coming into womanhood. Without attempting a comprehensive survey of courtesy literature (much less the range of related genres, which might include diaries, educational dialogues, ladies' magazines, ser-

mons, and children's fiction), I offer the works of these four women to sketch out in some preliminary way, as well as to historicize, the contradictory narratives I find in my four novelists.

My precedents for introducing conduct books directed toward women into a discussion of women's novels are several. In 1950 Joyce Hemlow first called attention to these influential didactic texts, arguing that novelists such as Burney "attempted to justify and dignify their new art by including [in their novels] the reputable and useful matter of the courtesy books" (757). Hemlow even calls *Camilla* (1796) a "courtesy novel," and notes that while novelists sought to gain respectability by incorporating material from courtesy books, so courtesy book writers sought to trade on the popularity of novels by employing novelistic devices (757). Some writers, Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth for example, tried their hand at both genres. If the eighteenth-century novel was, in general, highly permeable—emerging as a genre by scavenging from (and corrupting) others—then we should think of women's conduct books and novels as particularly contiguous and interpenetrating forms. In keeping with this point, Nancy Armstrong has recently implicated courtesy literature along with the rising novel in what she sees as a domestication or "feminization" of culture beginning in the late eighteenth century and coincident with the making of the middle class. Key to this argument is the fact that, as Hemlow observes, courtesy books for women reached a peak between 1760 and 1820 (although many continued to be reprinted well into the Victorian era)—just as the novel of manners was coming into being (732). Armstrong adds that, until the end of the seventeenth century, most courtesy literature was written for aristocratic men (61). From the genre's subsequent proliferation and redirection toward middle-class women, it seems clear that bourgeois womanhood was under especially intense construction at this time, and that novels as well as conduct books were part of the attempt to articulate and manage this new icon.

While I coincide with Hemlow and Armstrong in emphasizing the continuity between these two kinds of contemporary texts, their overlapping interest in female formation and their collaboration in producing a notion of the "feminine" bound up with notions of the middle class, I would challenge the view of both forms as simply and unanimously invested in the emergent ideal, what Mary Poovey has called the "proper lady."[15] For while acknowledging the many, mixed sources on which the discourse of domesticity drew, Armstrong claims the ideology of femininity offered by conduct books was able "to suppress the very conflicts so evident in the bewildering field of dialects comprising this body of writing" (69). She argues not only the internal coherence of this ideal but also its uniformity across works, thereby justifying her treatment of "these quite different texts as a single voice and continuous discourse" (94). This "single voice" is assumed to be that of the dominant culture, so that for Armstrong, as for the majority of critics, "conduct-book morality" is synonymous with a grim conservatism. I will be arguing, by contrast, that conduct books, like novels, are often profoundly inconsistent in relation to female formation, that they characteristically contest the dominant narrative as it appears in both their own and other works.

As my choice of guides implies, I would distinguish here between those written by women (usually addressed to daughters, nieces, or female students) and those by male professionals such as the Reverend James Fordyce or Doctor John Gregory—the former seem to me particularly compelled out of the beaten path and into other developmental ways. In addition, I agree on the one hand with Armstrong's major, crucial point that domestic fiction and guidebooks contributed to the class formation of the bourgeoisie: by formulating as "feminine" an ethic based on inner moral worth as opposed to inherited status, they produced the conception of subjectivity on which middle-class identity and hegemony would be based (14). Yet I want on the other hand to insist that even as their modeling of gender worked to reorganize society in class terms, these texts could hardly help enforcing ideologies of femaleness and maleness that were *lived as such*, inescapably, from day to day. Indeed Armstrong tends to forget that gender does more than simply code class: it is one of the most deeply felt ways in which class status is played out.[16] I look therefore to conduct literature for versions of a struggle among constructions of the feminine that are always lived concurrently with those of class; for some sense of what could be thought about female development at a particular time, a rough guide to the landmarks and limits of this discursive terrain; and for the pre-

view it offers of the play among developmental narratives in *Evelina* (1778), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) that is the subject of subsequent chapters.

My sampling of conduct books by and for women indicates two major nodes of conflict, two areas of dense ambivalence about how to plot a girl's life. One area concerns what we could loosely call affiliation: the desire for dyadic, familial, and also wider communal ties. The other area has to do with ambition, especially the ambition to study, to gain intellectual authority, and perhaps to write.[17] I begin first with affiliation and its usual reliance on the trajectory of courtship, marriage, and motherhood. Not surprisingly, this heterosexual series is largely taken for granted by each of my texts—with the significant exception of Murry, to whom I will return later—and by the courtesy books and novels of the period in general. Most guides not only recommend a sequence closing with the marital and maternal, but also, novel-like, reproduce this sequence in their own structures. It is not unusual to move, as Sarah Ellis does in *The Daughters of England* (1842), through such topics as "Taste, Tact, and Observation" to "Love and Courtship," which, as the tenth of twelve chapters, occupies the position of climax or goal, reached presumably by means of taste and tact. Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, first published in 1772 and reissued continually until as late as 1877, included in many editions after 1777 an appended "Letter to a New-Married Lady," so that even the story of mental improvement appears to culminate with marriage. Lady Pennington's book of maternal advice—which went into seven editions in the years 1761–1790 and, like Chapone's, reappeared throughout the first half of the nineteenth century—acquired in 1817 an "Additional Letter On the Management and Education of Infant Children." Its effect is similarly to drive the events and energies of girlhood to the finish line of wife- and motherhood.

The very shape of these narratives supports an ideology of romance that rigidly equates female maturity and gratification with the married state, and Chapone, "recommending your husband to be your first and dearest friend" ("New-Married," 122), is not alone in seeing the conjugal relation as primary. Yet, as in the novels that concern me here (which, except for *The Mill on the Floss*, all lead to the altar), a great deal of space in Pennington, Chapone, and Ellis is devoted to the difficulties

and risks involved in finding and wedding this "first and dearest friend."[18] As Chapone laments (addressing her niece):

> Young women know so little of the world, especially of the other sex, and such pains are usually taken to deceive them, that they are every way unqualified to choose for themselves, upon their own judgment. Many a heart-ach [sic] shall I feel for you, my sweet girl, if I live a few years longer! (*Letters*, 93–94)

Ellis seconds this despairing view that young women can hardly make a knowing choice of husband, that men are all too likely to deceive, and wives to suffer:

> "But how are we to know a man's real character?" is the common question of young women. Alas! there is much willing deception on this point. Yet, I must confess, that men are seldom thoroughly known, except under their own roof, or amongst their own companions. (230)

The safest procedure, advises Ellis, is to infer how a man will treat his wife from how he behaves with his mother and sisters (230).

Lady Pennington worries similarly lest her daughters pledge obedience to a man whose surface "Good Humour" has been mistaken for genuine "Good Nature" (60–62). Anticipating the abused mother/heroine of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria* (1798), Pennington warns that a bad-hearted husband is "the worst of all temporal ills—a deadly potion, that imbitters every social scene of life" (68). Like Ellis, she prays her daughters may be spared this by consulting

> the simple, unpolished sentiments of those, whose dependent connections give them an undeniable certainty—who not only see, but who hourly feel, the good or bad effects of that disposition, to which they are subjected. By this I mean, that if a man is equally respected, esteemed, and beloved by his tenants, by his dependents and domestics . . . you may justly conclude, he has that true good nature. (63–64)

Compare this with Elizabeth Bennet's reasoning about Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the resemblance reinforces our sense that Austen and Pennington were using and shaping a common language:

> The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him! (170–71)

Ellis would be glad to know that Darcy's kindness as brother to Georgiana and nephew to Lady Catherine are also major factors in Elizabeth's calculations.

But all this is only an attempt to load the dice in what Pennington describes as a losing gamble: "So great is the hazard, so disproportioned the chances, that I could almost wish the dangerous die was never to be thrown for any of you!" (56) In fact, all three writers first hold out hope for conjugal satisfaction—telling girls to choose carefully—and then proceed to assume that, at the very least, male tenderness will wane and infidelity probably ensue. Urging resignation to this likely circumstance, they offer an array of consolations. Chapone emphasizes religion and suggests that children may help to fill the void: "For their sakes life will still be valuable to you" ("New-Married," 120). She also urges "uniform adherence to your duty," and says that prospects brighten if the straying spouse is sick, in which case dutiful attendance "may at length regain his heart" ("New-Married," 119). Ellis agrees that one's own faithfulness and integrity are key, though she admits, "It may be called a cold philosophy to speak of such consolation being available under the suffering which arises from unkindness and desertion" (228). Ellis's strategy for reviving male interest is to hoard one's love: "You will want it to re-awaken the tenderness of your husband," she explains, "when worldly cares and pecuniary disappointments have too much absorbed his better feelings" (237). Pennington, too, describes jealousy as useless (80–82) and counsels "patient submission" in "dealing with a morose tyrannical temper" (71), but she alone draws the line at demands that would compromise one's principles. Sounding again surprisingly like Wollstonecraft's Maria, she informs her daughters: "All commands repugnant to the laws of christianity, it is your indispensable duty to disobey" (69–70).

If Pennington spends ten pages on what makes a good husband and

fifteen on what to do if he is cruel, I suggest that so the accent of my novelists' two-suitor plot may fall as much on the hazards of a Sir Clement or St. John as it does upon the merits of another. Jane Eyre's return to Rochester coincides with realizing that St. John proposes she yield to him her very existence. Moreover, if girls are so naive and men so deceiving as Chapone and Ellis suggest, who is to say that Jane's choice of Rochester over St. John or Evelina's of Orville over Clement is actually well founded? Sharing with courtesy literature doubts about the legibility of male character, the fictional texts I examine are similarly concerned about telling the good suitor from the bad. As I shall demonstrate in chapter 2, this anxiety is especially evident in *Evelina*, in which the dream of romantic progress coexists with the nightmare of circling from bad to worse. Though rarely so explicit or pragmatic as courtesy books, women's novels of this period exhibit a matching apprehension about courtship and its aftermath. Judging by the quotations I have cited, the romantic apprenticeship proceeds in both genres with a girl's aggrieved sense that marriage will place her, no less than his tenants, servants, and other female relations, at the legally sanctioned whim of a powerful man. As Pennington points to "the *good or bad* effects of that disposition, to which they are subjected," and as Elizabeth Bennet considers "how much of *pleasure or pain* it was in his power to bestow" (my emphases), the reader is alerted in conduct book and novel alike to a rift in the romantic plot: a split between one narrative that continues pleasurably along a gentle rise and another that slopes down or spins round into pain. And as I have implied, the second, dysphoric narrative is not associated solely with the rejected suitors or with the possibility of seduction; it also runs darkly along the road to marriage with an Orville, Darcy, Rochester, or Stephen Guest. Even in the ostensibly comic novels I discuss, both stories of female development, which we might loosely call the romantic and antiromantic, recur. In the readings that follow, I want at once to stress the tension between these crisscrossing stories and to dwell on the antiromantic—not because this story is more "real," but because, in relation to axioms about developmental fiction, its disconcerting virtues are those of the perverse.

These same conduct books can help to identify still another affiliative impulse at work in the novels, a narrative that more positively

counters the heterosexual by drawing women to each other. In fact, Chapone flatly contradicts "Dean Swift" who "exhorts his fair pupil to make no friendships with any of her own sex" ("New-Married," 120). Dismissing this as "preposterous advice" (121), Chapone's section "On the Regulation of the Heart and Affections" discusses relations between women at great length and treats the choosing of female friends with at least as much seriousness as the choice of a husband. Regarded in her time as the emblem of propriety, Chapone, as mentioned, is careful to privilege the conjugal tie (*Letters*, 86; "New-Married," 122) and to warn of its peculiar irrevocability (*Letters*, 93); yet the fact remains that three-quarters of her "Affections" is devoted to ties between women. Taking the standard criteria for marriage as the criteria for female friendship, she recommends to her niece an older girl, twenty-three or twenty-four, in a position to instruct. Like a spouse, the friend should be religious and of good repute, understanding, and temper (*Letters*, 73–80); she should not be inferior in birth or education (81). Echoing Pennington's advice in a different context, Chapone instructs her niece to "observe [the friend's] manner to servants and inferiors—to children—and even to animals" (78). In the same vein, she urges fidelity to such a friend and warns against the pernicious effects of jealousy (85). Finally, she ends her "Letter to a New-Married Lady" in a way that implies the priority she gives to love and trust between women. After dutifully agreeing with Swift that one's husband should be "first and dearest," Chapone closes with a sentence whose effect is subtly to displace the official mate: "I shall therefore depend on his full consent to my having always the pleasure of styling myself/ Your faithful and affectionate friend" (122).

Here I would observe several things. First, Chapone's "depend," while implying humility, means not that she breathlessly awaits the husband's consent but that she assumes or even commands it. Second, she receives his consent only to discard it in favor of her own permission: *she* styles *herself* loyal friend. Third, with the intervention of "my," repeated by "myself," Chapone appropriates not only the husband's consent, but also his *pleasure* in friendship with the "new-married lady." Signing her name at the bottom of the page, she seems to say: Though he may be "first," my name is here at the end, it is I who am faithful to the last, my pleasure is for "always"—and certainly her earlier account of marriage seems to bear this out.

Chapone's story of the love between women is present in all of my courtesy texts, whose very terms of address rely upon the mother-daughter relation. But Ellis's chapter on "Friendship and Flirtation," agreeing with Chapone on the importance of fidelity to women friends, takes this mandate a step further. Whereas Chapone is interested in the couple, the mentor-student dyad, Ellis celebrates the *circle* of "young female friends, who love and trust each other, who mutually agree to support the weak in their little community, to confirm the irresolute, to reclaim the erring, to soothe the irritable, and to solace the distressed" (199). If this sounds like some kind of proto-support group, Ellis goes on to describe a process that second-wave feminists would surely call consciousness-raising:

> In the circle of her private friends, as well as from her own heart, she learns what constitutes the happiness and the misery of woman, what is her weakness and what her need, what her bane and what her blessing. She learns to comprehend the deep mystery of that electric chain of feeling which ever vibrates through the heart of woman, and which man, with all his philosophy, can never understand. (199)

Of course Ellis's 1842 text coincided with the swelling of the first wave of the women's movement, with the writing of pamphlets and gathering of rage that produced both the 1848 meeting at Seneca Falls and, as I argue later, the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. Judging by the extraordinary series of metaphors that follows this passage, Ellis herself was not unaware that female community, based on a sense of collective disadvantage, may have radical political implications. Asserting that, through close friendship with a few women, "a measure of the same sympathy and tenderness is extended to the whole sisterhood of her sex," Ellis asks the following:

> What should we think of a community of slaves, who betrayed each other's interests? of a little band of ship-wrecked mariners upon a friendless shore, who were false to each other? of the inhabitants of a defenceless nation, who would not unite together in earnestness and good faith against a common enemy? (199)

The more urgent question underlying these questions—what should a community of oppressed people do?—is never explicitly posed, but an insurrectionary answer is silently assumed until, in the final lines, it is stated/disguised as a patriotic truism: they should (naturally) unite together against a common enemy. Ellis has already mentioned her abolitionist views (66), and here she invokes slavery as a convenient code for the subjection of women and an oblique reference to their struggle for emancipation.[19] I should stress that Ellis was no Lucretia Mott; she opens *The Daughters of England* by announcing that "as women . . . the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men" (8). Yet even here she seems to argue less for inferiority than contentedness, leaving room for the chance that discontented women might dispute their status, as she herself apparently does just two hundred pages later. For each of these scenarios, articulating women to each other, leads inevitably to her conclusion that women are inferior only insofar as they betray one another—whereas "in their integrity, their faithfulness, their devoted affection [to one another], they rise to an almost superhuman eminence" (200).[20] This narrative of female identity and power located in loyalty to a group, of solidarity against a "common enemy," of individual destiny linked to a common plight; offers a dramatic challenge to the plot of private romance that more typically organizes female development. We might call it, in Eve Sedgwick's sense, a narrative of the female homosocial, and in chapter 4 I will argue it is one of the stories attempted by *Jane Eyre*.[21]

Ellis closes her chapter on the "Economy of Time" with two contrasting vignettes of a wife and mother getting ready for a journey. In one case the woman has been tardy, making her last moments frantic and inefficient, causing tempers to be lost and goodbyes to be rushed, leaving the household in disorder and affections in disarray. In the other case the woman has prepared in advance; she devotes the entire last day to calm rituals of farewell; she provides in turn for each member of the household and stores up abundant tenderness for the coming separation (39–41). All very well, we might say, and perhaps Ellis is right about packing the day before, but what strikes me finally is that in both of these scenes, whether frantic or calm, a carriage is waiting outside and *a woman is leaving*. Where is this woman going? What kinds of narratives are possible for her once she leaves the family circle and even the circle

of women behind? I invoke Ellis's image to turn us now to that other node of conflicting stories about female destiny, this one concerning extradomestic, solitary, and scholarly ambitions usually framed in this period as "masculine," but according to conduct books and novels cherished, nonetheless, by women. For this purpose I call first upon Ann Murry's *Mentoria; or, The Young Ladies Instructor: in Familiar Conversations, on Moral and Entertaining Subjects. Calculated to Improve Young Minds in the Essential as well as Ornamental Parts of Female Education.*

Murry's conduct book was initially published in 1778; a sequel appeared in 1799, and by 1823 the original had gone into twelve editions. In 1801 Austen gave a copy to her beloved niece Anna (daughter of James), which is now on display at Chawton Cottage, but so far as I know the text has never before been commented on. The work consists of twelve dialogues between the governess Mentoria, her pupils Lady Mary and Lady Louisa, and their brother Lord George, home from Harrow and sitting in on dialogues four through twelve. They cover such typical topics as "Industry, Truth, and Sincerity"; "Politeness, Civility, and Gratitude"; "The Church-Service, and Nature of Parables"; and "Complacency and Cheerfulness." Yet Murry's handling of these strikes me as particularly bold, and so does her devotion of entire dialogues to "The Derivation of Words, and Geography"; "The Spartan Form of Government, and Plan of Education"; and "The Sciences, with an exhortation to acquire knowledge."[22] Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, by contrast, addresses the "learned" languages, history, "abstruse" sciences, dancing, and handwriting all with great circumspection under the heading "On Politeness and Accomplishments." I want to argue, however, not that Murry is wholly anomalous; rather that she thematizes with peculiar clarity a woman's ambition for knowledge and tells with exceptional vigor the story of a girl aspiring to genius, thereby alerting us to a narrative more subtly and ambiguously present in other conduct books by women and available as well to novels of female development.

Although her late eighteenth-century society was, by all accounts, increasingly regimented by gender, Murry seems little concerned to demarcate a narrowly female sphere of education. Her Socrates, the masterful governess Mentoria, will not concede the mental inferiority of women or tout their talent for feeling over reasoning, and she says noth-

ing about apprenticing for marriage. In fact, Mentoria manages—partly by directing her remarks to girls perhaps eleven or twelve—to avoid altogether the matters of fashion, flirtation, and courtship, let alone the minutiae of household economy treated at length by many conduct books. The governess offers girls instead the "male" models of Demosthenes, whose industry overcame his deficiencies as an orator (5–9), and the Spartans, whose rigorous education made them exemplary for courage and determination (192–98). Both models urge that excellence be pursued against all odds, in spite of apparent disability, fear, and even public humiliation. For Demosthenes was hissed into silence for his early, stammering speeches, but only "redoubled his assiduity, and at last became one of the most eloquent men of the age" (7). In Mentoria's account, Demosthenes devised a battery of heroic techniques: he declaimed with a mouthful of pebbles while climbing a mountain, orated over the roar of a raging ocean, installed himself in a device to break him of shrugging his shoulders, and kept to an underground study for months, during which time "he shaved but one side of his head, that he might not be tempted to appear in public" (6–7). Spartan children are likewise admired for "the intense application with which they pursued their studies" (195). Mentoria explains how they were separated from their families and bravely went barefoot, almost naked, their heads shaved (on both sides), until they were inured to hardship (192).

Together Demosthenes and the Spartans put into the hands of Mary and Louisa a map to intellectual mastery more often reserved for the likes of George. At the same time, their examples seem calculated to prepare girls for the obstacles that they, in particular, will encounter on the steep path of mental development. As if to answer those who call women "naturally" weak-headed, Mentoria tells stories in which nature—rocky ground, harsh elements, shrugging shoulders, stammering mouth—is triumphantly overcome by human industry and desire. As if to counter the sneering comparisons of preaching women to dancing dogs, her stories show humiliation as a spur, eccentricity as a scientific method. The shaved heads of her protagonists seem not only to figure this eccentricity but also, like the images of physical hardship, to encourage a kind of monkish renunciation of the gendered body. Along with Mary Wollstonecraft, who in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) would call for national coeducation, Mentoria seems virtually to degender the curriculum as well as the narrative of scholarly achievement. When Mentoria recalls her exhortation to a boy at Eton—in which she charges him to work hard "And gain the depth of subjects most abstruse/Fair science is the clue by which we find/Th'intricate lab'rinth of the human mind"—she is asked whether these words apply only to young men. Her answer, whose unorthodoxy she registers in parentheses, is nonetheless clear: "They are (if I may be allowed the expression) *epicene* instructions, and in their tendency of general use to both sexes" (231–32).

Murry's identification of Mentoria and her instructions with a category beyond female or male is the final payoff for an act of appropriation staged and restaged in the course of her text. Mentoria claims for herself the "male" story of literary ambition and celebrity, for example, by quoting a few lines on "gratitude" by Milton—and then casually adding some recently penned lines of her own (54–55). As the dialogues proceed, Mentoria continues to stamp her lessons with the authority of iambic pentameter by citing a poet who is less and less often Milton, and ever more frequently . . . Mentoria. Lord George's arrival in time for the lesson on geography also occasions a polite struggle for the professor's chair. "I hope you will not think it lessens your consequence as a man, to be taught by a Governess, and have young ladies for your school-fellows and companions," Mentoria modestly begins. "Not in the least, Madame: I shall esteem myself much obliged to you for permitting me to partake of your instructions" (60), Murry has George say. A few pages later, Louisa suspects her brother already knows what an island is—but Mentoria, not George, sails on to describe its properties. When she concludes, George approves the definition, thereby assuming, for one tense moment, the professorial role. With his next words, however, he cedes the floor for good: "But I will not interrupt you," he says contritely to Mentoria, "as I suppose you will now tell us what a promontory is" (74).

Mentoria's most difficult and decisive struggle for access to the scholarly highroad involves geometry and "a gentleman, who was a great mathematician" (229). In the ninth dialogue, delighted by her teacher's rapid survey of triangles and hexagons, Lady Louisa declares that she should like to study geometry. But here Mentoria balks, re-

verting for the first and only time to axiomatic taboos against erudition in women: "It is not a part of female education," she informs her eager student. "Neither can you form a proper judgement from the sketch I have given" (216). Leaving open the question of whether Mentoria herself is privy to geometry's higher mysteries, the dialogue moves on to what is carefully termed a "cursory or slight view of *Astronomy*" (216). A dozen pages later, however, geometry returns, along with the story of a famous man who bored his companions with untimely displays of geometrical knowledge. Assenting to cream in his coffee, he would invariably say: "Yes, Ma'am, because the globular particles of the cream render the acute angles of the tea more obtuse" (229).

As if taking revenge on this geometrician for many such offenses at her tea table, Mentoria uses him to make two points. First, she corrects those like Doctor Gregory who advise women, "If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret" (*Father's*, 26). "Knowledge ought not wholly to be concealed," Mentoria says, and her own example would seem to confirm this view. She goes on, however, to warn Louisa that showing off one's wisdom may become "pedantic and ostentatious" (228–29). Apparently on the verge of clichés about female modesty, Mentoria now introduces her *masculine* pedant. Throughout this text, the sound of separate spheres colliding is audible; at this enjoyable juncture one also hears the crash of double standards tumbling down. Second, Mentoria answers once and for all the question of her own intellectual status. Prompted by George's ensuing curiosity about the chemistry of tea and cream, Mentoria proves herself the great man's equal in knowledge of globulars:

> It is a generally received opinion, that all soft liquors, such as oil or cream, are composed of round or globular particles, which cause that smoothness in the taste; whilst, on the contrary, acids, such as vinegar or cyder, consist of acute or sharp particles, which make them irritate the palate: hence he supposed the richness of the cream would render the roughness of the tea more obtuse, which means blunt. (230)

So saying, she revises both her earlier proscription about women and geometry and the entire scenario: not only has the tiresome guest been humbled, but the tea-pouring hostess has taken his place as scientific

authority, and the tea table itself become a laboratory for female scientists of the future. Mentoria's remarks about "epicene instructions" follow immediately on this revision.

In the final dialogue, Mentoria names herself a surgeon of the understanding. "I feel the pulse of your mind," she explains. "Thus you see I exercise the medical function" (276). I would say, in sum, that the figure of the doctor may refer metonymically to the desire throughout *Mentoria* to undergo a rigorous training, to master a body of knowledge, and to gain a public voice. It may figure, in short, the middle-class woman's envy of the course of professional development only just under construction in relation to middle-class men. This is the story Brontë will later tell in *Villette*, whose "rising character," Lucy Snowe, falls in love not only with Dr. John's Grecian beauty but also, as Kate Millett observes, with his vocational success.[23] It is likewise the story implied by Eliot's juxtaposition of Lydgate and Dorothea Brooke,[24] and it does not end well; for notwithstanding Mentoria's triumph, what appears in women's conduct books and novels is more often an abandoned or otherwise ambiguous version of her climb to intellectual predominance. Thus, even as *Pride and Prejudice* carries Elizabeth Bennet up the sweeping drive to Pemberley, it also takes her down the road to knowledge, judgment, and the oracular authority of Demosthenes (or Austen)—in humiliating reverse. Elizabeth's ceding to Darcy of what I see as her authorial status is the subject of chapter 3. In Chapone, too, Mentoria's narrative is considered but disowned, or thought to be unavailable:

> The danger of pedantry and presumption in a woman—of her exciting envy in one sex and jealousy in the other—of her exchanging the graces of imagination for the severity and preciseness of a scholar, would be, I own, sufficient to frighten me from the ambition of seeing my girl remarkable for learning. Such objections are perhaps still stronger with regard to the abstruse sciences. (*Letters*, 156–57)

Yet what exactly does Chapone "own" in this hesitating passage? Cued by the slight uncertainties of "would" and "perhaps," I suggest she confesses to contradictory feelings about "presumption in a woman." For Chapone seems actually to have "the ambition of seeing my girl

remarkable for learning," only to be frightened away from it. But what interests me most is the envy (or is it jealousy?) she admits to feeling in the presence of women like Mentoria. The same denied desire comes through her remark that certain ancient works "are universally said to be entertaining as well as instructive, by those who can read them in their original languages" (*Letters*, 167); as she refers her niece to those "well translated" (167), I hear a sigh that anticipates Maggie Tulliver, envious of Tom's wasted drilling in the classics. A similar wistfulness underlies Lady Pennington's observation that a "sensible woman will soon be convinced, that all the learning her utmost application can make her mistress of, will be, from the difference of education, in many points, inferior to that of a school-boy" (29). Though meaning to rebuke vanity in "reading ladies," the effect of this comment is actually to rebuke the absurd gap in learning between the most sensible, hard-working woman and the merest schoolboy, and to place the blame on their different educations. In Pennington as in Austen and Chapone, the story of Mentoria, the governess-as-pundit, occurs in conflicted forms as that which has been lost or prohibited, but also as that which stealthily returns as a wish, an envy, and perhaps a bitterness.

Chapter 5 will contend that a similar envy of the schoolboy's development is at work in *The Mill on the Floss*. In Eliot, however, Maggie's repeated exclusion from this boy's education produces a degree of estrangement from it. Attraction to Tom's *Bildung* ultimately coincides, I believe, with skepticism, for *The Mill on the Floss* appears to perceive that Mentoria's strategy of male impersonation—taking over what Eliot would recognize as Wilhelm Meister's struggle for mastery—involves a ruthless individualism of which Maggie is morally as well as practically incapable. Like Goethe's and Carlyle's, the apprenticeship I take Murry to represent includes lessons in both class and national domination. Her fifth dialogue, continuing the survey of geography, develops telling correspondences between torrid, frigid, and temperate climates and the upper, lower, and middle classes. As Nancy Armstrong might have predicted, the upshot of this intriguing thermal determinism is praise for the temperate bourgeoisie, whose "manners preserve the medium between the Northern barbarity and Eastern luxury" (136). There are some ominous remarks about international relations as well. Mentoria has earlier condemned Cortez for his "lawless" conquest

(110), yet here she situates England in a zone that just happens to be both the most comfortable and the most moral, conveniently rationalizing its still inchoate imperial project. The domination of darker peoples is intrinsic to Tom Tulliver's *Bildung* as it is to Mentoria's, but I will be arguing that Eliot criticizes as well as collaborates with this impulse. In fact, *The Mill on the Floss* may finally propose an alternative view of development, virtually implicit in the form of the novel and explicit in the epistolary or dialogic form of all but one of my conduct books. In all of these texts the projection of a girl's growing up into dialogue may invite an understanding of identity not as a matter of individual choice and conquest but as a complex set of social relationships.

I want to close this chapter by stressing once again the contradictions I find across the gamut of this period's developmental narratives by women. Lady Pennington's text was originally called "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters." But sometime after her death in 1783, the word *unfortunate* was dropped, so that the subsequent title promised simply "a mother's advice." This title—with the "unfortunate" under erasure, the mother's own sad history muted—nicely represents the double view of maternal destiny that produces discordant accounts of becoming adult in women's handbooks and fiction alike. Pennington's own marriage and motherhood were indeed unfortunate. Enraged when she inherited an independent fortune from her father, Lord Pennington accused his wife of what we can only assume was adultery, and though he offered little evidence, his claims cost Lady Pennington her reputation and her children, from whom she was separated (7). In Pennington, therefore, the counterpointed stories of female formation correspond to the mother's qualified but still conventional encouragement to marry and mother on the one hand and her own calamitous history and powerfully negative example on the other. A remarkably similar tension is central to *Evelina*, whose optimistic courtship-as-education narrative is crossed by the tragic story of Evelina's mother, who was betrayed, like Lady Pennington, by the man she married.

In another sense, too, the mother/mentor's example directly undercuts her lesson, for all of these female-authored texts are founded, and in their official capacities founder, upon the contradiction between

"proper lady" and "woman writer" that Mary Poovey has so compellingly analyzed. Pennington may warn that a girl's reputation is of a delicacy "almost sullied by the breath even of good report" (vii), and Ellis may shudder at how publication reduces a woman's spirit to "an article of sale and bargain, tossed over from the hands of one workman to another, free alike to the touch of the prince and the peasant" (175)—yet the extraordinary fame and popularity of both these writers, the high visibility and wide circulation of their works, tell a different story. If this other story of the woman writer is always present in the biographical circumstances hovering around these books, it also breaks on occasion into the texts themselves. One encounters it, for example, when Ellis launches into an earnest digression on the art of good letter-writing (200–5). Condemning "common-place" and demanding "freshness," she echoes Samuel Johnson's famous admiration for Shakespeare's "just representations of general nature": "Common-place," Ellis asserts, "consists chiefly in speaking of things by their little qualities, rather than their great ones" (201). It can also be glimpsed when Pennington, admonishing her daughters to use their time well, employs a suggestive metaphor:

> Look on every day as a blank sheet of paper put into your hands to be filled up;—remember the characters will remain to endless ages, and that they never can be expunged;—be careful therefore not to write any thing but what you may read with pleasure a thousand years after. (22)

This is, of course, what Evelina literally does, her almost daily letters comprising the bulk of *Evelina*. Staging a woman in the act of writing, *Evelina*, like Austen's *Love and Freindship* and other such epistolary novels and conduct books, implicitly poses its own production history—the fact of female authorship—against its ambivalent rendition of what I have been calling the Mentoria narrative.

There are conflicts about how and into what girls should grow not only within individual texts but also, as I have mentioned, among their various authors. In addition to rejecting Swift's advice about female friendship, Chapone specifically challenges Dr. Gregory's recommendation that wives hide the full extent of their love: "a precept which does no honour to his own sex," she argues, "and which would take

from ours its sweetest charms, simplicity and artless tenderness" ("New-Married," 105). Austen wickedly mocks the whole of Fordyce's *Sermons* by having Mr. Collins read from them "with very monotonous solemnity" until, after three pages, Lydia can no longer contain herself and rudely interrupts (68–69). Austen looks back, as Chapone looks forward, to Wollstonecraft's more extended "Animadversions on Some Writers" in which Gregory and, especially, Fordyce are singled out for urging girls to become docile and dissimulating adults (92–100). "Idle empty words!" Wollstonecraft cries, scorning Fordyce's comparison of women to angels (95). She also criticizes Hester Thrale Piozzi and Mme. de Staël, women who "argue in the same track as men" (102–3), but pays her respects to Chapone, although they do not always agree (105).

Like the courtesy writers reviewed in this chapter, Frances Burney, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot may all be said to "argue in the same track as men," reproducing many orthodoxies about middle-class female formation. Yet I hope in the course of this book to show they argue in other, dissident tracks as well, some of which I have referred to above as the antiromantic, female homosocial, and Mentoria stories. The following chapter will trace the antiromantic narrative of female development in *Evelina*; chapter 3 will argue that the antiromantic theme in *Pride and Prejudice* is at the same time a tragically inverted version of the Mentoria narrative; chapter 4 will look at the suppression but also uncanny persistence of the female homosocial narrative in *Jane Eyre*; and chapter 5 will read *The Mill on the Floss* as a failed appropriation of the *Bildungsroman* that is finally a critique of this genre and its values. To move on at this point to Burney, Austen, Brontë, and Eliot is not to imply that these women, as novelists, were somehow more capable than the less "literary" Pennington, Murry, Chapone, and Ellis of offering alternative plots or articulating oppositional views. I would say, rather, that all these writers, by dramatizing female development in contradictory ways, pointed to the "feminine" as a site of ideological confusion, struggle, and possibility, thereby opening up still more space for debate around this term. Unable to represent a girl's entrance into the world as a simple, graceful passage, attending in diverse ways to its dangers and insisting on its deprivations, they managed collectively to question the routines of growing up female and male and at moments to imagine they could be otherwise.