

ABSTRACT

From Nature to Virtue:
Moral Formation and Community in Novels by Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Gaskell

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This thesis explores how novels by Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Gaskell contest popular Victorian assumptions that moral influence stems from maternal nature. By offering virtue as the true source of moral influence, these authors also challenge Victorian ideas about who should be involved in the moral formation of the young. In this thesis, I first examine how these authors' portrayals of bad mothers demonstrate their belief that maternal instinct is distinct from a woman's ability to be a positive moral influence on her children. Next, I consider how Yonge's and Gaskell's frequent use of virtuous female mentors demonstrates their belief that moral formation is both a communal activity and social duty. Finally, I explore how understanding the virtue that enables moral influence as domestic rather than feminine leads Yonge and Gaskell to portray fathers and male mentors who play a significant role in the moral formation of young people.

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For my grandparents, Paul and Frances Lindsey

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Several popular Victorian conduct manuals, most notably those by Sarah Stickney Ellis, relate moral influence, an individual's ability to instill moral values in another, to maternal nature and therefore contend that the work of the moral cultivation of children should primarily fall to mothers. However, several modern scholars such as Natalie McNight, Elizabeth Langland, and Sally Shuttleworth have noted the disconnect between this common idealization of the mother's role in moral formation and the frequency with which Victorian fiction writers portray selfish, silly, or even wicked mothers. This contradiction leads me to ask whether or not modern scholars have accurately understood the way some Victorians viewed the relationship between maternal nature and moral influence and what some Victorians may have believed were other sources of moral influence. In examining novels by Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Gaskell, I will not only recover a source of moral influence often ignored by modern scholars, but also draw attention to how attributing moral influence to this alternative source challenges popular Victorian conceptions about who can and should be involved in the moral formation of the young.

While social historians disagree about how much family roles and relationships changed in the centuries leading up to the nineteenth century, few would challenge the idea that the cultivation of the moral life in the young was prominent in Victorian cultural dialogues about family life. The nineteenth century saw the convergence of multiple

reasons for the considerable emphasis on how morality could be instilled in young people. Many orthodox Christians in Victorian England focused on the spiritual importance of moral formation. They believed in the doctrine of original sin, which holds that children are born into the sin of Adam and therefore display signs of their sinful nature from infancy. In light of the high infant and child mortality rates, parents who believed in this doctrine felt the heavy burden of their children's eternal destiny. Since the child's salvation might be at stake, these parents focused on teaching their children spiritual truths and right action from an early age in the hopes of helping them overcome their evil tendencies and find the way of eternal salvation. Other Victorians, such as empiricists influenced by John Locke, David Hume, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, argued that children were born as blank slates—innocent, angelic, and untouched by the world. Since children came into the world pure, parents were responsible for actively nurturing their children's virtue and instilling a system of morality in their children. Only a bad upbringing would destroy the goodness within the child. Hence early influences on the child such as education and the health of the parent-child bond shaped the adult (Kane 45-50; Houlbrooke 32, 140-145).

While neither the Christian nor empiricist justification for greater emphasis on the moral formation of the young was new in the 19th century, the audience to whom the call to moral cultivation came to be addressed did shift from earlier centuries. Social historians Hugh Cunningham, Robert Shoemaker, and John Tosh all note that while parenting manuals had addressed fathers during the Renaissance and then began to address both parents for several centuries, they generally only addressed mothers by the 19th century (42-44; 122-128; 91). Davidoff and Hall offer one explanation for this

phenomenon. Whereas work and home had often occupied the same physical space in the late 1700s, by the 1830s and 40s it was all but assumed that they were separate. Women, children, and servants occupied the domestic space while men were an “absent presence, there for direct and command but physically occupied elsewhere for most of their time” (181). Nineteenth-century conduct book writer Sarah Stickney Ellis extended the idea of separate spheres beyond the mere occupation of different physical spaces, and this idea came to affect the understanding of men and women’s role in the formation of their children. She states, “Men are in general too deeply engaged themselves in affairs of public interest, to allow of their exercising any very beneficial influence over their children in this respect” (202). Elizabeth Badinter and John Tosh offer an additional explanation for the tendency towards viewing mothers over and above fathers as the most important player in the moral formation of children—the association of mothers with a natural propensity for nurture and virtue and the association of fathers with less idealized qualities. Both scholars attribute the origin of this idea at least partially to Rousseau. In *Emile, or on Education*, for example, Rousseau argues that mothers are the key to moral and social reform because of their special capacity for nurture, particularly through the provision of physical nourishment by breastfeeding:

But when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state; [. . .] Thus the cure of this one evil [the practice of hiring wet nurses] would work a wide-spread reformation; nature would regain her rights. When women become good mothers, men will be good husbands and fathers. (22)

Rousseau later associates mothers with an instinctive blind affection for their children, which he believes to be beneficial, while associating fathers with ambition, avarice, tyranny, mistaken foresight, neglect, and harshness (12). Hence, maternal nature and the

mother's supposed natural propensity toward virtue served as the major rationale for the emphasis on separate spheres which resulted in the mother being the primary, if not only, player in the process of a child's moral formation.

However prominent the idealization of the relationship between maternal nature and moral influence was in the prevailing Victorian culture, several issues arise which force questions about how many Victorians actually hold to this belief. First, there is the contradiction mentioned earlier between the cultural rhetoric endorsing the idea that good mothering, and hence the ability to cultivate virtues in children, comes naturally to women and the fact that good mothers prove hard to come by in nineteenth-century British fiction. Second, because mothers often died before their children reached adulthood during this period, linking moral formation to maternal instinct would doom numerous children to life without a fit moral guide. Third, writers' continual portrayals of mentors shaping young adults' character imply the authors' belief that these relationships too were an effective means of cultivating moral virtue. Finally, a continued dialogue concerning the father's role in the child's moral life suggests that some Victorians were indeed questioning the emphasis on the mother's role in moral formation if it meant excluding the father's involvement. These issues indicate that modern scholars may need to consider what competing views Victorians held regarding the relationship between good mothering, nature, and moral formation. Here I will propose three ways of looking at this relationship.

The first view, *mothering as innate*, as I will call it, is related to the first definition of "natural" in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*: "Existing or present by nature; inherent in the very constitution of a person or thing; innate; not acquired or assumed."

Many modern scholars presume that *mothering as innate* is the position of most Victorians, and indeed it undoubtedly was the position of some. Peter Gaskell, who, to my knowledge, is not related to Elizabeth Gaskell, exemplifies this position in his 1833 study entitled *The Manufacturing Population of England*. He writes,

In all ages, in all countries, in all stages of civilization—in war, in pestilence, shipwreck, or famine—whether roaming through the jungle or over the prairie—whether traversing the expanse of the continent or dwelling in the far off and isolated island—woman has ever been found with the hallowed character of a mother, and exhibiting, for the sake of love of her offspring, an abandonment of self—a pouring forth of her most holy affections, which has been the brightest and purest portion of her history. (144)

Peter Gaskell goes on to argue that even a woman who became a mother isolated in a wilderness who had never been shaped by culture or education would lavish her child with the same tenderness and selfless care as a civilized woman would. In this view, mothering is linked with instinct and an innate propensity for sacrificial love and nurture, qualities that distinguish women from men. In Peter Gaskell's view, these innate maternal characteristics make women perfectly equipped, not only for the daily tasks of childcare, but also for the moral and spiritual formation of the child. Sarah Ellis shares Peter Gaskell's belief that maternal instinct is even stronger than the universal instinct for self-preservation. Ellis too holds that maternal instinct, or maternal love, as it is sometimes called, is a "Divine Providence-inspired natural responsibility" given for a significant purpose, children's moral formation (*The Mothers of England* 1-2). Therefore, because of the mother's powerful and unique instinctual love for her children, a mother can shape her children in a way that other people cannot. In this first view then, nature, not culture or education, is the source of good mothering and maternal moral influence. It is instinctual.

A second view of mothering in its relationship to nature is *mothering as a social construct*. The polar opposite of *mothering as innate*, this view holds that what good mothering is and whether women conform to that definition depend entirely on cultural and social construction. “Nature” is not involved in it at all. While *mothering as a social construct* is primarily a modern understanding of this relationship, the seeds of this view had undoubtedly already been planted in certain Victorian circles. In her 1981 *The Myth of Motherhood*, Elisabeth Badinter examines motherhood from the 14th to the 20th centuries and comes to the conclusion that the self-sacrifice associated with the idea of maternal instinct in the 19th century does not come naturally to women at all. The evidence she gathered from her home country, France, from the 14th to the 17th centuries suggests instead that what actually comes naturally to women is self-centeredness. A significant portion of this evidence relates to capable women’s refusals to breastfeed their children in spite of their knowledge that breastfeeding would significantly decrease their child’s risk of dying before age one, as well as women’s willingness to have their children live far away from them for most of their childhood, whether with a country wet nurse or at a distant boarding school. While Badinter devotes a significant portion of her book to proving that selfish mothers existed in large numbers in certain times and places throughout the last several centuries of history, she, of course, acknowledges that good mothers existed alongside them. Her point in all of this is to show that at certain times and in certain places in history maternal instinct and love could be hard to find because the society did not value or encourage these traits, whereas in other times and places they flourished more successfully because the culture as a whole embraced them.

It is certain that different Victorians fell at varying places on the scale between the two extremes of *mothering as innate* and *mothering as a social construct*, and examining the weaknesses of each of these positions helps direct us to an alternative position. First, *mothering as innate* ignores the reality of the past and present (i.e., infanticide, child abuse, and abandonment) as well as the startling evidence Badinter offers in her book. Clearly, some mothers do not love their children, or if they do, certainly do not sacrifice themselves in the way Peter Gaskell suggests they would under any circumstance. Second, if this view really was held by nineteenth-century British conduct book writers, their message and purpose are at odds. If self-sacrificial, nurturing mothering comes naturally without any influence from culture or education, why would it would be necessary to write books teaching women how to mother well? Finally, if most Victorian fiction writers held this view, then why do they include portraits of so many bad mothers in what they would otherwise claim are pictures of everyday life?¹

While understanding good mothering as entirely socially constructed does not appear to have been a popular view in nineteenth-century England, the evidence Badinter presents that not all women are born good mothers offers a significant challenge to the belief that good mothering is innate. At the same time, as I discuss in more detail below, even if Victorians did not believe that mothering came completely naturally to women, the idea that nature was a contributing factor was still popular. If nothing else, it rested on women's anatomical ability to give birth and give nourishment. As a study of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Yonge will reveal, some concept of nature in relationship

¹ In *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930*, Laurie Langbauer notes how authors like Gaskell present themselves as depicting everyday life in their novels. For other possible reasons ideal mothers are so frequently absent from fiction, see Barbara Thaden's *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction* 4.

to good mothering still arises even in the works of Victorian writers who clearly do not fall into the camp of *good mothering as innate*. The other challenge to Badinter's view of good mothering as a social construct comes primarily from more recent historical studies. Other social historians such as Ralph A. Houlbrooke, Tanya Evans, and Robert Brink Shoemaker are not certain that maternal instinct and love ever diminished to the extent that Badinter suggests in any particular time or place. They believe instead that at any given time in history one could find both women who deeply loved their children and sacrificed for them and also women who displayed total callousness toward their children. The evidence they have gathered suggests that, in spite of the existence of both kinds of mothers, most societies consistently consider loving sacrificial mothers both the norm and the ideal, while they consider callous, unloving mothers abnormal and unnatural.

Since *mothering as innate* offers a view that is often contradicted by Victorian fiction in which mothers are either shown to be unfit parents or in need of education to become better mothers, and since *mothering as a social construct* is often contradicted by the vast amount of "nature" talk in both Victorian fiction and Victorian conduct manuals, I present a third view on the relationship between mothering and nature that lies somewhere between these two extremes. I will call this position *good mothering as virtue*. An alternate definition of "natural" in the *OED* helps clarify this view: "Based upon innate moral feeling; instinctively or immediately felt to be right and fair, though not prescribed by any enactment or formal compact; having a claim to be followed or acted on even if not legally prescribed."² Good mothering is natural, not in the sense that

² This is definition 4 in the *OED*.

women are born good mothers, but in the sense that people are born with an innate moral feeling that mothers *should* be good.

In a sense, good mothering is a universally acknowledged moral ideal, but one which individual mothers may or may not reach. In this way, good mothering is a virtue that must be developed. Aristotle offers the classic understanding of virtue that many Victorians would have been familiar with and that will help clarify my definition of *good mothering as virtue*. At the beginning of Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlines two kinds of virtue, intellectual and moral. He notes that neither kind of virtue arises in people innately, but that intellectual virtue is developed through education while moral virtue is formed through habit. Aristotle points out that trying to train anything to do something against its nature is like trying to make a falling stone act against the force of gravity. A stone will never fall up instead of down. He goes on to explain, “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect [in them] by habit” (Book II. 1. 23-25). I argue in this thesis that many Victorians understood good mothering as a virtue in the same way. Like any virtue, good mothering is something women are adapted by nature to do, but also like any virtue, good mothering is something women must both learn and practice.

Sarah Lewis, another major writer of women’s conduct literature and author of *A Woman’s Mission*, envisions the relationship between nature and mothering in terms of virtue. For Lewis, love based on natural instinct and love based on moral principle interplay to create ideal maternal love, but remain two distinct elements. On one hand, Lewis says that maternal instinct is a beautiful gift of Providence in that it can induce a

woman to an act such as caring for a sick child at the risk of her own health, but maternal instinct does not induce a woman to deny her child's unreasonable desires or go against her child's will even when it is in the child's best interests to do so. Lewis argues that maternal affection based on moral principle, in contrast, seeks the child's moral and ultimate good. To emphasize the difference between the two loves—love based on natural instinct and love based on moral principle—Lewis states, “The natural instinct will prompt the weakest and most criminal of women to confront pain, danger, death itself, for her offspring, but it will not enable a mother, unaided by other principles, to correct one failing, to subdue one passion, to avoid one selfish or criminal indulgence, for its sake” (87). Hence moral maternal love, not the instinctive maternal love, is the love that offers the mother moral influence over her children. In contrast to Peter Gaskell and Sarah Ellis's view, Lewis holds that the natural instinct is not only unrelated to a woman's moral influence over her child, it actually can and often does hinder a woman's positive moral influence on her child.

Lewis believes that maternal instinct can easily result in what Rousseau earlier described as blind affection. Lewis argues, “The fondness of some mothers for their children is simply the selfish gratification of an animal passion, regardless of anything but its own present enjoyment, and supremely regardless of the ultimate happiness of its object. It is the transferred idolatry of a selfish nature to a second self” (85). Lewis holds that the selfish, unrestrained behavior of the parent toward the child will produce a similar type of behavior in the child. Hence, mothers who indulge their unchecked fondness for their children without exhibiting any moderation or moral restraint will most

likely raise children who fail to display any more moral restraint than do their mothers (87-89).

Lewis believes that part of the reason some women fail to display this moral restraint in regard to their instinct is that the beautiful and admirable forms maternal instinct sometimes takes cause women to mistakenly believe that instinctive maternal love can accomplish more than it actually can. The purpose of instinctive maternal love is primarily the physical preservation of the child, not the moral development of the child. While it sometimes works alongside a mother's virtue by allowing mothers to attract, rather than force, children to obedience and virtue, expecting it alone to shape children into moral selves is unfounded. The reason relates to the same distinction Aristotle makes between a passion and a virtue. Lewis states, "Inasmuch as it is a passion, it has no merit; and can only have merit when, by an union with the moral sense, it has become a virtue!" (90). In Lewis's view, a passion is an unchecked animal instinct—one's instinctive response to internal and external stimuli. Virtue, in contrast, is the application of moral sense to one's response to those stimuli—the transformation of one's automatic reactions through the cultivation of good habits. The ability to apply moral sense to one's responses is the quality that distinguishes humans from the animal kingdom. Thus, if mothers want to develop something other than an eat-or-be-eaten ethic in their children, they must cultivate their moral sense, or virtue, but to do that, they must first cultivate moral sense in their own lives.

Lewis emphasizes this view that moral maternity, in contrast to maternal instinct, must be cultivated within the mother. Moral maternity, she writes, "demand[s] sacrifices; but sacrifices which the instinct would never prompt, and which love itself will not

always make easy. It demands, in short, the spirit of self-renunciation, not only in the physical, but the moral nature of the mother” (92). Because moral maternity is not natural, or innate, some mothers, Lewis argues, are not even aware of its existence and the responsibilities it entails. Hence, she offers the following test for a mother’s possession of this essential trait:

A mother can never be sure that she is possessed of the spirit of moral maternity, except she be as willing to make moral sacrifices to her children as physical; to give up the cherished indulgence of faults and follies as cheerfully as nature prompts her to give up bodily ease and comfort for its sake: in a word, except her regard for its ultimate moral destiny transcend by far her anxiety for its physical well-being. (91)

Clearly, the development of moral maternity necessitates a shift from the innate instinct to protect one’s children to the learned virtue of making moral sacrifices for one’s children.

Other writers and thinkers from the nineteenth-century agree with Lewis’s assertion that moral influence finds its source in virtue. For example, Charles Bray, close friend of George Eliot, asserts in the preface to the London edition of his *The Education of the Feelings* that the one essential rule in the moral formation of children is “to be ourselves what we would wish our children to be” (12) because the parent’s job is “to make right principles living realities, by their own obedience to them, and to gain such an attractive power over the minds of their children, that they, too, shall be brought into the same subservience” (185). Because of the importance of virtue in the parents, Bray contends that the purpose of his book is not so much to assist in the direct education of children as to contribute to the re-education of their parents.

Bray’s assertion that part of the parent’s goal is to gain an “attractive power” over their children’s minds points to the way moralists like Lewis and himself view virtue

working to shape the hearts and actions of those around them. For Bray, moral growth requires both knowledge of what is right and a desire to do it. Therefore, learning to love what is good by seeing the beauty of its enactment in individuals is what attracts and transforms character. John Foster's description of the workings of personal influence from his 1823 *Essays, in a Series of Letters* offers a vision of moral influence at work:

In some instances we have been sensible, in a very short time, of a powerful force operating on our opinions, tastes, and habits, and throwing them into a new order. This effect is inevitable, if a young susceptible mind happens to become familiarly acquainted with a person in whom a strongly individual cast of character is sustained and dignified by uncommon mental resources; and it may be found that, generally, the greatest measure of effect has been produced by the influence of a very small number of persons; often of one only, whose extended and interesting mind had more power to surround and assimilate a young and ingenuous being, than the collective influence of a multitude of persons, whose characters were moulded in the manufactory of custom, and sent forth like images of clay of kindred shape and varnish from a pottery. (18)

The key to moral formation, then, according to this model, is the influence of a small number of virtuous individuals, sometimes only one, on the heart and mind of a young person.

Since *good mothering as virtue* envisions virtue, not maternal instinct, as the impetus behind moral influence, it recognizes that while virtuous mothers can be the influential person Foster describes, so can fathers and other members of the child's community as well. This view holds that good mothering is natural in the sense that it is the ideal, or what ought to be, but recognizes that the ideal does not always become reality. It takes into account that mothers, like other individuals, will be flawed and at varying stages on the path toward virtue. By disassociating moral influence from an innate maternal quality, it also takes into account that, although women might die before their children reach adulthood, the absence of the mother does not inevitably result in the

retardation of children's moral development. Other virtuous members of children's communities can participate in their moral formation. Hence, biological fathers and non-biologically related mentors, male and female, can not only be reinserted into the process of a child's moral formation, but may even be essential to the process. Furthermore, when the work of moral formation is seen as a communal activity rather than a responsibility relegated to a single individual, various members of a child's community are able to compensate for one another's flaws in order to cultivate greater balance and virtue in the child.

In this thesis, I argue that Yonge and Gaskell adhere to the view of *good mothering as virtue*, in other words, that virtue rather than maternal nature is the source of moral influence. This view leads them to show individuals within the community working in tandem to cultivate virtue in the young. In the second chapter of this thesis, I argue that these authors' representations of flawed fictional mothers challenge the popular Victorian concept of *good mothering as innate* and demonstrates their view that virtue is the source of both good mothering and moral influence. In the third and fourth chapters, I contend that the prominence in Yonge and Gaskell's novels of virtuous non-mother mentors, both female and male, as agents of moral formation in their heroes and heroines' lives not only reiterates the idea that moral influences stems from virtue rather than maternal nature, but also suggests that moral formation is both a communal activity and a social as well as familial responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO

Mothers, Nature, Virtue, and Moral Formation

Charlotte Yonge's *Heartsease* (1854) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866) each feature selfish, detached mothers whose vices negatively affect the moral development of their children. Like other portrayals of wicked mothers in nineteenth-century British literature, these fictional mothers contradict the idea common in Victorian culture that mothers are endowed with a special nature or instinct that makes them especially fit for the task of cultivating virtue in the young. An examination of the way Yonge and Gaskell each portray flawed fictional mothers suggests that these two authors are challenging the culture's prevailing idea that good mothering, and hence the moral formation of young people, finds its source in nature, or maternal instinct. While Yonge maintains a belief in maternal instinct and implies that Lady Martindale, the flawed mother in her novel, has this instinct, an examination of this woman and her relationship to her children demonstrates that the mere possession of this innate quality does not enable her to have a positive moral influence over her children. In contrast, Gaskell denaturalizes maternal instinct, but still uses her portrayal of bad mothering to imply that moral influence does not find its source in an innate, static quality like instinct, but instead in virtue, a fluid characteristic that can be cultivated in children and adults alike.

Yonge's Christian beliefs contribute to her counter-cultural understanding of the relationship between maternal instinct, virtue, and moral influence and reflect a

philosophy that closely resembles that of Sarah Lewis. For Yonge, a Tractarian in the same vein as John Keble, the fall of Adam and Eve leads to an intrinsic brokenness in all people caused by the entrance of sin into the world. Consequently, people's instincts or innate tendencies—what Aristotle refers to as passions—are flawed. This does not necessarily mean they are bad in and of themselves, only that they need to be tempered and sometimes redirected. Maternal instinct, then, like other innate qualities, has been stained by sin and must be used rightly in order to benefit children's moral development. This view recalls Lewis's assertion, "Inasmuch as [maternal instinct] is a passion, it has no merit; and can only have merit when, by an union with the moral sense, it has become a virtue!" (90). Therefore, an innate quality such as maternal instinct can become a virtue—the virtue Lewis calls moral maternity—only when a moral principle such as self-control is applied to it. Hence, Yonge scholar Gavin Budge asserts that Lewis and Yonge both emphasize the virtue of self-control because they see it as the only way women can exercise their moral influence (82).

In this same line of thinking, Tractarians like Yonge view the Christian life as a journey of disciplining one's passions in order to cultivate Christ-like virtues. In Christian terms, one's old nature is to be replaced by a new nature out of which moral actions arise. Budge points out, "The Tractarians emphasized that perception of the desirable course of action might be unconsciously determined by personality traits, so that morality might ultimately consist less in the actions taken than in the attempt to become a different kind of person" (30). The passions people unconsciously allow to control their behavior define their character, and, therefore, virtue can only be cultivated

when people apply self-control to these passions in order to transform their own character and enable them to transform the character of others.

The themes of applying self-control and striving against one's own nature as well as the theme of how parenting affects the moral development of children recur throughout Charlotte Yonge's body of work. *Heartsease, or The Brother's Wife* is a representative example. This novel brings these two themes together in a portrayal of two very different mothers. The novel centers on Violet, whose struggle against her own weak, passive nature results in a powerful moral influence, not only over her own children, but over her husband's family. A subplot of the novel explores how Violet's mother-in-law Lady Martindale's failure to overcome her nature affects the moral lives of her own now grown children. While I explore Violet's journey to virtue and the resulting moral influence in the next chapter, here I argue that Lady Martindale's failure to overcome her passions not only leads to the suppression of her maternal instinct, it also disables her from acting as a moral influence on her children and grandchildren even after her maternal instinct has been recovered.

Lady Martindale, orphaned as a child, comes to be raised by her wealthy, powerful, and controlling aunt, Mrs. Nesbit. Mrs. Nesbit's determination to give Lady Martindale every advantage in life through the cultivation of numerous accomplishments and by introducing her into the best society eventually results in Lady Martindale's marriage to Lord Martindale. Lady Martindale soon gives birth to three children, a son named John and two younger daughters. While the novel offers only sprinklings of details about the early history of the Martindale family, it alludes to a tragedy that occurred during this period of their lives, explaining many of the dynamics of their

family that drive the numerous subplots of the story. The tragedy occurred when Lord and Lady Martindale left their children with governesses for an extended period of time in order to accompany Mrs. Nesbit on a trip to the continent. Each of their two daughters became ill and died in quick succession. Upon hearing the news of her daughters' deaths, Lady Martindale, then pregnant with her fourth child, went into preterm labor, putting both her life and the life of her infant son in danger. When Lord Martindale tried to return to England with the baby in order to seek help from English physicians, the child died during the journey. While it is difficult to determine what kind of mother Lady Martindale had been to the older children before this tragedy, the novel emphasizes that she became a detached uninterested mother to the children, Arthur and Theodora, born after these events as well as to the older son who survived, John.

Though most of the novel portrays Lady Martindale as an emotionally detached, uninvolved mother, various incidents throughout the novel suggest that Lady Martindale had felt an instinctive maternal love for her children—the kind of love that seeks to protect her children when their lives are in danger but does little else. The conversations relating Lady Martindale's emotional detachment from her living children to her grief over the loss of her three dead children suggest that she did indeed feel a natural maternal love for the children who died. Furthermore, instances in which Lady Martindale expresses concern about the health of her grandchildren recall the loss of her own son and daughters and suggest her maternal love for those children. In addition, the novel offers rare instances in which she demonstrates love for her living children as well. When John, Lady Martindale's oldest son, loses his fiancé and becomes seriously ill, she visits him and nurses him. For John, over thirty-years-old, this experience serves as an affirmation

of his mother's love for him, albeit the first affirmation in many, many years. Theodora has a similar experience when she is seriously injured in a fire. Lady Martindale's nursing of her during the aftermath of this injury finally assures Theodora of her mother's love.

Though these instances reveal the existence of Lady Martindale's instinctive maternal love, the fact that her children do not become aware of this love until their early adult years hinders their moral development. While John was fortunate to have spent a great deal of time with the local rector's family, which counterbalanced his parents' failings, both Arthur and Theodora face serious moral struggles in their young adult years without parental guidance. Arthur chooses friends unwisely and incurs significant debt because of his gambling habits, all the while neglecting his young wife and children. Theodora, who also chooses friends unwisely, has such an unfulfilled longing for affection that she often succumbs to the temptation of coquetry in order to invite the attentions of men who make her feel loved. Theodora directly relates her mother's indifference to her own questionable behavior. As a young adult she asserts, "If people never concern themselves about their children, they need not expect the same from them as if they had brought them up properly" (281). Predictably, after years and years of little parental involvement in her life, Theodora balks at her parents' attempts to wield authority over her in her early adult years. Her strong will gets the best of her as she refuses to yield to anyone. While taking full responsibility for her actions in the end, Theodora recognizes that her moral struggles would have been significantly diminished if her parents had offered her more guidance as a child. She complains specifically of her father: "He never had any moral power over me. He never convinced me, nor led me to

yield my will” (281). By this time, because of Lady Martindale’s extreme detachment, Theodora does not even acknowledge the lack of moral guidance from her mother. Her mother is irrelevant in that respect.

The insufficiency of Lady Martindale’s maternal instinct to prepare her to be a positive moral influence on her children harkens back to Lewis’s distinction between maternal instinct and moral influence and also supports my assertion that while good mothering is consistently seen as the ideal, some Victorians make a sharp distinction between maternal nature and a woman’s actual ability to mother well. In this novel, Lady Martindale’s failure to mother her children well is not attributed to her lack of maternal instinct but rather to her lack of virtue or moral principle. Several somewhat related character flaws not only signal the underdevelopment of Lady Martindale’s virtue, but also inhibit her ability to instill virtue in her children.

The first of Lady Martindale’s flaws, selfishness, exhibits itself in her protection of her own interests over those of her children. By emotionally detaching herself from her living children, Lady Martindale hopes to insulate herself from any more emotional pain such as she experienced after the loss of her other children. However, by protecting herself in this way, she fails to protect her children emotionally and morally. For Yonge, protecting the self over others is a failure to exemplify the most fundamental Christian virtue, self-sacrifice. In her view, this virtue is closely linked to moral maternity, or the kind of mothering that enables a woman to have a moral influence on her children. In her instructional book *Womankind* (1877), Yonge suggests that Mary, the mother of Jesus, exemplifies this kind of self-sacrificial maternity to the extent that it becomes the antidote to Eve’s transgression (*Womankind* 4). Mary’s maternity serves as the antidote

to Eve's sin because while Eve, the mother of all mankind, acted selfishly in her desire for everlasting life and knowledge, Mary acted selflessly by unreservedly pouring love into the Son she knew she would soon lose.

The self-sacrifice and trust exemplified in Violet, Lady Martindale's daughter-in-law, links her to Mary even while her maternal behavior contrasts Lady Martindale's. The following conversation between John Martindale and Violet illustrates the sacrificial nature of Mary's motherhood and demonstrates the way Violet envisions herself as emulating Mary's example:

“Do you remember,” [John] added, “that picture you described to me this time last year, the Ghirlandajo's Madonna?”

“Oh, yes,” said Violet, pleased and surprised.

“She does not hold her son back from the cross, does she, *though the sword was to pierce through her own heart?*”

“Yes, but that was for the greatest reason.”

“Indeed, it was; but He who was a Child, the firstborn Son of His mother, does not afflict your baby without cause. He has laid on him as much of His cross as he can bear; *and if it be yours also*, you know that it is blessed to you both, and will be turned to glory.”

“The cross!” said Violet; adding after some thought, “Perhaps thinking of that might make one bear one's own troubles better.”

(*Heartsease* 125; emphasis added)

Here John and Violet envision Mary willingly offering her Son up to the cross in spite of the pain she knew she would experience. Her Son's suffering was not only His own. It was His mother's as well. While Lady Martindale seeks to avoid further suffering by emotionally detaching herself from her children, Violet opens herself up to the possibility of suffering with, for, and because of her children. She begins to see these sacrifices, whether mundane or monumental, as daily “crosses” which not only serve to liken her to her Savior, but also serve to further her progress along the path to earthly virtue and eternal glory. As the Violet plot plays out, it becomes obvious that her selfless

willingness to sacrifice for the best interests of her children not only serves to transform her character but also serves to make her an important moral influence on the lives of others. In contrast, Lady Martindale's failure to sacrificially risk more pain for the sake of meeting her children's needs results in their moral instability.

A second major flaw in Lady Martindale's character that signals her lack of virtue is something Yonge calls the "idolatry of affection." Yonge's catechism-style commentary on the first commandment included in a series called "Conversations on the Catechism" in her magazine *The Monthly Packet* explains this kind of idolatry:

Miss O. I think there is one sort of idolatry which is a particular danger to women, and, therefore, had better speak of it here—I mean that of over-reliance upon some one person. It was part of our punishment that women should cling to man with a sense of her inferiority, and this often leads to the temptation of being blindly led, so fastening our admiration on those we love as to put them, as it were, between us and God.
Audrey. The idolatry of affection. (qtd. in Budge 186)

Even though Yonge suggests that women most often succumb to the temptation of the idolatry of affection in their relationships to men, Lady Martindale's relationship with her aunt Mrs. Nesbit reflects the same over-reliance Yonge describes. Lady Martindale clings to her aunt with a sense of inferiority, allows herself to be blindly led by her, and allows her admiration for her aunt to come between her and what I believe Yonge would assert is her God-given duty to mother her children well.

Lady Martindale's sense of inferiority to her aunt signals a lack of moral courage which hinders her ability to be a good mother. In many instances, Lady Martindale defers to Mrs. Nesbit's opinions because she does not believe that her judgments hold as much value as Mrs. Nesbit's. She, therefore, fears contradicting her aunt even when she might believe Mrs. Nesbit is wrong. Lady Martindale's sense of inferiority to Mrs.

Nesbit and consequential allegiance often results in her blind submission to Mrs. Nesbit's leadership even at the expense of her children's well-being. Lady Martindale displays this submission to Mrs. Nesbit induced by her sense of inferiority when she first meets Violet, newlywed to her youngest son, Arthur. Lady Martindale initially praises Violet's beauty to Arthur as a way of affirming his choice for a wife, but she soon begins "to qualify her praise," presumably because she "caught her aunt's eye" (34). Arthur, who is desperately seeking approval from his family for himself and his young wife, is angered by her change in tone, especially since he recognizes that it is a response rooted in his mother's wrongheaded belief in her own inferiority to Mrs. Nesbit and her resulting blind allegiance to Mrs. Nesbit over and above what would seem to be her more rightful allegiance to her son.

The events surrounding the death of the Martindales' infant son stress the way this aspect of Lady Martindale's idolatry of Mrs. Nesbit has affected her ability to mother well. When Lady Martindale gave birth to her son prematurely in Europe shortly after receiving the news of her daughters' deaths, both her life and the life of her infant were in danger. In Mrs. Nesbit's recounting of the events she avows, "We were in great alarm for her [. . .] and the poor child was a miserable little thing, and pined away till we thought it best to send him home to be under English treatment" (143). Though Mrs. Nesbit says "we," it seems likely that she may have been the only one involved in the making of this decision. Further reading reveals that Lady Martindale's lack of action is not necessarily due to any lack of concern for her children, but instead was the result of "a fortunate arrangement" of her aunt (143). Presumably Mrs. Nesbit had decreed that Lady Martindale should stay in Europe with her and Lady Martindale had

unquestioningly submitted. The relationship between Lady Martindale's blind submission to Mrs. Nesbit's arrangements and her infant son's death on the return trip to England can be inferred from a comment Lord Martindale later makes to Violet when she worries about whether or not she is doing enough for her own ailing child. In an apparent reflection on the deaths of his own children he assures Violet that in holding her son and caring for him herself, she is "doing more for him than all the physicians in England" (170). The implication seems to be that if Lady Martindale had regarded her duty of caring for her child as more important than her obedience to her beloved aunt, the child might have survived as Violet's child does.

While Lady Martindale's sense of inferiority and blind submission demonstrate two of the characteristics Yonge associates with idolatry, the novel also offers examples of the way Lady Martindale's affection for her aunt typifies the more conventional aspects of Yonge's definition of idolatry of affection, loving a person so much as to put him or her between oneself and God, or in the case of Lady Martindale, between oneself and one's God-ordained duty. Indeed, the Martindales' oldest son, John, attributes the underdevelopment of his younger sister Theodora's character in part to Lady Martindale's keeping up her own accomplishments at Mrs. Nesbit's insistence instead of investing herself in the cultivation of her daughter's virtue. The observations several characters make about the difference in Lady Martindale's behavior when Mrs. Nesbit is not present highlight the fact that much of her failure to nurture her children and grandchildren results from her idolatry of her aunt. John, for instance, attributes his mother's first displays of affection toward him at age thirty to absence of his aunt. The weeks he spent alone with his mother "taught [him] what she is, away from [her] aunt"

(140). In the same way, a moment alone with Lady Martindale convinces Violet that “there was a warm current beneath, only stifled by Mrs. Nesbit’s power over [Lady Martindale’s] docile character” (289). These instances demonstrate that Lady Martindale’s idolatry of affection for her aunt stands between her and her duty to nurture her children.

Perhaps Mrs. Nesbit’s death, however, serves as the most striking evidence of Lady Martindale’s idolatrous affection for her aunt and the effect it had on her ability to mother her children well. When a fire destroys the Martindale family home, Theodora rescues the fatally injured Mrs. Nesbit but sustains serious injuries herself in the process. In spite of the grave state of her own daughter’s health, Lady Martindale initially refuses to leave her dead aunt’s side. Yonge does not shy away from using the language of idolatry to describe the debilitating grief Lady Martindale felt for her aunt. Yonge writes, “It was as if her aunt had been her one idea in life, and without her she could turn to nothing else” (344). As Violet presses Lady Martindale to leave the dead body of Mrs. Nesbit and come to Theodora, a battle between her love for her daughter and her love for her aunt takes place within Lady Martindale. Only when she finally breaks down and grieves the death of this woman who had been both idol and mother to her is she able to finally go and nurture her own child. Released from Mrs. Nesbit’s hold, Lady Martindale “wished to do everything for [Theodora] herself—would hardly admit Violet’s assistance—and took every care, with skillfulness that was marvelous in one trained to ineffectiveness” (340). Hence, Mrs. Nesbit’s death allows Theodora to receive “the first taste of a mother’s love” and rests in it “with a grateful face of childlike peace” (340). Clearly, Lady Martindale’s unwarranted allegiance to her aunt led to the negligence of

her duty to nurture her children, and this is only reemphasized by the fact that only after Mrs. Nesbit's death can Lady Martindale finally grieve the deaths of her long-dead children—an “outpouring of a pent-up grief, that had never dared to come forth” (346).

Though the discussion of Lady Martindale's self-protection after the death of her three children and idolatry of her aunt establishes the fact that Lady Martindale's failure to mother well relates to her own weaknesses of character, Mrs. Nesbit's death and the subsequent reawakening of Lady Martindale's instinctive maternal love for her grown children still does not make her a moral mother in Yonge's view. The moral frailty that made her susceptible to Mrs. Nesbit's control is still present. If Lady Martindale's relationship with her granddaughter Helen is any sign, she still does not grasp the moral element to maternal love even though the instinctual aspect of her love has been renewed. After Arthur finds little Helen ordering the obedient Lady Martindale around, he jokes to Theodora:

“Helen has succeeded to my aunt's vacant throne, and my mother is never so hurt as when Violet interferes with any of her vagaries. The other day, when Violet carried her off roaring at not being allowed to turn Grandmamma's work-box inside out, her ladyship made a formal remonstrance to me on letting the poor child's spirit be broken by strictness.” (471)

While this statement is partially made in fun, it does point out that the same character flaw that made Lady Martindale vulnerable to her aunt's control hinders her from being a positive moral influence in the life of her granddaughter. She passively takes orders from little Helen in the same way she took orders from Mrs. Nesbit. Though Lady Martindale's love has been reawakened especially for her granddaughter Helen, she still does not understand what Yonge, Lewis, and others like them so adamantly insist upon—that sometimes instinctive maternal love needs to be tempered by moral principle in order

to do what is best for the child's ultimate moral good. As Theodora retorts to Arthur's comments above, "I hope you told her that some spirits would be glad to have been broken long ago" (471).

While her interactions with Helen make clear that Lady Martindale does not understand the moral element in parenting, Violet affirms the goodness of Lady Martindale's instinctive love for Helen while also distinguishing it from the moral maternity she herself displays in her mothering. When Violet and Arthur decide to live with Lord and Lady Martindale, they discuss their concerns about Lady Martindale spoiling Helen. Violet concludes, "I'm not afraid. It is all love, you know, and grandmamma is very kind to me, even when Helen is in disgrace. If *we* can only be steady with her, I am sure another person to love her can do her no harm in the end" (477). While Violet affirms the positive effect Lady Martindale's love can have on Helen, she immediately distinguishes it from the kind of love that is going to form Helen into a strong moral self. Like Lewis, Yonge affirms that a mother's instinctual love for her child can be beneficial to its physical protection and can lay a foundational sense of secure love upon which moral virtue can be built. However, sometimes the mother's instinct must be checked by moral principle for the sake of the child's ultimate good.

In *Heartsease* Yonge suggests that while mothers may have an instinctual love for their children, they also have an ability to repress this instinct in both positive and negative ways which both relate to a mother's virtue or lack of virtue. The absence of strong moral character in women like Lady Martindale may cause them to smother their instinctual love for their children in order to protect themselves emotionally or by submitting to the control of another person to an unhealthy degree. In Lady Martindale's

case, this person was her aunt, Mrs. Nesbit, but in other cases, especially in Victorian society, that person could be a woman's husband, parents, or even society itself. At the same time, a woman like Violet sometimes has to suppress her instinctive desire to keep her children happy at all times in order to plant the seeds of virtue and discipline. In the instance where Helen pulls out the contents of her grandmother's sewing basket, for example, Violet has to disrupt Helen's happiness temporarily in order to teach her a lesson about respecting other people's property. In Lady Martindale's case, the suppression of her instinctive maternal love harms her children's emotional and moral health and signals her moral weakness. However, in the case of Violet, the suppression of her instinctive maternal love for the sake of discipline encourages moral development in her child and indicates her virtue. In Yonge's *Heartsease*, then, the appropriate use of the natural maternal instinct is essential to the moral formation of the child and is directly related to the mother's virtue.

While Yonge maintained that instinctive maternal love comes naturally to all women and that it can be used in both negative and positive ways, most modern literary critics agree that Elizabeth Gaskell, in contrast, did not believe maternal love was instinctual for all women. Over the years, critics have pointed out the paradoxical way Gaskell underscores the crucial role mothering plays in society and the lives of individuals while not portraying a single strong successful mother in all of her fiction.³ Indeed, Gaskell claims that motherhood is one of woman's "greatest & highest duties" (Chapple 53), yet many of the mother figures in her novels are absent, ineffective, or simply odious. Carol Martin suggests that the ever-evasive strong mother figure in

³ Laurie Buchanan, for example, states, "[. . .] while she firmly believed that the mothering of children was an adult's most important responsibility, Gaskell clearly denies the Victorian assumption that all women wanted to be mothers or were naturally capable of nurturing" (499).

Gaskell's works is a repudiation of the sentimental, over-simplistic portrayal of motherhood so often created by her male contemporaries (299). While Martin may well be right, I contend that the scarcity of good mother figures in Gaskell's novels also serves as a challenge to prevailing Victorian ideas about the source of maternal moral influence. By simultaneously emphasizing the total absence of selfless maternal nature in the primary mother character in her final novel *Wives and Daughters* and the negative effect this absence has on the moral development of the daughter, Gaskell demonstrates that basing moral influence on a static, innate quality that individuals either possess or lack is problematic. I argue that Gaskell offers virtue as an alternative source for moral influence because it is a fluid quality that can be developed in anyone willing to cultivate it.

Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* describes the transition from childhood to adulthood of two step-sisters, Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick. Both Molly and Cynthia lose a parent when they are very young, but while Molly enjoys a relatively happy childhood in the care of her father, Mr. Gibson, and a few servants, Cynthia experiences an unhappy childhood in boarding school separated from her uninterested mother Hyacinth "Clare" Kirkpatrick. When Mr. Gibson marries the superficial, selfish, and scheming Clare Kirkpatrick in an effort to provide Molly with a mother/chaperone during her late adolescent years, Molly and Cynthia are brought together. While the step-sisters become fast friends, Molly's good-hearted simplicity stands in stark contrast to the beautiful Cynthia's secrecy, duplicity, and carelessness, particularly in her relationships with young men. At the youthful age of fifteen Cynthia becomes secretly engaged to an older man, Mr. Preston, who also lends her a considerable sum of money. Though

Cynthia soon wishes to break their engagement when she discovers more about Mr. Preston's character, he uses her debt and her love letters to him to deter her from breaking off the engagement. After her mother's marriage to Mr. Gibson, Cynthia begins receiving the attentions of the local squire's son, Roger Hamley, and cannot resist accepting this very honorable young man's marriage proposal in spite of the fact that she does not actually love him and that she is still engaged to Mr. Preston. Cynthia's continued coquetry, which invites two more marriage proposals after her betrothal to Roger, and her seeming disregard for moral principle set in contrast to Molly's steady adherence to doing good invites readers to question why Cynthia and Molly's character seem so different.

Undoubtedly, Gaskell demonstrates that the step-sisters' differences relate to their dissimilar upbringings. But before examining how Cynthia's upbringing leads to her moral struggles, I will examine the contrast Gaskell establishes between the way two biological mothers, Clare Kirkpatrick and Lady Cruxhaven, treat Molly Gibson, a stranger to them both, and I will explain the important insight Gaskell's description of the two mothers offers into the way Gaskell understands the relationship between good mothering, virtue, and nature. Though both women are mothers and should, according to the understanding of *good mothering as innate*, display a sort of biological, maternal kindness to Molly, only Lady Cruxhaven displays this type of maternal behavior while Clare acts only out of self-centered motivation. The two women's interactions with Molly occur at the beginning of the novel when twelve-year-old Molly attends an annual festival at the Hollingford Estate where Clare had previously worked as a governess. When Molly, separated from her chaperones, finds herself tired, hungry, and lost on the

grounds, she falls asleep on a bench under a large cedar. Clare and the landed family's eldest daughter, Lady Cruxhaven, discover and awaken Molly. Lady Cruxhaven immediately acts to relieve Molly's most pressing discomfort, her hunger, by personally choosing the foods to be brought to her and then puts Molly into what she believes to be Clare's good care.

Clare turns out not to be as kind or as able a caregiver as one might hope, and her treatment of Molly continuously demonstrates her self-centeredness. Though Lady Cruxhaven charges Clare with getting Molly to eat, Clare seizes the opportunity to hurriedly devour the food herself when Molly proves uninterested. When Lady Cruxhaven mistakenly believes Molly feels sick because *she* consumed the tray of food too quickly, Clare makes no attempt to correct her perception while Molly burns with embarrassment at Lady Cruxhaven's mistaken assumption. Though Clare allows Molly to rest in her own bed and assures her that she will not let her over-sleep and be left behind by her chaperones, Clare promptly forgets all about her and acts as though it is Molly's own fault she missed her ride home. Since Molly has been left behind, she faces the awkward situation of having to stay overnight in a huge mansion full of strangers who do not even know who she is or why she is there. Clare makes no effort to relieve the awkwardness of Molly's situation and only attends to her briefly at Lady Cruxhaven's bidding before abandoning her entirely. Clare's actions in regard to Molly in no way reflect the kind maternal nature some Victorians purport mothers to have even in regard to other people's children. Instead, her treatment of Molly draws attention to a superficial desire to appear to be kind and dutiful that thinly veils the self-centeredness that lies beneath.

In contrast to Clare's selfishness, Lady Cruxhaven displays a sincere, thoughtful concern for Molly. Not only does she attempt to meet Molly's physical needs and place her in the hands of someone she thinks can care for her, she also seeks to relieve the social discomfort Molly finds herself in when she is brought down to dessert with the other children in the wealthy family. When Molly finds herself in the uncomfortable position of being discussed by some of the adults while feeling entirely alone and unsure how to occupy herself, Lady Cruxhaven firmly diverts the conversation away from Molly, kindly inquires after Molly's health, and hand picks some books she thinks Molly might enjoy perusing to pass the time. Lady Cruxhaven relates to Molly with a grace and sensitivity that signals a greater depth of character than Clare's.

By contrasting these two women's behavior, especially in the way they treat a child who is not their own, before revealing anything about the way they treat their own children, Gaskell shifts the attention away from biological motherhood and the maternal nature that is presumed to come with it and instead highlights the way virtue affects a woman's interactions with children, both her own and those of others. Indeed, the self-centeredness Clare displays in her interactions with Molly is the same lack of virtue she later displays in her relationship with her own child. Likewise, the genuine concern Lady Cruxhaven displays in her interactions with Molly is the same "all-absorbing care" (103) she displays in her treatment of her own children. The contrast between these two mothers emphasizes the fact that some mothers are virtuous and good while others are not and shows that becoming a mother does not automatically make a woman overcome long-held character flaws. The virtue an individual possesses and cultivates, not an innate biological trait related to maternity, affects the type of mother one becomes so that

there is a consistency between the way a woman treats her own children and the way she treats any other individual.

A dialectic the novel sets up between the role of nature and the role of nurture in determining individual character demonstrates both why Gaskell emphasizes young people's need for moral guides and why Gaskell understands good mothering as a cultivated virtue rather than a natural instinct. In conversations with Molly about the differences in their character, Cynthia repeatedly invokes nature as an explanation for her faults and Molly's virtues. When Molly insists that she might have acted in a similar way had she been in Cynthia's situation with Mr. Preston, Cynthia denies this on the basis of nature; "No you would not," she says. "Your *grain* is different, somehow" (187; emphasis added). Likewise, Cynthia blames her coquetry on nature. Of her encouragement of one of her later admirers, Mr. Cox, after she is already engaged to Roger Hamley *and* Mr. Preston, Cynthia says, "I knew he liked me, and I like to be liked; it's *born in me* to try to make everyone I come near fond of me" (472; emphasis added). Later, to justify her inability to love Roger she explains: "It's *not in my nature* to go into ecstasies" (473; emphasis added). In spite of Cynthia's continual linking of her character flaws and Molly's exemplary behavior to nature, the novel consistently suggests that these differences are actually a result of their upbringings. Cynthia herself inadvertently implies this, for only a few pages after she bemoans that nature has not given her love for her mother, she confesses that she has never been able to forgive her mother for her neglect (258). While social historian Penny Kane suggests that many Victorians believed that a child's love for his or her parents was both innate and unconditional (45), the novel argues instead that Clare's repeated neglectful behavior has eroded Cynthia's ability to

love her. Nature did not somehow fail Cynthia by not instilling an ability to love others in her. Her mother's failure to nurture her—both emotionally and morally—made her the way she is. The novel also goes on to show, as I argue in Chapter Three, that Cynthia eventually does go on to change under the positive influence of Mr. Gibson and Molly. Hence, the reason Gaskell emphasizes that young people need moral guidance is that she believes their character *is* malleable but that it needs formation and, as in Cynthia's case, sometimes re-formation.

When it comes to thinking about the way the dialectic between nature and nurture relates to Gaskell's view that good mothering, which I here conflate with a woman's ability to act as a positive moral influence⁴, stems from virtue rather than a natural instinct, I must first reemphasize that Gaskell does not believe that good mothering comes naturally to all women. As seen with Clare and Lady Cruxhaven, some mothers are bad and some mothers are good just as some children are bad and some children are good. However, the problem that arises in attributing Cynthia's character to nature, an inborn static quality, is the same problem that arises when good or bad mothering is attributed to maternal instinct or nature, another inborn static quality. If Cynthia is correct that all of her character flaws are innate and therefore intractable, then a character like Clare can also, as critic Hilary M. Schor points out, "stand as evil, unadulterated by her own necessities, born into some primal vulgarity," while a character such as Molly "can be originally good, not through education or even something so subtle as influence, but through some supra-environmental quality of her own" (187). Hence, if character is innate, then people are what they are and can never be different. This idea, however,

⁴ In her article "Maternal Thinking," modern critic Sara Ruddick suggests that one of the goals of mothering is to raise a child not only who the mother herself can accept, but also who society can accept. Part of being accepted by a society is learning to abide by its moral codes (349).

leads to individuals being released from any responsibility for their actions, which is why it is so appealing to Cynthia. Gaskell resists this view because her Unitarian beliefs lead her to put a great deal of emphasis on individual responsibility, a view that rests on the assumption that character is malleable. Hence, Gaskell understands good mothering, like character in general, as a cultivated virtue rather than an instinct.

While selfless, virtuous mothering may not be innate, for Gaskell virtuous mothering is still the ideal and the goal because of the powerful influence a mother may have on her child. The absence of virtue, or as Sarah Lewis calls it, moral maternity, in mothers usually results in a similar lack of virtue in their children. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* offers one theory as to why this connection exists. Chodorow suggests that a balance of merging and separation between mother and daughter must occur in order for the daughter to grow into a well-adjusted moral adult. If a mother either selfishly cuts herself off from her child or, conversely, exerts an unhealthy control over the child, the risk increases that the child will not adequately merge or separate from the mother. The failure to accomplish these two processes often has a negative effect on the child's self-esteem and sense of autonomy, which in turn increases the likelihood that the child will participate in self-destructive or immoral activities.

Linking Sarah Lewis's model of ideal maternal love set forth in *A Woman's Mission* to Chodorow's model shows how the mother's ability to appropriately merge and separate from her child relates to her virtue. Lewis's ideal maternal love can be described as the proper balance between the mother's merging and separation with her child. On one hand, as we can see from Lewis's model, maternal instinct can cause a woman to

want to merge too completely with her children, seeing them as a “second self” (83) to gratify. In viewing her children as an extension of herself, the mother may either attempt to gratify her own desires through her control of the child or seek to gratify her child’s every desire, since making her child happy makes her happy. On the other hand, a mother’s selfishness may also cause her to detach herself from her child whenever caring for the child hinders her ability to gratify her own desires. The application of moral virtue, or what Lewis calls moral principle, however, can serve as a corrective to either of these imbalances. In either case, the commitment to acting in a way that is best for the child rather than for the gratification of the mother’s own selfish desires, even those desires that find their source in her maternal instinct, corrects the imbalance. However, the ability to act in this way requires a strong sense of moral duty in the mother and a wellspring of inner virtue to help her act on that duty. When a healthy balance of merging and separation occurs in this way, it serves to protect children and make them feel loved and accepted. The security children find in this balance as well as the example of their mother’s application of moral principle serve to encourage them to develop a similar level of virtue in themselves.

While the association of moral influence with virtue rather than maternal instinct allows Gaskell to do away with maternal instinct altogether in Clare, Clare’s detached relationship with her daughter Cynthia signals a lack of character as well as a lack of maternal instinct. After discussing Clare’s quality as a governess in rather vague uncertain terms with her mother and sister, Lady Cuxhaven concludes, “The only thing that makes me uneasy now is the way in which she seems to send her daughter away from her so much; we never can persuade her to bring Cynthia with her when she comes

to see us” (104). Indeed, Clare leaves Cynthia at her French boarding school during the holidays while Clare enjoys lengthy stays at “grand houses” (254). Though Clare attributes her keeping Cynthia away to economic reasons, Cynthia tells Molly that even when her mother sent her to a boarding school at age four so she could work as a governess, she could tell that her mother “didn’t much care for parting with [her]” (254). At one point, Cynthia attributes her mother’s not wanting her around to her self-centered concern that Cynthia’s behavior might embarrass her in front of the rich and powerful families with whom she would be staying. Clare’s motives for not having Cynthia with her at her marriage to Mr. Gibson also reflect her self-centeredness. Though Mr. Gibson insists on having Cynthia at their wedding and even gives Clare money for the travel expenses, Clare purposefully puts a stop to Cynthia’s coming while pretending she is unable to come. The narrator makes clear that Clare’s motives for keeping Cynthia away are her fear that Cynthia’s beauty will overshadow her own on her wedding day and her desire to use the money that would cover Cynthia’s travel expenses on herself.

Clare’s self-centeredness leads to her failure to merge properly with Cynthia and results in many of Cynthia’s moral and emotional struggles. Laurie Buchanan, who applies Chodorow’s theory to this novel in her 1990 article “Mothers and Daughters in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*,” points out that Cynthia and Clare’s relationship epitomizes the failure to properly merge or separate. Because of Clare’s physical and emotional detachment from her daughter, Cynthia fails to merge with her mother, which results in feelings of rejection and in doubts about her mother’s love for her. And it follows that since she never merges properly with her mother, she cannot separate from her mother properly either (501-502). Cynthia’s simultaneous failure to

merge and separate from her mother leads to a host of problems. First, Cynthia's failure to bond with her mother spills over into her other relationships. Just as she proves unable to form an emotional bond with her mother, so she fails to develop any genuine depth of love for her fiancé, Roger Hamley, even though she feels great respect for him. Similarly, Cynthia never demonstrates any genuine love for Mr. Henderson, the man she eventually marries. Second, while Cynthia finds it difficult to love others, she simultaneously feels an insatiable need for others to love her. This second result of her failure to merge with her mother is the source of the coquetry that leads to the string of marriage proposals from four men over the course of the novel, three of them while she is already engaged. She knowingly leads each of the men along simply because she wants to be liked by them. Buchanan emphasizes that these relationships all spring from the way Cynthia transfers her need to connect with her mother to a passive dependence on others, especially men, for affirmation (502). Finally, one of Cynthia's most significant missteps, her secret engagement to Mr. Preston, relates back to her mother's detachment and her inability to act as a moral guide. While Clare is away on one of her extended stays with a wealthy family during a school holiday, she purposely withholds her forwarding address from Cynthia. When Cynthia finds herself in need of money and unable to reach her mother, she unwisely borrows money from Mr. Preston and becomes engaged to him because of his promise to erase the debt. When Cynthia finally reveals the secret of this engagement to Molly, Molly's response implies that if Cynthia had had a loving parent who sought to instill moral principle in her or who had been present to guide and protect her, she might have acted differently in this situation. Furthermore, if she had felt more secure in her relationship with her mother, she would not have

preferred to complicate her problems by continuing her engagement to Mr. Preston instead of confessing her failings to her mother.

By showing the way Clare's poor mothering has affected Cynthia's moral life so dramatically, Gaskell draws attention to the problem of seeing moral influence as stemming from maternal instinct. Since Gaskell believes some women may have a propensity for nurture while others do not, she finds it essential to link moral influence instead to character which is fluid and malleable. This shift from viewing moral influence as innate to viewing it as virtue not only holds mothers responsible for the development of their own character and the corresponding cultivation of virtue in their children, it also opens up the possibility of other members of the child's community participating in the child's moral formation. In the next chapter, I demonstrate the way Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Gaskell use female mentors within their heroes and heroines' social circle to shape and develop their character.

CHAPTER THREE

Female Mentors and Moral Formation

In Chapter One, I argue that Yonge's and Gaskell's portrayal of flawed fictional mothers presents a challenge to popular Victorian culture's idea that maternal nature is the source of moral influence. As has been shown, the lack of virtue displayed in these fictional mothers negatively affects the development of their children's character. While Yonge and Gaskell offer little hope that these particular mothers will change, they do offer hope for the children of such ineffective mothers and for other children whose mothers' untimely deaths have left them without moral guidance by introducing female moral mentors into the children's lives. In this chapter, I argue that Yonge's and Gaskell's use of virtuous female mentors to shape the character of their fictional heroes and heroines reemphasizes virtue as the source of moral influence while also showing moral influence as a social duty and communal activity.

In *Heartsease* Yonge uses two main female mentors to reshape the malformed character of Lady Martindale's children and shows their virtue to be the reason they are each such effective moral influences. Helen Fotheringham, the first of those mentors, proves to be highly instrumental in the forming of John Martindale's character. Shortly after the Martindales lose three of their children to illness, Lord Martindale fires the governesses, forges a stronger relationship with the local rector, Mr. Fotheringham, and his family, and asks Mr. Fotheringham to treat John like one of his own children. While Mr. Martindale's hopes for this connection were primarily that John would develop

physical health and have the opportunity to live a freer childhood than his daughters had, John finds “the parsonage was the great balance to the home spoiling” (127).

Indeed, while John describes Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringham as “kind and judicious” and reports that the character of their daughter Helen “could not but tell on all around” (127), this daughter proves an even more significant influence on John than her parents. Described by John as “exactly of my own age, but with the motherly helpful kindness of an elder sister, [. . .] full of pretty, childish compassion for the little wretched solitary being that I was” (126), Helen shaped John’s character through her own virtues of kindness, compassion, self-sacrifice, contentment, and patience. Though the kindness and compassion she shows John proves to be the foundation of her moral influence over him because these virtues assure John that he is loved, the narrator shows Helen’s self-sacrifice, contentment, and patience in the face of adversity to have been the qualities that most directly shaped his character. When John’s brotherly affection for Helen eventually transforms into a romantic love, John’s father and aunt at first oppose their marriage. However, by the time Lord Martindale finally consents to the marriage, Helen’s parents have died, leaving her as the caretaker of her elderly grandparents. Though John proposes and Helen accepts, Helen chooses to patiently delay their marriage until her grandparents no longer need her help. Caring for her delusional grandfather after her grandmother’s death proves especially challenging for Helen, but her letters to John during this period of their engagement give evidence that she bears up under this trial with patience and contentment and the hope that this willing sacrifice of her time will someday be rewarded. Helen’s letters offer John truths he chooses to adopt and live by in his own life—spiritual truths like the peace that comes from contentment, the

understanding of trials as paths to eternal reward, the divine purpose with which seemingly meaningless mundane tasks are saturated, and the freedom that comes when one stops worrying about the future. When John later becomes ill, Helen comes and nurses him. In retrospect, John tells Violet how during that time Helen “used to sit by me with her sober face, at work, ready to read and talk to me, and left sayings and thoughts that have brought refreshment at every such time. It was indeed a blessing that she could come that first time to teach me how to bear illness” (129). Though the couple never marry because Helen dies soon after her grandfather’s death, John accredits the exemplary way he learned to bear his own trials to Helen’s shared wisdom and example and, as I argue in chapter three, goes on to offer the same wisdom and to be the same kind of example to Violet.

Just as Helen’s virtue allows her to be a moral influence on John, so Violet’s virtue enables her to shape Theodora’s character in spite of the fact that Violet is actually several years younger than Theodora. Though the process of Theodora’s transformation is drawn out through most of the novel, each step forward relates back to Violet’s example of virtuous living. The fact that some of the virtues Violet displays in her friendship with Theodora do not come naturally to her serves to emphasize Yonge’s Tractarian belief that the development of virtue relates to disciplining and sometimes transforming one’s natural tendencies. In this way, moral influence not only proves unrelated to *maternal* nature, it often proves more closely related to the mentor’s ability to go against her natural inclinations for the sake of acting virtuously.

Violet’s genuine love and willingness to sacrifice for Theodora’s sake lay the foundation for her mentorship of Theodora in the same way that Helen’s kindness and

compassion lay the foundation for her mentorship of John. As seen in chapter one, Lady Martindale's lack of virtue hinders her ability to offer love and attention, much less self-sacrifice to her own children. As Theodora confides to her middle brother, Arthur,

“The misery of my life has been want of affection. Anyone who loved me could have guided me at will. You doubt! You don't know what is in me! How I felt as if I would work night and day at my lessons, if they were ever to be heard by mamma! I remember once, after a day's naughtiness, lying awake, sobbing, and saying, again and again, half aloud, 'I would be good if they would love me.'” (180)

In Theodora's view, and seemingly in Yonge's view as well, genuine love breeds goodness so that, as we shall see, Violet's love for Theodora lays the foundation for the transformations that take place in her character.

One of the key ways Violet displays her virtuous love for Theodora is through acts of self-sacrifice. The earliest instance of the display of the softening power of Violet's selfless love relates to her attempts to repair the weakened relationship between Theodora and her brother after Violet's marriage to him. At first Theodora is jealous of Arthur's young wife because she fears that Violet has stolen her brother's love away from her, but once Theodora realizes that Violet wishes to nourish the long-standing comradeship between her husband and his sister, Theodora softens toward her. While this is a minor example of Violet's selfless behavior, it highlights Violet's virtue, especially when her willingness to share her husband's love in appropriate ways is compared to Theodora's wish to hoard and control it. Somehow this simple act signals to Theodora that Violet is a better person deep down inside than she herself is.

Another example of Violet's selflessness demonstrates Lewis's idea of moral maternity. Lewis tests a woman's moral maternity, or virtue, by her willingness “to make moral sacrifices to her children” as well as physical and by her willingness to sacrifice

her own comfort or her child's for the sake of his or her "ultimate moral destiny" (91). Violet makes both moral and physical sacrifices for Theodora. When Theodora falls in with some friends of questionable character, Violet feels a moral duty to guard Theodora's reputation in spite of her resistance. Hence, when Theodora plans to attend a ball with one of these companions as her chaperone, Violet insists on going to the ball as her chaperone instead. Fulfilling her moral duty to protect Theodora, however, entails significant sacrifices on Violet's part. Violet, nearing the end of her second pregnancy, knows that going to the ball with Theodora could endanger her own health since the stifling summer heat in the ballroom will strain her already over-taxed body. At the same time, Violet realizes that her insistence on attending the ball with Theodora will appear to some as if she is selfishly going to the ball of her own accord at the risk of her unborn baby's health. Indeed, while Theodora flirtatiously dances with every available partner even though she is already engaged to Percy Fotheringham, Violet succumbs to the heat and faints. Furthermore, after this episode, one of Violet's closest and most respected friends chides Violet for her foolish attendance of the ball in her condition for her own pleasure. Yet Violet's sacrifices are not fruitless; they initiate a process of moral cultivation in Theodora. Now mixed in with her fits of "jealousy" and "perverseness," Theodora experiences "strange variations of contrition" (231), changes her behavior toward Violet, and even finds that Violet's "sweet smile and grateful face chase away [her] ill-humour" (233). She "was so affectionate and agreeable [to Violet] as to surprise herself, and make her believe herself subject to the fascination Violet exercised over her brother" (233). Hence, even though Theodora initially resents Violet's interference in her

affairs, Violet's love and sacrificial spirit soften Theodora and begin a process of moral cultivation in her.

Not only is Violet's virtue, so similar to Lewis's moral maternity, displayed in her willingness to sacrifice herself for the sake of Theodora's moral good, it is also shown in her willingness to sacrifice Theodora's good will toward her for the sake of doing what is best for Theodora in the long run. One of the reasons Theodora has never learned to submit her will to another person is that everyone is afraid to challenge her for fear of losing her good favor. Violet, however, is determined to do her moral duty in regard to Theodora no matter the cost. When it comes time for Violet to confront Theodora about her scheme to go on a steamboat picnic once again without a suitable chaperone, she knows the confrontation might indeed come at great cost. "How could she hope to prevail, or not to forfeit the much-prized affection that seemed almost reluctantly to be at last bestowed?" (238). While many biological mothers might have turned away from this duty on those grounds, Violet understands this unpleasant duty as part of her cross to bear. She muses, "If I turn from it because it is so dreadful to me, I shall not take up my cross!" (239). Though very fearful during the confrontation, Violet makes her case with both empathy and firmness. Though Theodora challenges her at every step, Violet finally wins her submission through her very commitment to do what is right:

"Theodora, if you will not take some one with you whom we know [your parents] would approve, we must write and ask what Lord Martindale would wish. "

"Arthur will never write," said Theodora, in defiance; but the answer took her by surprise—"If he does not, I shall. " (240)

Theodora's surprise is no doubt because many such conversations in the past had ended with her mother, governesses, or even aunt humbly entreating her to "take her own

course” (240), but her compliance seems to be a response to something in Violet’s kind manner and obvious struggle to overcome her own fearful nature in order to find the will necessary to confront Theodora. It is Violet’s “wistful eyes . . . the gentle imploring face, and the hands trying in vain not to tremble with nervousness” (240). As Percy points out when he discusses the incident with Theodora later, perhaps the reason Violet was so successful in evoking a moral response from Theodora was that the moment entailed a double submission of wills. Of Violet he says, “There’s the true sort of spirit! Brave enough to confront even *you* for the right, yet yielding her own will and wish at the first moment” (248). Violet does not *want* to confront Theodora at all, least of all for the sake of winning a battle. Rather, Violet submits her own will to what she believes to be her moral duty before she ever confronts Theodora. Therefore, their confrontation is not a battle of wills, but a softening of the will through love.

Another conversation between Percy and Theodora suggests that another part of the reason Violet is successful in persuading Theodora to comply is that she seeks to engage Theodora’s empathy rather than set herself up as a hostile force. When one of Theodora’s poor students at the village school refuses to recite her hymn of the week, Theodora attempts to stubbornly “wait her out.” However, when Percy comes over and plays the fool with the student by mixing up the words of the hymn, the little girl suddenly recalls the hymn and recites it perfectly in full. Percy later explains why his method worked and Theodora’s did not. He says, “You forgot your want of power to enforce obedience. You wanted victory, and treated her with the same determination she was treating you with. It was a battle which had the hardest will and could hold out longest” (165). Theodora then replies, “And if I had conquered she would have gone

away angry with me, only having yielded because she could not help it. You softened her and made her sorry. I see. She really is a good child on the whole, and I dare say I shall do something with her now” (165). Through this incident Theodora realizes that in a battle of the wills all that is won is resentment on the part of the loser, but by softening the will through genuine empathy one receives empathy in return. Theodora does not seem to make the connection between these two events, but clearly Violet’s softening of Theodora by asking her to imagine herself in her own shoes helps Theodora begin to feel sorry for her own willful behavior, and Theodora’s ability to feel sorry gives Violet hope that her sister-in-law is a good person deep down.

In fact, this hope is another attribute that distinguishes her from almost anyone else in Theodora’s life and furthers her ability to act as a moral influence on Theodora. When others have given up hope in Theodora, Violet maintains an unquenchable belief that the good in Theodora will overcome the bad. While Arthur criticizes Theodora’s flirtatiousness and hypocrisy, Violet disagrees with her husband and defends Theodora:

“I think,” said Violet, diffidently, “that some day the good will conquer the rest. Some day, she will feel these things to be wrong and strive against them.”

“Do you mean that she does not know it is wrong to be as wilful and proud as Lucifer?”

“I do not think she knows she has those tendencies.” Arthur laughed and shook his head. “One learns one’s faults as one grows older, you know,” continued Violet, “and she is so very kind. Think of her giving up all going out in the evening to stay with me; and you don’t know how she waits on baby and me. She is so grand and noble, that kindness from her is delightful, and her face when it softens is so like you! Some book says that high natures have the most trouble with their faults.”

“Then her nature ought to be high indeed.” (237)

Violet sees something good in Theodora that Arthur fails to see. While Arthur has given up hope that Theodora will ever change, Violet loves Theodora, as imperfect as she is,

because she has faith in what Theodora can become. Theodora's realization of the depth of Violet's love and her subsequent desire to fulfill Violet's hopes for her are instrumental in bringing Theodora to a place in which her will is at least now divided:

Two wills were dividing Theodora: one calling on her to renounce her pride and obstinacy, take up the yoke while yet there was time, earn the precious sense of peace, and confer gladness on the honest heart which she had so often pained. Violet was the genius of this better mind, and her very presence infused such thoughts as these, disposing her not indeed to openly yield, but to allow it to drop to silence.

But there was another will, which [. . .] would yield to no one's caprice, and impelled her to maintain the unconquerable spirit in which she had hitherto gloried. Violet's unexpressed opinion was tricked out as an object of defiance; and if she represented the genius of meekness, willfulness was not without outward prompters. (250-251)

Though Theodora's rebellious spirit is still roaring within her, she genuinely desires to please Violet on another level of herself. That desire is related to Theodora's desire to avoid disappointing the woman who has put so much faith in her.

Though much of Theodora's progress toward humility comes as a result of some very painful experiences, the narrator also attributes Theodora's turn from pride to Violet's example of humility. Theodora finally comes to a breaking point when she and Percy's engagement comes to a sad end because of her defiance of his request that she give up going to a derby with her friends in order to meet his aunt who has been like a second mother to him. After the break in her engagement to Percy, Theodora is so desperate to feel loved and important in one of her lowest moments that she begins flirting with a suitor, Lord St. Erme, simply to boost her pride. However, while Theodora finally comes to see the demise of her engagement to Percy and her over-willingness to flirt with St. Erme as signs of the depth of her own inner baseness and pride, the narrator attributes "her first true humiliation" (270) after these events to Violet's influence:

[These events] had shown her the vanity of her boast of strength of mind; for when she thought of the morning's unreasonable ill-humour, and unkindness to her brother and his wife at such a moment, and of the coquetry with Lord St. Erme, she was indeed lowered in her own eyes; and it was sorrow, not bitterness.

Her heart was very heavy, but less hard. Slowly had the power of Violet's meekness and lowliness been stealing into her affections and undermining her pride. (270-271)

Violet's virtues of humility and self-sacrifice have powerfully, but somewhat indirectly begun a transformation of Theodora's own character. The beauty of Violet's virtues has attracted Theodora and caused her to want to be like Violet. One of the signs of Violet's own virtue and humility, however, is the fact that Violet discourages Theodora from depending on her too much for her own goodness. When Lord Martindale mistrusts the meek Violet's ability to control Theodora and decides he wants to manage her himself, Theodora fears that her separation from Violet will result in the demise of all her progress. But while Theodora associates her ability to be good with her proximity to Violet, Violet reminds her that she can be good anywhere her duty lies and pushes her to depend on Christ for this goodness, not Violet or anyone else.

Theodora is indeed separated from Violet for a time, and her ability to maintain her level of progress and continue to grow signals Violet's success as her mentor. After successfully resisting a second marriage proposal from Lord St. Erme, who Theodora does not love, Theodora goes on to risk her own life in order to save Mrs. Nesbit when a fire destroys the Martindale family home. She sustains significant burns that change her appearance for ever, but she responds with thankfulness that she will no longer be in the "pale of attractive people" because of the temptations of pride beauty brings. Though the novel shows that Theodora finally develops into a morally and spiritually vibrant young woman because of her dependence on Christ, she always maintains that Violet showed

her the way. Of the superiority of the self-sacrificing life she lives now over the life of pride she lived before, Theodora says it is “as much better as it is to have found one’s anchor than to be tossed at the will of the waves. That was a frightful time” (359).

Theodora goes on to acknowledge to Violet the part she played in her anchoring, “Thank heaven you made me feel for the cable!” (359).

The way Yonge uses the two female mentors in *Heartsease* to cultivate virtue in two young adults whose character was malformed by their parents’ neglect suggests that Yonge sees this type of relationship as a religious duty. While modern social historians often recognize surrogate relationships as a common means of filling gaps in the family structure in nineteenth-century England, especially when a member of the family suffers an untimely death, they do not typically call attention to mentor relationships between children whose parents are still living and other adult members of the community.

Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, for example, point out in *Family Fortunes*, a study of the English middle-class from 1780-1850, that surrogates were often found within the extended family to serve as educators, sponsors, or even “pro-parents” (who actually took over the daily parental functions) when high mortality rates left gaps in the nuclear family. Yonge presents many examples of surrogate mothering that correspond to Davidoff and Hall’s description of surrogates as replacement-mothers who seek to fulfill a familial duty by acting out the multi-dimensional role of a mother to the child or children of a close friend or relative who has died, but she also portrays surrogate relationships born out of a moral or religious duty. For example, in *The Clever Woman in the Family* (1880), two unmarried sisters, Ermine and Alison Williams, raise their niece Rose after her mother dies and her father is forced to flee the country. Similarly, a

middle-aged woman in the novel, Mrs. Curtis, acts as a mentor to her niece Fanny Temple, not only during Fanny's childhood, but also when she returns from abroad as a widowed mother of six. Yet the mentoring relationship Yonge presents through Helen and John and then through Violet and Theodora differs from this in that these mentors are not acting in a role that replaces an absent parent, but rather that supplements what is lacking in a living parent—the virtue that induces moral growth in young people. While the relationships Yonge sets up between Helen and John and especially between Violet and Theodora are somewhat similar to the relationship of a godparent to a godchild, it resists even this label because the relationships that develop between Yonge's mentors and young adults arise more organically and are not institutionalized.

It seems that in thinking through the implications of the shift away from viewing moral influence as stemming from maternal nature to viewing moral influence as stemming from virtue, Yonge recognized that linking moral influence to virtue did not simply mean that other individuals in a child's family or community *could* act when parents were absent or morally weak, it meant that virtuous individuals in the community had a social *duty* to supplement parents' weaknesses. Just as Yonge's view that virtue rather than nature is the source of moral influence was grounded in her Tractarian beliefs, so her belief in moral influence as a social duty finds its root in her Tractarianism. For while the culture Yonge lived in took it for granted that woman's primary duty was to be the helpmate of an individual man as wife and mother, Yonge viewed her duty as a single woman with no children through a Tractarian lens. For her, Christ's marriage to the church meant that a woman was not limited to being one man's helper, but was compelled, especially when single, to help "the whole Body whom Christ our Lord has

left to be waited on as Himself” (*Womankind* 6). As an unmarried woman, then, Yonge believed she ought to “feel herself responsible to the one great Society of which she is a part, and [. . .] look for the services that she can fulfil by head or by hands, by superintendence or by labor, by pen or pencil, by needle or by activity, by voice or by music, by teaching or by nursing” (*Womankind* 7). Indeed, Yonge viewed her writing as a means of helping others, especially young women, cultivate virtue. In this way, she was engaged in her own form of moral mentorship and wanted to encourage others to do likewise.

Just as Yonge’s personal experience and religious beliefs led her to view moral influence as a social and communal duty, so Gaskell’s personal history and Unitarianism led her to understand moral influence in a similar way. Like Yonge, Gaskell portrays situations in which members of a child’s community act as moral mentors in both circumstances of maternal death and maternal moral negligence. In Gaskell’s first novel *Mary Barton* (1848), it seems as if Gaskell implies that a girl’s loss of a mother can lead to irreparable moral struggles. The protagonist of this novel, Mary, gives this explanation of her misdeeds at her lover’s murder trial. She pleads,

“For you see, sir, mother died before I was thirteen, *before I could know right from wrong about some things*; and I was giddy and vain, and ready to listen to any praise of my good looks; and this poor young Mr. Carson fell in with me, and told me he loved me; and I was foolish enough to think he meant marriage; *a mother is a pitiful loss to a girl*, sir.” (383; emphasis added)

Similarly, in a later novel, *Ruth* (1853), the heroine is seduced and bears the illegitimate child of her seducer. The narrator of the story interjects the comment that Ruth “was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the subject of a woman’s life*” (44). Undoubtedly, the fate of the moral lives of girls who

lose their mothers at a young age was a topic close to Gaskell's heart because her own mother died when she was still a child. However, Gaskell's aunt took her in and became an excellent mother-surrogate, a circumstance that highlights part of the reason why Gaskell would not see biological maternity as essential for moral influence and why Gaskell often portrays various members of a child's community participating in the child's moral formation when the mother is absent. In *Ruth*, for example, a minister and his sister end up taking in Ruth and become instrumental in reshaping her character.

In *Wives and Daughters* Gaskell portrays various women in the community acting as mentors to the motherless Molly Gibson. Literary critics generally attribute Molly's virtue to the role mentors play in her early formation. Jacqueline and Laura Berke, for example, argue that through this narrative Gaskell is telling readers that, "in the absence of a real mother [. . .] a young girl's needs may be met by surrogates" (105). Laurie Buchanan takes this idea one step farther by suggesting that Gaskell does not simply believe that a young girl's needs *can* be met by surrogates, but rather that Gaskell may even be questioning "whether it is possible or necessary or natural for one woman to adequately raise a child" (507).⁵ All of these critics argue that a circle of women in Molly's community play a significant role in giving her the nurture, advice, and support she needs to grow into a morally astute adult.

Undoubtedly each of these women contributes to Molly's moral formation in her own way. Betty, the nursemaid, is probably the most significant woman in Molly's life during her childhood after her mother's early death since she tended to Molly's daily

⁵ In *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction*, Barbara Thaden makes a similar argument based on other works by Gaskell. She argues that Gaskell's novels continuously portray children being raised in maternal circles, groups of mothers and grandmothers, sisters and friends, living in community while they raise a child.

care. The novel paints Betty as a strict but loving mentor. The Browning sisters have also been part of Molly's maternal circle from her earliest days. Having been good friends of Molly's mother before her death, they see it as their duty to offer Molly the maternal care and guidance she lost. They see Molly on a regular basis and sometimes serve as Molly's chaperone when Mr. Gibson is not available. Molly's relationship with the local squire's wife, Mrs. Hamley, though lasting only a short time before Mrs. Hamley's death, is full of mutual love and sympathy. Buchanan emphasizes the brief, but powerful role this relationship serves in Molly's life, saying, "It is this merging of affections between [these] two women that allows Molly to begin to develop autonomously as she begins to trust and like her feminine self" (508). Lady Harriet Cumnor, the last mentor to enter Molly's life, is attracted to Molly's simple, truthful manner. In fact, it is Lady Harriet's faith in this aspect of Molly's character that causes her not only to believe in Molly when no one else does, but also to act to rescue Molly's reputation when the aforementioned scandal threatens to mar it.

While each of these women plays an important role in Molly's transition from childhood to moral adulthood, Maureen T. Reddy argues that none of them is able to completely take a mother's place. Reddy points out that while Molly and the Browning sisters share a mutual love for one another, the Brownings' lack of sophistication hinders their "understanding of subtleties of attitude or behavior" which is necessary to help Molly grow into the mature moral woman Molly needs to become (77). Reddy also suggests that Mrs. Hamley, though a more appropriate mentor for Molly according to class and refinement, fails on three counts: she is too ill and isolated to help Molly in all the ways she should, she reveals the weakness of her own character in her obvious

favoritism toward her older son, and she is too dedicated to the idea of female submission to encourage Molly to adhere to what is right under any and every circumstance.

According to Reddy, Lady Harriet also fails to serve as an ideal mentor to Molly both because she received inadequate mothering herself and because Molly has as much to teach Lady Harriet in the moral realm as Lady Harriet has to teach Molly (77).

While Reddy concludes that Molly must essentially be her own guide because of the failings of each of these maternal mentor figures, I believe that another conclusion can be drawn from the fact that all of Molly's mentors prove to be flawed while Molly still turns out to be virtuous. Instead of concluding that Molly had to be her own guide, we can conclude that moral influence has a communal aspect. As demonstrated through Yonge's and Gaskell's portrayals of Lady Martindale and Clare, biological mothers are imperfect. Surely, mentors are imperfect as well, even those who have developed a great deal of virtue. Hence, the presence and active involvement of more than one mentor in the lives of young people prove beneficial because they allow the mentors and even biological parents to supplement one another's flaws. The fact that the novel itself puts less emphasis on the fact that each of these women is flawed than on the fact that Molly *has* multiple women (and men, as I will argue in the next chapter) who invest themselves in her emphasizes the communal aspect of moral influence. Each of Molly's mentors, though flawed, has strengths or abilities which he or she shares with her and which shape her into the woman she becomes. Buchanan points out, Gaskell

calls for the mothering of daughters to be experienced as a shared responsibility among women to include educating the daughter toward achieving autonomy. This is, to Gaskell, a social duty; and it is perhaps in her idea of nurturing as a social responsibility and necessity, that Gaskell distinguishes herself from other Victorian writers. (512)

While Buchanan rightly recognizes Gaskell's view of mothering as a communal and social duty, her suggestion that achieving autonomy is the goal of Gaskell's social mothering seems off base. I believe instead that mothering or mentoring toward *virtue* more accurately conveys the ends of this social duty. While Gaskell's concept of virtue entails a certain level of autonomy, she seems equally, if not more, concerned about qualities like self-sacrifice and genuine love for others.

The way the absence of moral mentors in Cynthia's life affects her character prior to her coming to live with the Gibsons suggests that had Cynthia grown up in a community where multiple mentors could have supplemented her mother's failures, she might have been a very different young woman. Contrasting Cynthia's experience with the experience of Maggie Brown in Gaskell's short story "Moreland Cottage" further emphasizes this point. Like Cynthia, Maggie Brown is unloved and even misused by her mother. However, while Cynthia finds herself wading her way through the morally muddied waters of life on her own during her teenage years, Maggie Brown discovers a mentor in Mrs. Buxton, a kind, wealthy neighbor who begins to invite Maggie to her home frequently. Gaskell describes her mentorship of Maggie in this way:

Mrs. Buxton did not make a labour of teaching; [. . .] She was simply herself; she even confessed (where confession was called for) to shortcomings, to faults, and never denied the force of temptation, either those which beset little children, or of those which occasionally assailed herself. Pure, simple, and truthful to the heart's core, her life, in its uneventful hours and days, spoke many homilies. (24)

Mrs. Buxton shares many similarities to Violet and, like Violet, refuses to allow biological ties alone to dictate where she ought to invest her nurture. In spending time with Maggie, Mrs. Buxton sows seeds of virtue in Maggie where Maggie's own mother had only left a void of love. In the end, Maggie is shown to be a loving, selfless young

woman who fulfills her moral duty to her mother in spite of the years of mistreatment. Her virtue even begins to transform her mother, whereas Cynthia, after many years without any moral guidance, falls into moral mishap after moral mishap all the while questioning the legitimacy of her duty to her mother.

While critics primarily explore the concept of children being nurtured by mentors in *Wives and Daughters* through discussions of Molly's development, Molly also eventually gives moral guidance to Cynthia. In fact, the proof that Molly has received good mothering in her own life, albeit through mentors, lies in Molly's own development into a strong moral and maternal presence in the lives of others, most prominently Cynthia. From the time Molly first meets Cynthia, she relates to her in a fashion similar to that of a mother meeting her new-born child. Gaskell writes, "Molly fell in love with her, so to speak, on the instant" (249) and "Cynthia had so captivated Molly that she wanted to devote herself to the new-comer's service" (250). Though Molly is one of many characters who are unexplainably attracted to Cynthia, Molly's love for Cynthia evokes something in the charming girl that no other character's love for her does, a return of that love. Just a few days after they meet, Cynthia confesses that she loves Molly more than she loves her own mother. The only explanation for this seems to be that Molly offers Cynthia the kind of maternal love that she has longed for her entire life. Whereas Clare allows jealousy to interfere with her relationship with her daughter, Molly never compares "the amount of admiration and love which they each received" (265). Molly continuously offers Cynthia more grace than she could ever deserve, empathizing with Cynthia's failures but also pressing her to become a better person.

Molly's love for Cynthia is not without its challenges, yet Molly responds to the testing of her devotion with an unconditional and self-sacrificing love that seems eventually to initiate transformation in Cynthia's character. Cynthia pleads with Molly from the beginning, "Love me as I am, sweet one, for I shall never be better" (259), and Molly does. Molly's love is pushed nearly to its limits by the fact that Cynthia wins, but does not deserve or return, the love of Roger Hamley, who Molly loves. However, once Molly recognizes Roger's devotion to Cynthia, Molly chooses to suppress her love for Roger in the hopes of procuring happiness for the couple. "She would have been willing to cut off her right hand, if need were, to forward his attachment to Cynthia; and the self-sacrifice would have added a strange zest to a happy crisis" (402). Though frustrated by Clare's constant efforts to throw Cynthia and Roger alone together and further frustrated by Cynthia's supposed obliviousness to it, Molly determines to think the best of Cynthia "for she could not help loving" her (403).

The sacrifices that Gaskell has Molly make for Cynthia resemble the kind of sacrifices Yonge has Violet make for Theodora and therefore also reflect Lewis's moral maternity, or "maternal" virtue, that offers women moral influence over others. When Molly finds out that Cynthia is already engaged to Mr. Preston, news that would be devastating to Roger and most likely end his devotion to Cynthia, Molly keeps her step-sister's secret and even responds compassionately and sympathetically to her confession. When Cynthia asks Molly to meet Mr. Preston privately in order to give him the money Cynthia owes him and to break off the engagement on her behalf, Molly determines "she would try and walk in a straight path; and if she did wander out of it, it should only be to save pain to those whom she loved" (550). In the end, Molly sacrificially bears the

consequences that were rightfully Cynthia's to bear when the town gossips learn that Molly has been spotted meeting Mr. Preston alone in a secluded location. But even when her reputation is totally ruined, Molly refuses to reveal Cynthia's secret, even to her beloved father. Though Molly and Cynthia are not even sisters by blood, Molly's sacrifice on behalf of Cynthia more strongly resembles a mother's supposed instinct to protect her young at the expense of her own needs and desires than does Clare's behavior toward her daughter. This fact suggests that Molly's virtue is a more powerful influence on Cynthia than is the relationship she and her mother share.

Molly's moral influence over Cynthia is not limited to the sacrifices Molly makes for Cynthia's sake. Molly and her father serve as moral guides for Cynthia, both through example and verbal encouragement. After living with the Gibsons a few months, Cynthia confesses, "I've never lived with people with such a high standard of conduct before; and I don't quite know how to behave" (475). Certainly Clare has never held to a very high standard of conduct and in any case most of Cynthia's childhood has been spent in boarding schools which some Victorians would perceive as reason enough for the lack of virtue Cynthia has developed.⁶ Molly and Mr. Gibson's moral conduct makes a deep impression on Cynthia. It fosters a love and respect for Molly and for Mr. Gibson she never felt for her mother, which in turn inspires a *desire* in Cynthia to do good, even if it is not always backed by right action.

Though some critics contend that Cynthia remains a static character throughout the novel, I assert that Cynthia does make progress through her association with Mr. Gibson and especially Molly. Reddy notes, "unfortunately for her peace of mind [. . .] Cynthia is intelligent enough to realize that she is missing an essential element of

⁶ See Lewis's *A Woman's Mission*, pg. 27-29; Yonge's *Womankind* pg. 30.

character, and she tries *unsuccessfully* to live up to the standards she perceives to be held by Molly and Mr. Gibson” (80; emphasis added). Like Reddy, W. A. Craik, insists that Cynthia remains a static character throughout the novel. “In Cynthia Kirkpatrick [Gaskell] reveals the growth of self-knowledge, yet it is accompanied by no easy or automatic increase in virtue, but rather a sadly inevitable recognition that the twig once bent by careless upbringing and an ineradicable heredity can never grow into the straight tree” (Craik 212). To a certain extent, Craik is correct. Gaskell does want readers to see through Cynthia’s character that the failure to instill moral virtue in children is not to be taken lightly. It is a serious moral and social offence because, if virtue has not been cultivated in a child at a young age, it is much more difficult, though not impossible, I believe Gaskell would argue, to develop at an older age. Cynthia can make great leaps like a “moral kangaroo,” as she tells Molly (253), but initially seems incapable of maintaining consistent moral behavior. Yet certain progress can be seen. For example, Berke and Berke point out that Cynthia eventually marries well. They attribute her marriage to a good man to the positive moral influence of Molly and Mr. Gibson (101). But beyond Cynthia’s marriage, Gaskell points to other evidence of growth. When Molly falls ill while Cynthia is in London, Clare purposely avoids telling Cynthia how serious Molly’s illness is because she is afraid that if Cynthia leaves London, it will compromise her chances of becoming engaged to Mr. Henderson. However, when Cynthia finds out about the gravity of Molly’s illness through another source, she races back to Hollingford to nurse her. She selflessly puts her budding relationship with Mr. Henderson on the line in order to care for her beloved step-sister. Gaskell emphasizes how this act on Cynthia’s part demonstrates the way her character has finally begun to diverge from her mother’s;

for while Clare becomes impatient with nursing Molly and hearing her recount the painful events she has recently undergone, Cynthia listens untiringly and treats Molly with an unprecedented selfless attentiveness in which she makes herself “talkative or silent, gay or grave, as the varying humor of Molly required” (678). Cynthia’s reaction to Molly’s illness is what finally leads Mr. Gibson to offer Cynthia his mark of approval by calling her a “good girl” (678). Cynthia has changed, and the fact that she comes back to nurse Molly, her mentor, affirms that Molly’s influence has softened Cynthia and begun the work of moral re-formation.

The change in Cynthia holds implications for what the novel has to say about the possibility of the moral education of a child, especially through the influence of a mentor. As mentioned in Chapter One, if Craik and Reddy are correct in their beliefs that Cynthia is a bent tree whose nature and careless upbringing can never be corrected, then the novel affirms nature over nurture and embraces moral determinism. According to this reading, Cynthia’s nature dictates her actions, the cultivation of virtues is futile, and people cannot justly be held accountable for their actions. By extension, an affirmation of static nature over qualities that can be changed, qualified, or cultivated, would elevate instinctive maternal love (a static nature either possessed or not possessed) over moral virtue (a quality that can be cultivated in anyone who is willing). However, the novel’s continual emphasis on the role of upbringing in character formation and the evidence that Cynthia’s character does change suggest the affirmation of cultivated qualities over nature. If Cynthia’s character is not determined by her natural tendencies, neither, then, is a woman’s character and the way she mothers determined by a natural instinct. Rather, the way she raises her children relates back to her own virtue or lack thereof. Since virtue,

not maternal instinct, is the source of moral influence, mentors within the child's community not only *can* have a moral influence on the child, they have a responsibility to act as moral mentors to those who have none. With moral influence disassociated from maternal instinct and instead linked more closely with virtue, Yonge and Gaskell not only remove moral influence from the strictly maternal realm, but they also, as I argue in Chapter Three, remove it from the strictly feminine realm.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fathers, Male Mentors, and Moral Influence

Earlier I brought to light the idea of good mothering as virtue in order to demonstrate that some Victorians view virtue rather than maternal nature as the source of moral influence. In Chapter One, I argue that Charlotte Yonge's and Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayals of bad mothers reflect this view. In Chapter Two, I argue that by linking moral influence with virtue rather than maternal nature these authors not only suggest that mentors in young people's communities *can* participate in their moral formation, but also that this participation may actually be a social duty. While up to this point I have focused on the role of women in children's moral formation, I would now like to draw attention to the dialogue I alluded to in the introduction about what, if any, role fathers and male mentors play in the moral formation of young people and what the novels of Yonge and Gaskell add to this conversation.

John Tosh points out in his book *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* that while many women in mid-Victorian England embraced ideas about separate spheres and a woman's special capacity for moral influence because it offered a special realm of power in the home, the father's position in the home and in the lives of his children became harder and harder to define because of these doctrines. Tosh offers this commentary on the ambiguous position of fathers during the Victorian period:

[Fatherhood's] location in the private sphere was the nub of the problem. For if public and private were really separate spheres defined by gender,

then parenting must fall exclusively to the woman's lot. If, on the other hand, the virtues of domesticity laid claim on both sexes, fatherhood became a telling touchstone of men's commitment to the home. Since both these views coexisted in the Victorian middle class, there was a great deal of uncertainty about what was expected of fathers. Were they a remote back-up for the mother's efforts? Did they offer their children something distinctive and essential? Or was their role to duplicate as closely as their natures permitted the services performed by the mother?
(79)

Tosh's questions are important questions and questions that I will address in this chapter in view of both Yonge's and Gaskell's works.

However, before delving into a discussion of how Yonge and Gaskell address such questions, I will briefly examine a dialogue that takes place in *The British Mother's Magazine (BMM)* during this period about these very questions. Barbara Leavy's article-length study of this magazine points out that similar questions to those Tosh raises were becoming part of the broader cultural dialogue in the mid-1800's. While the magazine acknowledges an awareness as early as February of 1846 that half of the parenting team was being neglected in its articles, it continued to focus on mothers because of their presumably greater influence on the child's life. According to Levy, the mother's consistent presence, her ability to form her child's character from birth, her natural bond with her child, and her husband's inability to consistently carry out family discipline because of his responsibilities outside the home are all reasons cited in the magazine for continued focus on mothers rather than fathers. But, in spite of the magazine's continued focus on mothers, the editors do not let fathers off the hook entirely. In the October issue of 1849, for example, an author notes, "How seldom do we see a father informing and enlightening the domestic circle in the evening" (qtd. in Levy 14). The author goes on to say that while mothers are often held responsible for "crimes which might have been

prevented if they had conscientiously performed their duties. . . . Fathers delegate their duties to mothers without strengthening their authority by co-operation. They are satisfied if they furnish the means of supporting their families” (qtd. in Levy 14). In response to its recognition that the father’s role in the moral formation of children had generally been ignored in its pages, the magazine finally opened itself to contributions for and by fathers in January of 1864, stating,

We have written much and often in the pages of this magazine upon the duties and responsibilities of mothers, and have sometimes thought it appeared as if the whole moral training of the child devolved solely upon maternal efforts, and that the father was altogether excluded both by divine law as well as by human custom, from all share in the matter. In compliance with various hints we have had from several of our correspondents, we have taken our pen in order to give our numerous readers our thoughts on the subject” (qtd. in Levy 13).

This statement suggests that this issue was not only of particular interest to the magazine, but was also an issue readers prompted the magazine to address.

Concern about fathers’ near removal from home responsibilities, particularly their responsibility of taking part in the moral formation of their children, came from two different sources. Conservative Christians maintained that the father was the head of the home, a sort of domestic priest, and therefore must continue to provide moral and spiritual guidance even if he spent most of his time outside the home. These circles maintained that mothers and fathers each had distinct roles to play and that the failure of one of the parents to fulfill his or her role would compromise the health of the family structure and, therefore, the moral and spiritual health of the children. Leavy points out that other concerns about fathers being released from their parental responsibility stemmed from the way the mother’s position of having more influence over her child

than anyone else also set her up as a scapegoat for a child gone wrong (Levy 13).⁷ While the magazine acknowledges that some fathers may have trouble finding a significant role to play in the parenting of their children and that their best course of action in this situation is to support his wife's efforts and avoid undermining them, it also refuses to completely absolve him from his responsibility as a parent (Levy 13-15).

To return now to Tosh's questions about the role of fathers in regard to their children's moral formation, I contend that because of Yonge's and Gaskell's adherence to the idea that moral influence is related to virtue rather than maternal nature, they both understand fathers as something more than a "remote back up for the mother's efforts" (79). I suggest that these women *do* believe that the virtues of domesticity, which readers both contemporary and modern sometimes exclusively associate with women, actually lay claim on both sexes. Therefore, while fathers and male mentors sometimes *do* offer young people something distinctive and essential in their development, putting too much emphasis on gender distinctions often shifts focus away from the domestic qualities that Yonge and Gaskell believe signal virtue in individuals of both sexes. In fact, modern critics of both authors often misunderstand these two authors' novels as anti-feminist because they read instances of fathers' and male mentors' encouragement of young women to cultivate virtues such as self-sacrifice and humility as reinforcing patriarchal family and social structure rather than recognizing that these men exemplify these same qualities in themselves. Therefore, in this chapter, I argue that Yonge's and Gaskell's portrayals of fathers and male mentors not only reinforce the idea that moral influence stems from virtue and that moral formation is a communal activity, but also that the

⁷ The view that the mother is often blamed for her children's misbehavior is demonstrated in the title of the short story "The Son Unguided, His Mother's Shame" published in *The British Mother's Magazine* in August of 1848.

virtue these authors envision transforming young people's character is a domestic kind of virtue that both transcends gender and has the power to transform familial and social structures as well as individual character.

An examination of the relationships between young women and mentors in *Heartsease* and *The Clever Woman of the Family* emphasizes that ideal fathers and male mentors in Yonge's novels do not attempt to wield an oppressive patriarchal power over young women but rather exemplify the same domestic virtues they encourage young women to emulate. Furthermore, such an examination reveals the importance Yonge places on the character-forming responsibilities of both women and men, whether they are parents or mentors. Though the domestic realm was commonly associated with the feminine during the Victorian period, Yonge scholar June Sturrock notes,

Yonge is not especially interested in the notion of separate spheres for men and women, their segregation into the private or the public; the conventional distaste she expresses for the notion of women invading the public realm seems largely an expression of a genuine distaste for the public realm as such, as dangerous both physically and spiritually [. . .] she valorizes domestic values, seeing the home as the arena of moral and religious engagement (98).

The cultivation of domestic values for the sake of moral and religious engagement is indeed the driving force in Yonge's fictional world, and the virtues born of these values are highly regarded in both men and women. While one can never argue a liberal feminism from Yonge's works—after all, she clearly states “that woman was created as a help-meet to man” on the first page of her treatise *Womankind*—I still argue that even in her relatively conservative novels, Yonge is striving for something that challenges mainstream Victorian values.

Some critics like Myra C. Stark believe that Yonge's fiction expects women alone to embody domestic virtues like self-sacrifice and humility. However, when Gavon Budge and June Sturrock examine Yonge's fiction in light of her Tractarianism, they find that while the mainstream British culture associated self-sacrifice and humility with femininity and the domestic sphere, Tractarians, especially those in John Keble's circle, reinforced and promoted these virtues in both men and women. Sturrock points out, Yonge, whose intellect and faith were greatly influenced by Keble, used her fiction to put flesh on his belief that the virtues British society associated with femininity and domesticity ought to be generalized as Christian behavior for men and women (23). Hence, Budge suggests that Yonge's Tractarian beliefs open an ideal space where patriarchy itself can be feminized (80).

Perhaps the value Yonge places on domesticity in both sexes can best be illustrated by how the domestication of Violet's husband Arthur in *Heartsease* gives evidence of his growth through the narrative. Critic Barbara Dunlap suggests, "Arthur Martindale's maturation is indicated, in part, by the interest he begins to take in his children" (315). Dunlap views Yonge's belief that the nurturing of young children is a worthy occupation for men as a pioneering vein in her fiction. In the early stages of the novel, while Arthur enjoys playing with his son Johnnie, he often gets caught up in his work and other interests at the expense of his children. However, when Arthur becomes ill and embarks on his own inward spiritual journey, his children become of utmost importance to him. Yonge writes, "It was Johnnie's presence that most soothed him" (389). Arthur changes from an uninterested, cranky father to a man whose will to live is driven by his love for his wife and children. Not only does Arthur spend more time with

his children after his recovery, he also becomes more nurturing and accepting. Whereas before his illness Arthur would shame Johnnie for his childish, effeminate fear of dogs and cattle, Arthur now shows sensitivity to Johnnie's delicate nerves. His forcefulness and desire to make Johnnie a man is replaced by acceptance, nurture, and gentle leading. Instead of forcing Johnnie to face his fears, he simply holds Johnnie's hand tightly when he is ready to brave them. Now, Yonge notes, Arthur is "always happier when the little fingers [are] in his" (449). For Yonge, Arthur's development of more nurturing qualities is a sign of his overall progress in virtue.

Yonge seems to suggest that the domestication of fathers like Arthur is important because children need and desire a maternal *and* paternal presence. Even though Violet is a virtuous, caring mother, her children still display a deep desire for their father's involvement in their lives. Johnnie, for example, is "never so well satisfied as in the room [with his father]" (389) and admires his father from afar even in infancy. While Helen also demonstrates a desire for her father, she longs for something beyond a mere presence in the room. She longs for a kind, nurturing domestic father. During Arthur's illness, the ever-fiery Helen pronounces that she hopes her father will never get well. While Johnnie is shocked and angered by his sister's seemingly morbid wish, further investigation reveals that she really just desires the kinder version of her father his illness has exposed. Referring to a little girl and father Helen had observed in their neighborhood, she explains, "If he would ever lead me by the hand, like the little girl's papa at the house with the parrot, I should like that sort of papa" (399). Though her mother could have surely played the part of the papa in Helen's simple domestic daydream, Helen wants a *father* who will act in this way with her. Johnnie and Helen's

innate longings for a father who is more than a mere provider undermines the belief that men and women's roles, especially with regard to their children, can fit neatly into two separate spheres.

John Martindale's role as mentor to Violet further demonstrates the difficulty Yonge finds in strictly separating the roles of men and women in regard to the moral formation of children and young adults. Maternity and paternity simultaneously characterize John's relationship with Violet. Before John becomes a mentor to Violet, he first becomes domesticated through the absorption of virtues which his late fiancée and mentor Helen inculcated in him. Only after his mentor cultivates these virtues in him is he able to pass these virtues on to Violet. At the center of his mentorship of Violet are Helen's letters and the truths he took away from his relationship with Helen. John encourages Violet to read Helen's letters and urges her to implement the self-sacrifice, moral courage, and attitude toward trials envisioned in them. However, it is important to note that John does not ask Violet to practice these virtues without first cultivating them in himself. John has already willingly sacrificed his marriage to Helen so that she could fulfill what they believed to be a higher duty to her family. He exemplifies moral courage when he challenges Arthur's mistreatment of Violet at the beginning of their marriage, and he mirrors Helen's attitude toward hardship in the way he views his weak constitution and struggles with ill-health as crosses to bear for Christ's sake. John's adoption of self-sacrifice, moral courage, and meekness implies that these are not *feminine* virtues after all, but virtues to be developed by both men and women. These virtues are what enable him to be a mentor to Violet, and, in a sense, this role in Violet's life is a reward for his virtue. Since John's and Helen's self-sacrifice resulted in the

forfeiture of marriage and of the possibility of biological children, Violet becomes a sort of spiritual child for John—the fruits of his and Helen’s virtuous unity.

While Sara Ruddick’s article “Maternal Thinking” contends that expecting and instigating real change in offspring and preparing offspring to face the demands society places upon them, among other distinctives, characterize the mother’s role in a child’s life, John actually fulfills many of these functions in Violet’s life more successfully than her own mother. Violet’s mother has not prepared her well for marriage, and Violet is completely overwhelmed with the management of her household due to her youth and ignorance. Her natural disposition does not make the transition any easier, either. The narrator explains, “Violet’s spirits were naturally not strong, and she was scarcely equal to the cares that had come on her [. . .] a slight degree of indisposition or of anxiety was sufficient to set her tormenting herself with every imaginable fear and grief; above all, the dread that [Arthur] was not pleased with her” (70). After less than a year of marriage these worries trigger a nervous breakdown which in turn initiates Violet’s pre-term labor with her first child, all while Arthur is away on a recreational trip. When John arrives on the scene, both mother’s and child’s lives are at stake. While John is angry with Arthur for not caring for Violet as carefully as he ought, John also recognizes that Violet must also change if she is going to survive even the slightest difficulty. Once Violet and the baby, Johnnie, are stabilized and Arthur must leave again, this time to fulfill his military duties, John stays with Violet and takes advantage of this time to initiate a process of growth in Violet’s character. When trials arise and Johnnie undergoes a second serious illness, once again in Arthur’s absence, Violet’s response to this trial is transformed, and it is clear that John is the cause of Violet’s altered reaction to troubles. When Arthur asks

how she got through the trial of Johnnie's illness, she replies, "I had help [. . .] thoughts—verses in the Bible [. . .] things his uncle [John] had helped me to, did come so comfortably while [Johnnie] was asleep. [. . .] It helped to put me in mind to be sure that all he was going through would somehow be a blessing. I could bear it then, and not be angry, as I was last year" (191). Without John's mentorship and fulfillment of what was traditionally seen as a maternal role in Violet's life, this transformation in her response to struggles may never have occurred.

John's initiation of change in Violet's character affects her reaction to personal hardship, but it also positively affects her ability to cope with the demands society places on her. Though John endorses humility and self-sacrifice in Violet as the way to virtue, he also endorses courage. After several years of John's mentorship, Violet tells her sister, "You cannot think how much happier I have been since I knew it was wrong to be faint-hearted" (447). The kind of mentorship John offers Violet does not encourage, much less require, fearful submission to those in her familial and social circles. Instead, it offers confidence and power through willing submission to Christ and others. Violet suggests that it was John who enabled her to overcome the patriarchal oppression under which her mother wilted:

Her mother was what she herself might have become but for John. She was an excellent person, very sensible, and completely a lady; but her spirit had been broken by a caustic, sharp-tempered, neglectful husband, and she had dragged through the world bending under her trials, not rising above them. Her eldest daughter had been sent to a fashionable school, and had ever since domineered over the whole family, while the mother sank into a sort of *bonne* to the little ones, and slave to her husband. There was much love for her among her fine handsome girls, but little honour for the patient devotion and the unflinching good sense that judged aright, but could not act." (446)

Violet, like her mother in so many ways, could have easily followed the same path, but through John's influence she rises above her trials and learns that self-sacrifice need not mean slavery. Violet has to learn to act on the devotion and good sense her mother quietly kept to herself. Perhaps the best evidence that Violet has learned this is the way she challenges Theodora's strong will at the risk of her sister-in-law's hard-won affection in an act that defies her own natural tendencies. Whereas Violet's mother shrinks from the domineering power of her eldest daughter, Violet refuses to let the willful Theodora rule her and actually ends up bending Theodora's will more than anyone could have expected. The strength and confidence Violet gains through John's guidance not only releases her from her fear of displeasing Theodora, it also enables her to become a respected equal in her marriage. She makes decisions by which Arthur abides, he asks her advice, and she leads *him* on the path toward virtue.

While John undoubtedly exemplifies several of the characteristics of Ruddick's maternal thinking, his domestication does not equal his emasculation. While displaying domestic qualities, he, like his protégé Violet, refuses to be eaten up by the power of those who wish to oppress and control him. Though John often submits his own desires to the will of others, he does not, for example, let his aunt's unhealthy desire for power rule his life. Hence, the intermixing of both his feminine and masculine qualities is essential to his influence on Violet. The moral strength and courage he instills in her helps balance her preexisting tendency toward self-effacement. Both John and Violet achieve a relative balance between qualities traditionally demarcated as feminine and masculine, the mixture of which may in reality be true domestic virtue for Yonge.

While this mixture is achieved in one individual, John, in regard to Violet's development, Percy Fotheringham works alongside Violet in the mentorship of Theodora Martindale in a role that is distinguished from Violet's. Their distinct but complementary roles work together to shape Theodora's character. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Violet's influence over Theodora primarily takes shape through her exemplary behavior and sacrificial acts, though she occasionally has to directly confront Theodora about her behavior. Percy Fotheringham, however, plays a more direct, confrontational role in Theodora's moral formation. From childhood Theodora's older play-fellow Percy held a position of authority in her mind. His playful but straightforward way with her earned him the role of mentor in her life.

His blunt ways, and downright attacks, were a refreshment to a spirit chafing against the external smoothness and refinement of her way of life, and the pleasure of yielding to his arguments was something new and unexampled. She liked to gain the bright approving look and with her universal craving for attention, she could not bear to not be engrossing him, whether for blame or praise, it did not matter (165).

Percy's direct style of mentorship makes an impact on Theodora's life partly because his direct manner challenges her will in a way that her parents' manner toward her never has. Theodora takes Percy's direct warnings about her pride and willfulness more willingly than one might expect partly because she believes "no other man is true and downright friend enough to warn [her] honestly" (174). Another reason she accepts Percy's warnings appears to be that he recognizes the good in her alongside the bad. Whatever the reasons for her toleration of his continual admonitions, the narrative suggests that his direct manner lays the groundwork for Violet's indirect influence. Yonge writes, "Perhaps the direct attacks of Percy, though strongly resisted, had in reality given a shock which prepared the way for the silent effect of [Violet's] sweetness and forbearance "

(270-271). If the primarily indirect influence of Violet and the more direct influence of Percy worked in tandem to initiate change in Theodora's character, then it seems Yonge is suggesting that part of the reason involving various members of young people's communities in their moral development is that each mentor brings unique personality traits and, therefore, unique strengths and weakness to the table. Hence two or more mentors or, when parents are involved, both parents working together supplementing one another's strengths and weaknesses may be more effective than a single parent or mentor attempting to cultivate virtue in a young person alone.

Though Percy's directness situates him in a traditionally paternal role in regard to Theodora, Percy's domestic virtues of humility and self-sacrifice are what eventually allow his and Theodora's relationship to transform from a mentoring relationship into a marriage relationship based on a mutuality that defies patriarchal structure. While patriarchy esteems unquestioning submission to paternal, or for that matter, masculine authority, Percy, though continuously encouraging Theodora toward the path of humility and submission, only asks her to submit to his own will once in the entire novel. Percy concerns himself less with her refusals to submit to his advice than with the fact that she will not submit to anyone. When an issue arises about the wisdom of continuing or, in Percy's case, initiating friendship with Theodora's childhood companion Georgina Finch, Percy refuses to associate with Mrs. Finch himself but respects Theodora's decision to continue in her own friendship with the young lady. In spite of his strong feelings about the wisdom of associating with Mrs. Finch, Percy agrees to disagree with Theodora rather than force her to submit to his own will. Percy also reveals his own humility in that he hopes he will be proven wrong about his fiancée's friend. Though Percy continues to

warn Theodora of her pride, it is always clear that his concern lies in the fear that her failure to humble herself will lead to great heartache, not a fear that he cannot control her. When Percy finally does break off his engagement to Theodora, however, it is because she will not concede her own will in the one thing he has asked of her all this time—that she stay back from an outing with her friends so that she can meet his aunt, who not only holds his fortune in her hands but has also been like a mother to him since his own mother’s death. When Theodora refuses this simple request, he knows that even her love for him cannot overcome her willfulness. When Theodora finally does humble herself, Percy does not rejoice in her humiliation, but rather defines their relationship in terms of equality. Percy verbalizes their equality: “We have *both* had lessons enough to teach us to be more humble and forbearing. [. . .] Let us hope that since this blessing has been granted us, that we shall be aided in *our* endeavours to help *each other*” (424; emphasis added). As Theodora matures, Percy relinquishes his role as mentor so that he and Theodora might marry as equals. Hence, Theodora’s development of self-sacrifice and humility does not lead to her becoming a victim of the oppression of patriarchy. Rather, her development of these virtues leads to a marriage in which the couple’s strivings to live in mutual helping and submission to one another exemplifies what Yonge seems to understand as true domestic bliss and the appropriate family structure.

Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, like *Heartsease*, envisions various mentors, mostly men, partaking in the heroine’s moral transformation. Although the protagonist, Rachel Curtis, had a loving mother, her father died when she was young and her mother fears that she gave Rachel too much freedom during her childhood and adolescence. A recurring thread throughout the novel is the question of how Rachel

might have been different if her father had lived to guide her. The character flaws that drive Rachel's escapades put even Theodora's pride and willfulness to shame because, while she is indeed the clever woman of her family, she believes herself to be cleverer than she really is. Her overwhelming desire to be useful in the world leads her into an ill-fated partnership with a stranger. The establishment and demise of the F. U. L. E., a boarding school where poor girls can learn the trade of engraving, make her look the fool when she discovers that her business partner has been stealing the money donated to the school and that the students have been worse off at the school than they were in their low-income homes. The untimely death of one of the students due to an illness that could have been cured had Rachel's pride not gotten in the way finally sends Rachel down a path of remorse and repentance guided by three male mentors.

Because of the continual references in the novel to Rachel's needing to be "kept down" or "taken in hand" by a man, critics often use *Clever Woman* to affirm their assumption that Yonge is an anti-feminist writer. Critic Kim Wheatley's argument, for example, centers on a comment by the only other female intellectual character in the novel, Ermine Williams. Ermine, who serves as a foil to Rachel, reflects, "[Rachel] is just what I should have been without papa and Edward [my brother] to keep me down" (168). Wheatley believes this comment "parenthetically re-emphasizes the power of patriarchal control" (905), fails to reveal anything about the character of either Ermine or Theodora, and therefore highlights Yonge's anti-feminism. While trying to argue radical feminism from any of Yonge's novels would be a mistake, I believe attending to the remarks that follow Ermine's observation reveals that discussing this passage in terms of feminism or anti-feminism may actually be confusing the point Yonge is trying to make.

Ermine goes on to explain her earlier comment, “I believe that all that is displeasing in [Rachel] arises from her being considered the clever woman of the family; having no man nearly connected enough to keep her in check, and living in society that does not fairly meet her” (168). Ermine’s comments, though still grating to the modern ear, reveal the major flaw in Rachel’s character—she has no humility. Rachel has always been considered the smartest person in her family and probably in her limited social circle. Since a father or brother were typically the most educated people in a woman’s family in Victorian England and Rachel has neither, she does not experience until early adulthood the humbling power of realizing that others have read more and can discuss those readings better than she can. Though she does not have anyone in her life who can challenge her intellectual abilities during most of her youth, three mentors, all very intelligent men, become instrumental in her journey toward humility. However, Yonge does not attribute their suitability for the task of Rachel’s moral formation to their intelligence or manhood. Instead, she portrays them as aptly suited for the job because they embody the virtue of humility that Rachel needs to cultivate in herself.

What makes Colonel Keith, the first man who develops a mentor-like relationship with Rachel, effective is the fact that he is both intelligent and humble. In Colonel Keith, Rachel finally finds someone “reading some of the books over which [she] had strained her capacities” (174). They both enjoy the companionship of finding someone else willing to struggle with the difficult topics many of their peers avoid. Rachel discovers that Colonel Keith can address some of these ideas better than she has seen them addressed in newspapers and magazines and finds herself “increasingly prone to consult him” (174) on intellectual matters. Though Rachel is humbled by her conversations with

the colonel, it is not because he lords his masculine intellect over her. Actually, when Rachel asks his opinion about women writers, he replies, "Many things can often be felt and expressed by an able woman better than by a man." He adds, "Men are as apt to publish what is not worth saying as women can be, and some women are so conscientious as only to put forth what is of weight and value" (175). For Colonel Keith, then, superiority of mind has little to do with gender and much more to do with virtue, especially the virtue of humility. He tells Rachel, "The larger and deeper the mind, the more there would be of the genuine humbleness and gentleness that a shallow nature is incapable of. The very word humility presupposes depth" (175). Rachel's response seems to convey the heart of Yonge's understanding of domestic virtue and her reevaluation of her culture's values when she says, "Gentleness is not feebleness, nor lowness lowliness" (175). For as Colonel Keith points out, gentleness and lowness are not feminine virtues, but virtues to be cultivated by both sexes which would in turn transform the face of the whole of society.

Mr. Clare, a blind parish priest who becomes Rachel's uncle by marriage, serves as an important moral influence in Rachel's life because of his ability to embody strength of mind and humility simultaneously. After her marriage to Alick, Rachel spends a great deal of time helping Mr. Clare with his parish work and finds that she reaps "much benefit from intercourse with such a mind" (505). The strength of Mr. Clare's sharp intellect humbles Rachel. In reference to the effect Mr. Clare's intelligence has on Rachel, the narrator comments, "Many of her errors had chiefly arisen from the want of someone whose superiority she could feel, and her old presumptions withered up to nothing when she measured her own powers with those of [this] highly educated man"

(505). However, the narrator does not finally attribute the humility Rachel gains from her interactions with Mr. Clare to her feelings of inferiority in the face of his intellect. Rather, she learns humility through his example—“by very force of infection” (505). While Mr. Clare’s mental powers may have laid some groundwork for Rachel’s transformation, his humility, a domestic virtue, was the infectious power that truly changed Rachel.

An examination of the third mentor in Rachel’s life, her husband Alick, brings to light other aspects of domestic virtue hitherto unmentioned in regard to male mentors. While he, too, displays exemplary humility (he is a former soldier who was injured in battle while saving his comrades but always insists that any other person would have done the same had they been in his position), he, alongside Mr. Clare, is also accredited with offering Rachel the strong religious “tincture” her character needs to be brought back around to faith and virtue after a stint of doubt and despair (506). Another unique aspect of his mentorship is his offering of sympathy to Rachel. While many of the characters seem to expect him to take a leading, teaching role in Rachel’s life after their engagement, Alick views his role differently. When he conveys his plan to marry Rachel to the colonel, the colonel responds:

“With such genuine affection you should surely lead her and work upon her! I trust you will be able.”

“It is less that,” said Alick, rather resentfully, “than sympathy that she wants. Nobody ever gave her that except your Ermine!” (416-417)

Alick does not believe it is his job as Rachel’s husband is to work on changing her character in a direct manner. Instead, he finds his formative role in her life from this point forward is to be a role of sympathizing with Rachel—offering compassion and nurture.

Just as Yonge's portrayal of Theodora's moral development emphasizes the communal nature of moral formation, so her portrayal of Rachel's development stresses this same idea. While Rachel has a nurturing, caring mother who was surely a positive force in her life, she could not match Rachel's strength of will and failed to help Rachel learn the best use of her good qualities. As Alick laments, "It is hard that a person without any natural advisor should have been allowed to run headlong by force of her own best qualities" (326). Though Mrs. Curtis clearly succeeds in parenting Rachel well in many areas and is generally portrayed as a good mother—Rachel is after all genuinely interested in helping others—Rachel still needs other mentors, in this case Colonel Keith, Mr. Clare, and Alick, to supplement the areas in which Mrs. Curtis proved unable to help her.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, several critics recognize the important role Gaskell shows various female members of the community playing in the moral formation of Molly Gibson in *Wives and Daughters*. While I agree that these women undoubtedly play an important role in Molly's development, Molly's father, Mr. Gibson, and Roger Hamley also play a crucial, but often ignored or misunderstood, part in her character formation. When critics do recognize that either of these men is formative in the shaping of Molly's character, they tend either to downplay their influence on Molly for the sake of emphasizing her female mentors or argue that Mr. Gibson and Roger's patriarchal influence has either a neutral or detrimental effect on Molly's development.⁸ The

⁸ See for example, Jacqueline and Laurie Berke's "Mothers and Daughters in *Wives and Daughters*: A Study of Elizabeth Gaskell's Last Novel," Laurie Buchanan's "Mothers and Daughters in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*: In a Woman's World," Patsy Stoneman's "Gaskell, Gender, and the Family" and *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Maureen T. Reddy's "Men, Women, and Manners in *Wives and Daughters*," and Hilary M. Schor's *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel*.

problem with approaching Gaskell's text with a mind to emphasize one gender over the other is that it ignores the emphasis Gaskell places on domestic virtue in both sexes.

Both Mr. Gibson and Roger mentor Molly alongside the women in her community, and what makes their moral influence truly effective is the fact that they embody the same domestic virtues they hope to engender in Molly.

Part of what makes Mr. Gibson such a successful single parent and positive moral influence in Molly's life is his domesticity. Even critics who minimize his influence on Molly acknowledge Mr. Gibson's success as a parent, but they often express this acknowledgment in feminine terms. Jacqueline and Laurie Berke, for example, write that Mr. Gibson has given Molly "excellent mothering" (98) and has been "as devoted as a mother as any father can be" (104). Yet in many instances Mr. Gibson expresses his affection in a stereotypically paternal way of jocularly and good natured teasing that, while making some of the women in the community like the Misses Brownings question his love for his daughter, Molly completely understands.

[H]is domestic affections were centered on Molly, but even to her, in the midst of their private moments he did not give way to much expression of his feelings: his most caressing appellation for her was 'Goosey', and he took pleasure in bewildering her infant mind with his badinage. [. . .] Molly, however, had her own intuition to guide her. Though her papa laughed at her, quizzed her, joked at her, in a way which the Miss Brownings called 'really cruel' to each other when they were alone, Molly took her griefs and pleasures, and poured them into her papa's ears, sooner even than into Betty's. (34)

Many of the ways Mr. Gibson shows his love for Molly simply signal domestic displays of affection—some of which harken back to what Yonge's little Helen desires to see in her own father. He has an eager desire to "gratify his little girl" (7) and displays a sensitivity to Molly's feelings in spite of his teasing nature. As soon as he realizes she

has been left behind at the towers on that first awful visit, he rushes to get her because he knows she will be extremely worried and uncomfortable there. When they ride home in the dark he offers his hand to her as soon as he senses she is afraid. Later when Molly leaves for her first trip to Hamley Hall, Mr. Gibson stands at the gate as long as the carriage can be seen, an act which emphasizes his sensitivity. Mr. Gibson's domesticity is also demonstrated through his keen affection for Molly and desire to be involved in her life. Mr. Gibson keeps Molly close to himself even after his first wife dies, though by Victorian standards it would have been perfectly acceptable for him to send her into the care of a female relative or close family friend from a young age. Finally, Mr. Gibson, a doctor, takes Molly on his rounds with him when it is practical and regularly comes home from his rounds to eat lunch with her.

Throughout the novel Gaskell seems to convey that Mr. Gibson's love for his daughter and his involvement with his daughter are signs of his inner virtue, while Clare's detachment from Cynthia is a signal that she lacks virtue. Mr. Gibson's virtue as shown through his love for Molly lays the foundation for his ability to succeed at cultivating her virtue; for Molly's confidence in her father's love and her return of that love is what enables him to achieve what Ruddick considers the three goals of mothering: growth, preservation, and acceptability. But these goals could perhaps also be considered the three goals of moral influence, since Gaskell apparently assumes that each of these goals can also be achieved by fathers. Mr. Gibson preserves Molly, helps her grow, and shapes her into the type of person he as a parent can be proud of, one who can become an active and respected member of society. The contrast between Mr. Gibson's and Clare's parenting styles and the resulting character of each of their biological daughters

demonstrates the fact that it is Mr. Gibson's virtue—shown through his affection and involvement in his daughter's life—that makes him more successful at achieving the goals of “mothering” than the primary mother in the story, Clare.

Mr. Gibson not only proves more successful than Clare at fulfilling his daughter's basic need for love and security when she is young, but he also does a better job protecting Molly's reputation and innocence as she grows older. The two parents' tactics prove very different when their daughters each begin to approach womanhood. When Mr. Gibson realizes that young men are becoming interested in Molly, he seeks to protect her from their advances altogether. Rather than allowing her to become entangled in a less than ideal relationship with one of his medical students, Mr. Cox, he sends her to Hamley Hall where he knows she can be of use, but where he also knows she will find an affectionate mother-mentor. Even before the situation comes to a head with Mr. Cox's attempt to convey a secret love letter to Molly, Mr. Gibson has already tried to alleviate some of the social awkwardness of her being left too often alone with his young medical students by hiring a governess. Clare, in contrast, seems relatively unaware of or else unconcerned about Cynthia's budding womanhood and leaves her at home alone with a maid for months fully knowing that the devious Mr. Preston would be making frequent visits on business. Even if the situation were as innocent as Cynthia in her naivety believes at first, it is difficult to imagine Mr. Gibson leaving his own daughter in such a situation.

Mr. Gibson's virtue enables him to initiate moral growth in his daughter, whereas Clare does not. Indeed, Mr. Gibson's love and virtue motivate Molly to desire to be good and love others in the same way that her father loves her. Cynthia, in contrast, questions

her mother's love for her and not only fails to develop love for her mother, but also fails to develop love for others. She consistently struggles with being good and regularly fails to live up to the moral standards Mr. Gibson and Molly hold. In several conversations Cynthia relates her moral struggles back to her uncertainty of her mother's love and to the fact that she has never before lived with such good people. Another incident involving the infamous Mr. Cox reveals Mr. Gibson's concern for the moral character of both Cynthia and Molly. When Cynthia, already engaged to someone else, encourages the attentions of this young man in whom she has no interest and whom she has no freedom to encourage, Mr. Gibson becomes livid. For Mr. Gibson, this kind of behavior is unacceptable and he declares that he hopes he has instilled the kind of values in his own daughter that would never allow her to act in such a way. Because of Mr. Gibson's high standard of character for himself, he feels forming Molly's character is a vital part of his responsibility as a parent. Indeed, Molly's values largely conform to her father's. On the single occasion when Molly and her father are at odds because of her refusal to explain rumors about her being seen in a seemingly compromising private meeting with Mr. Preston, Molly is acting on principles that Mr. Gibson would endorse. Clare's lack of virtue and resultant lack of concern for inculcating virtue in her daughter, in contrast, leads Cynthia to the same disregard for goodness as her mother and leaves a gaping hole where Cynthia's moral center should be.

Though Mr. Gibson is largely successful in instilling moral virtue in Molly, even he is not a perfect father. Sometimes the very qualities that make him a good father also cause him to make significant mistakes. His high moral standards occasionally make him harsh and quick to judge both Molly and Cynthia. But obviously, his marriage to Clare in

an effort to provide a chaperone for Molly is his most costly mistake as it brings turmoil to what has up to that point been a rather peaceful household. Essentially his remarriage reveals that his biggest flaw is not realizing that he has already given Molly the nurture she needs to move into moral adulthood. Patsy Stoneman agrees, saying,

From what we learn of Molly we as readers are ready to believe that [Mr. Gibson's] exaggerated protection of her – rushing her away to stay with neighbors, and remarrying in haste to provide her with a chaperone – is unnecessary, since his generally sensible treatment of Molly has already led her to become a 'law unto herself,' easily capable of dealing with a lovestruck apprentice. (144)

Indeed, Molly does not need a stepmother to fill a role Mr. Gibson, along with the female mentors with whom he encourages her to spend time, has already fulfilled. The exemplary virtue Mr. Gibson has displayed in his fathering of Molly proves far more profitable than simply having a woman who displays little virtue present in the home.

In spite of Mr. Gibson's imperfection, the result of his domestic virtue is that Molly becomes both a daughter in whom he can take pride, as well as a woman who can take a respected place in society. Though Mr. Gibson does not always understand it in the moment, Molly has embraced the ethic he has instilled in her through his example and become confident enough in her own knowledge of moral principle to be able to follow it even when it entails sacrifice or when others do not understand her motives. As Stoneman points out, this is what Gaskell in other places calls becoming a law unto oneself (144). Molly's insistence on keeping Cynthia's secret about her engagement to Mr. Preston at the expense of her own reputation in spite of Mr. Gibson's ire is an excellent example of this trait in Molly. Mr. Gibson does not understand Molly's secrecy at first, but once he recognizes Molly's behavior is morally irreproachable, he respects her decision to act in a way that seems right to her own conscience. He realizes that she

is indeed acting on the same principles by which he lives, and he takes pride in her strength. Mr. Gibson can also take pride in Molly because she wins the heart of the man Mr. Gibson most deeply respects in his community. On a social level, Molly's marriage to someone above her in class shows that Mr. Gibson has also prepared her to become an influential member of society. The fact that Molly is not afraid to stand up to her father for the sake of what she believes is right, as in the situation where she keeps Cynthia's secret against her father's wishes, shows that Mr. Gibson has parented Molly *not* with the goal of teaching her to submit to patriarchal rule but with the goal of teaching her to abide by moral principle. In this, Mr. Gibson achieves the balance Ruddick suggests is necessary between attentive love and the demands of society (359). Teaching Molly to stand true to moral principle rather than authority turns the patriarchal structure on its head and allows her to be freed from much of its oppression.

Like Mr. Gibson, Roger Hamley is a good mentor to Molly because he displays domestic virtue, encourages moral development, and prepares Molly to enter adult society. Roger's domesticity reveals itself in his nurturing care for her, especially in the early stages of their friendship. When Molly finds out about her father's impending remarriage, she is greatly distraught. She seeks comfort from her distress under a shade tree, a setting that harkens back to Molly's encounter with Clare and Lady Cruxhaven in the early pages of the novel. Just as that scene exposes the character of the two women, so this scene serves to underscore Roger's domestic care. Though Roger initially thinks to leave Molly alone, pretend he has not noticed her, and allow his mother to comfort her instead, his tender, sympathetic heart cannot leave Molly unattended. The same qualities that set Lady Cruxhaven apart as a maternal figure also place Roger in a domestic light.

Just as Lady Cruxhaven demonstrates her maternity by attending to Molly's physical needs, so Roger first attends to Molly's physical needs by bringing her a drink of water from the spring. Just as Lady Cruxhaven acts in subtle, but sensitive ways throughout Molly's first visit to the Towers, so Roger subtly and sensitively acts to give Molly time to recover from her crying. He looks upon her in her weakness with compassion. For example, when she stumbles on a root as he leads her back to the house, he becomes conscious of her vulnerability and longs to help her in the same way a parent might long to help his toddling baby:

He watchful, though silent, saw this stumble, and, putting out his hand, held her up from falling. He still held her hand when the occasion was past; this little physical failure impressed on his heart how young and helpless she was, and he yearned to her, remembering the passion of sorrow in which he had found her, and longed to be of some little tender bit of comfort to her, before they parted. (135)

When he speaks, his words also take a sympathetic tone, "[I]t's beyond my power to help you, as far as altering facts goes, but I can feel for you, in a way which it's best not to talk about, for it can do no good. Remember how sorry I am for you!" (135). Roger's words are emotional and empathetic, traits commonly associated with femininity, rather than rational or didactic, traits often linked with masculinity.

Roger's nurturing care for Molly highlights the domestic role Roger takes in Molly's life but also highlights his desire to see Molly develop morally. After her initial struggles in the midst of the emotional crisis of her father's remarriage, Roger continues to mentor her. "She felt that he did her good, she did not know why or how; but after a talk with him she always fancied that she had got the clue to goodness and peace, whatever, befell" (157-158). And as he begins to mentor Molly informally, he expects his noble ideas to change her.

He felt as if high principle and noble precept ought to perform an immediate work. But they do not, for there is always the unknown quantity of individual experience and feeling, which offer a tacit resistance, the amount incalculable by another, to all good counsel and high decree. But the bond between the Mentor and his Telemachus strengthened every day. (157)

Interestingly, this passage describing Roger and Molly's relationship offers more direct evidence of Roger's moral influence on Molly than any of the passages describing her relationship with her other mentors in the novel.

In spite of the direct reference to Roger's positive moral influence on Molly, critics often argue that Roger takes up a suppressive, patriarchy-enforcing role with regard to her.⁹ Much of the critical attention given Roger centers on the advice he offers when she is upset about her father's remarriage. Roger suggests that it might help her to think of her father's happiness over her own in the case of his remarriage and then advises, "One has always to try and think more of others than of oneself" (134). Molly's response to this advice, when the pair revisit the subject a short time later, is at the heart of critics' arguments about what Mr. Gibson and Roger's paternal role in Molly's life means: "It will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and only live in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as well never have lived. As for the happiness you speak of, I shall never be happy again" (155). Shirley Foster contends that Roger's advice to Molly is the classic creed of female self-denial and, Stoneman asserts, this kind of self-denial could too easily result in the loss of Molly's individuality and the death of her female self. Similarly, Reddy argues that Roger, in offering this kind of advice to Molly, acts like a mother, but the kind of mother

⁹ See Patsy Stoneman's *Elizabeth Gaskell* and Maureen T. Reddy's "Men, Women, and Manners in *Wives and Daughters*."

who prepares her daughter to accept her place in the patriarchal culture. This, Reddy notes, is not the kind of mother Molly needs. Reddy asserts that Molly needs a mother figure who can both nurture her and recognize the demands of society, but that neither Roger nor the female mentors in Molly's life are able to do both of these things.

I argue, in contrast to these views, that Roger's advice neither undermines his nurturing behavior, seeks to repress Molly, nor grooms her for a position of submission to patriarchy; for Roger seeks to live by this advice as well. On the two separate occasions that he offers this advice to Molly, he relates it back to the way it had helped him in his own life. The first time he offers the advice to Molly, Roger notes how his attempt to follow this advice had comforted him in some undisclosed situation in the past (134). The second time, the narrator reiterates that this advice was a principle "on which he had learnt to rely" (155). Greater familiarity with Roger's own situation affirms the way he has built his life on this principle. As a second-born son, he is constantly placed in the shadow of his older brother, Osborne, quite unjustifiably. His parents make it no secret that they believe Osborne to be the more intelligent and better looking of the two boys. Mrs. Hamley even goes to the extent of saying that "Roger was never to be compared with [Osborne]" (73). Expectations are indeed high for Osborne Hamley, an aspiring poet who his parents expect to marry well after winning great fame and honor at Trinity College. The novel goes to show, however, that in all reality Osborne is a mediocre poet at best and is far from winning any medals at school. In fact, he has secretly married a French Catholic nanny and incurred an extensive amount of debt supporting her, both severe marks against him as far as his father is concerned. Undoubtedly, Roger feels the favoritism lean toward his brother and could have become extremely jealous. Instead, he

devotes himself to his brother and becomes a stabilizing force when hints of his brother's financial troubles begin to surface. Osborne confides the details of his secret marriage to his brother, and while Roger could have revealed the offense to his father to instigate his brother's immediate disinheritance, he faithfully protects his brother from the results of his unwise actions and eventually supports his brother's wife financially through his own hard work. If anyone has the right to offer Molly advice to think of others more than oneself, it is Roger, because this is what he has been doing for much of his life. He passes on to Molly the lesson he has learned through his own experience. Harboring bitterness and anger toward his brother would only result in unhappiness for everyone, but by accepting the state of affairs and seeking the happiness of his parents and brother over his own, Roger is ultimately rewarded with happiness himself. Instead of his brother, Roger is the one who wins honor at Trinity and fame in the wider world of science by doing what he loves to do. Hence, Roger is not encouraging Molly to live a life of self-sacrifice in order to relegate her to the feminine realm where her individuality can be squandered away and where she can be taught to submit to patriarchal authority. Rather, he is encouraging her to adopt an ethic he believes should be embraced by both men and women and which he believes will ultimately lead to her happiness and inner fulfillment. Indeed, after her initial resistance, Molly does ultimately seek to follow Roger's advice. Though the task is not always easy, the many sacrifices she makes for Cynthia, Roger, and her father are eventually rewarded by the novel's implication that she and Roger will marry.

In conclusion, Yonge and Gaskell's portrayals of fathers and male mentors playing a significant role in young people's moral formation directly engages both the

Victorian cultural dialogue about whether maternal nature or virtue is the source of moral influence and the dialogue about what role, if any, fathers and other men play in the moral formation of the young. The portraits not only affirm the role of virtue and men in moral formation, but also demonstrate the way both authors value domesticity in both sexes. These women's portrayals of mothers and fathers working alongside male and female mentors bring light to the fact that the cultivation of virtue in young people is an activity that takes place in community and in which virtuous, yet imperfect, individuals supplement one another's strengths and weaknesses for the greater good of the child.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

My examination of novels by Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates that these authors attribute moral influence to virtue rather than maternal instinct. By showing through their portrayals of bad mothers that good mothering, which Yonge and Gaskell both closely associate with moral formation, is not an instinct, these authors establish that it is not necessary to be a biological mother, or even a woman, in order to have a moral influence on young people. Their portraits of female mentors depict moral formation as a communal activity and social duty while their representations of male mentors and involved fathers stress the idea that moral formation is the work of both men and women and that the virtue that produces moral growth transcends gender.

While many modern scholars mistakenly assume that *good mothering as innate* was the prevailing understanding of moral influence in Victorian England, I demonstrate in this thesis that some popular writers of the period espoused a very different view, a view that I believe most modern scholars ignore, the view that virtue is the source of moral influence. While I underscore that there were competing points of view concerning the source of moral influence, further research could explore how prevalent each view was, if and what other views existed, and how other writers and thinkers understood moral formation.

This thesis underscores some of the ways Yonge and Gaskell participate in the cultural dialogues of their time, some of which are also relevant to our own time. They

engage the question of what is to become of motherless children in light of the common Victorian belief that moral formation is primarily the mother's duty. They both argue that fathers and various other member of the child's community can step in and guide the cultivation of virtue in the child since moral influence is believed to find its source in virtue rather than nature. But the fact that both Yonge and Gaskell emphasize the importance of the father's role in the child's life and dislocate domesticity from the feminine realm demonstrates that the campaign for greater involvement of fathers in home life started much earlier than the 1980's. With the discovery of Yonge and Gaskell's involvement in this dialogue on fatherhood and the de-genderization of domesticity, it stands to reason that there is much more yet to be revealed about these authors as well as the highly underdeveloped study of fatherhood in Victorian England.

In closing, with Yonge and Gaskell's emphasis on virtue as the source of moral influence, modern readers are encouraged, even as Victorian readers were, to examine their own character and consider the influence they have or may have on the children in their own families and communities.

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