

The “Dangerous” Potential of Reading

*Readers and the Negotiation of Power in
Nineteenth-Century Narratives*



Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND CULTURAL THEORY

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To Jürgen, Nicolas, and Julia

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Introduction

...[H]e so buried himself in his books that he...filled his mind with all that ...impossible nonsense; and so deeply did he steep his imagination in the belief that all the fanciful stuff he read was true [that]...now that he had utterly wrecked his reason he fell into the strangest fancy that ever a madman had in the whole world. He thought it fit and proper...to turn knight errant and travel through the world with horse and armor in search of adventures.

Cervantes, *The Adventures of Don Quixote* (1604)¹

How does reading affect the lives of characters? This study examines this question in American and French narratives of the nineteenth century.² The nineteenth century is particularly interesting because of the development of a mass readership, a mass market for books, and a new, more prominent status of reading.³ Narratives such as Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1867), Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) reflect this historical reality. In all of these works, reading and books play an important role in the lives of the protagonists.

In contrast to Patrick Brantlinger's recent work on British nineteenth-century narratives, which argues that British writers criticized mass literacy as a cause of social dissolution,⁴ this study demonstrates the ambivalence of American and French narratives. American and French authors were torn between applauding literacy as a tool of social advancement and socialization, and criticizing it as dangerous to both the character and society as a whole. Rather than leading the characters to selfdestruction, as traditional scholarship has posited, reading empowers them in these narratives. To be sure, Flaubert's Emma Bovary ends her reading in suicide, and Alcott's heroine, Jo, becomes domesticated. Nevertheless, their reading liberates the protagonists to challenge established authority from their subaltern positions.

While Alger's, Douglass's, and Zola's protagonists use reading to rise up from slavery, poverty, and oppression and defy racial and social categories, the women readers in Alcott's and Flaubert's novels pose a threat to established gender relations. In all cases, reading changes the lives of the protagonists. Their reading may seem dangerous to those who dominate them, be it bosses, masters, fathers, or husbands. Nevertheless, reading allows the characters to change their lives despite all efforts to control them.

The precursor of the topos of dangerous reading is Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, a bookworm gone mad. The narrator describes Don Quixote as believing in the "nonsense" of his books; believing himself to be a "knight errant" on a quest for adventures. Don Quixote therefore superimposes fictional worlds onto the world in which he lives. On the one hand, then, Don Quixote can be read as a fool who even attacks windmills, mistaking them for enemies. On the other hand, despite his bumbling ways, Don Quixote strives to help the unfortunate, to be just, and to do good. The noble knight has a sense of honor and dignity as well as strong notions of what is right or wrong,⁵ and his reading questions the society in which he lives, a society unjust to the unfortunate and lacking the protagonists' noble idealism. Reading, therefore, is not only "dangerous" to Don Quixote, but it also leads him to challenge the society that surrounds him. Not surprisingly, Don Quixote has been called the ancestor of Emma Bovary,⁶ and, by extension, other reading protagonists.

This work thus challenges the traditional view that reading is primarily dangerous to the characters themselves. Instead, it points to the disruptive and destabilizing potential of reading. Reading can empower a character to the extent that he or she poses a threat to the established order. This order may be a rigid social stratification (as in the case of characters from subaltern groups such as slaves, street boys and workers) or the gender structures of society. Therefore, subaltern and women readers alike pose a threat to hierarchical and patriarchal structures and use their reading to negotiate a greater share of power. Dangerous reading, then, is linked to relationships of power. Reading constitutes an empowering activity for those with little power, and it can prove to be dangerous to the groups already in power. At the same time, it may help dominant groups and people to increase their power over others, as the attempts to restabilize the disruptively reading characters show.

This study is organized in seven chapters. Chapter one examines the connection between reading and power in the nineteenth century. It provides the historical background—the history of the book, the history of literacy and reading—for the discussion of the narratives. The following three chapters provide examples of the fictional treatment of the issues of reading and power in the case of subaltern protagonists. Chapter two analyzes *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, positing that reading is empowering and helps Douglass gain freedom. In chapter three, a comparison of the *Narrative to Ragged Dick* shows that reading allows the protagonist to change his social status. Chapter four examines the same development in *Germinal*. These three works may be considered exemplary because each one of them focuses on a protagonist who achieves a better life through the ability to read.

Each protagonist is more powerful due to his literate status. The three authors' different attitudes toward this power show some of the many possible ways of reacting to the disruption of the status quo of reading and readership in the nineteenth century. The last three chapters examine the role of reading in the lives of women readers. Chapter five sets up the background for the discussion of women readers by presenting the perceived position of women, their access to reading and their function as readers in nineteenth-century society. Chapters six and seven examine *Little Women* and *Madame Bovary*. The reading heroines of these two novels are similar in that reading empowers them to some extent. However, Alcott and Flaubert react differently to the disruptive potential of reading, restabilizing the heroines in different ways. The latter three chapters are longer since the two novels yield a much larger corpus of instances in which the characters read.

All of the protagonists examined here change their lives “under the influence” of reading. Their reading may seem dangerous and disruptive (or, as Lady Ludlow says, as “leveling and revolution”)⁷ to those who dominate them, be it members of higher social classes or husbands and fathers. Nevertheless, reading appears as empowering to the characters themselves, because it allows them—despite all attempts at control—to change their lives and follow their dreams.

THE “DANGEROUS” POTENTIAL OF READING

Chapter One

Reading and Power in the Nineteenth Century

How unfit the lower orders are for being trusted indiscriminately with the dangerous power of education [and reading].

Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow* (1858)¹

In this passage, Lady Ludlow refers to the connection that exists between reading and power. She opposes Sunday School for the lower classes and argues that the knowledge of reading produces “leveling and revolution.”² Indeed, she goes as far as to say that she would only hire illiterate serving maids.

Lady Ludlow’s comments speak of a fear disguised as disdain. She recognizes that the knowledge of reading could give the lower classes powers that could lead to “leveling,” that is, the destruction of the hierarchical social structure and to an even worse fate: that of revolution. Education and the teaching of reading to the lower classes present a threat to her stable world. Lady Ludlow fears a disruption of her world, and she is not alone in her fears. Many contemporaries of this fictional character voice similar concerns.

Destabilization is by definition an act of making unstable, of disrupting an established order. The nineteenth century saw an upheaval in everything concerning the act of reading. Revolutionary changes took place in all aspects of the book market: production, distribution, and readership. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the historical development of the book market and the readership in the nineteenth century. It shows that the changes represent an overthrow of the established order and customs, and that a large part of the population in the United States, France, and England reacted with fear to these changes. This chapter examines how the relationship between reading and power accounts for these feelings of fear. This discussion provides the background for examining the selected narratives. The approach to fiction and history in this study is a combination of various theoretical models. I combine the ideas of new historicism that texts are linked to multiple institutions, beliefs, and cultural practices with ideas of cultural materialism. According to Hayden White, all

history is interpretation and a narrative discourse, that is, fiction itself. While I do see a dividing line between history and fiction, the two are intertwined, and one informs the other. It is before this background that I wish to look at the historical changes in the nineteenth-century related to reading, publishing, and bookselling. I show how narratives—fiction primarily written by middle-class intellectuals—incorporate and “digest” historical realities.³

To examine the development in the book market in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to analyze the intertwined issues of the history of the book, the history of reading and the history of literacy. This study can only briefly outline the developments that occurred in the United States, England, and France.⁴ It is important to note that in each country the changes took place in different phases and at a different rate. However, it can be said that in these three countries, the nineteenth century witnessed major changes and an unbalancing of the old “reading world.”

In England and France, in particular, reading had for centuries been the preserve of small social, religious, and political elites.⁵ The church monitored the reading of the scriptures in monasteries and universities, and the king or queen controlled secular publications. In addition, the landed nobility played an important role through its function as patrons.⁶ Their large influence could allow authors to rise to fame, or it could destroy them. In the United States books and reading had also been the pastime of small elites. Yet higher rates of literacy speak for the “uniqueness” of the United States in that a larger portion of the population had access to reading and the book market.⁷

During this time, the book was considered a luxury item in the western world; its cost made it unattainable for anyone but the wealthy. Books were produced for a limited market in a slow process with old machines. Printers—organized in guilds—and booksellers still held those functions later to be taken over by publishers. The books were sold to a very small percentage of the population in the large urban centers. The Bible, chapbooks, almanacs, and devotionals were an exception to this pattern in that they were sold in rural areas as well.⁸

This situation affected the writing of books as much as their production and distribution. Authors considered themselves participants in the culture of *belles-lettres*, and they wrote for a defined known readership. They wrote to please their patrons but also with the aristocracy and upper class as readership in mind.

The readership before the nineteenth century was a rather predictable group. In France, reading before the nineteenth century was a very public event. Reading aloud to others took place in the church, school, or in the salon among the aristocracy. Both in France and in the United States, reading was in a sense a collective endeavor because like-minded readers shared their interpretations and refined their understanding by discussing the works together. The same type of interpretive communities existed in England.⁹ A few works circulated and were known by everyone as a common canon: a narrow range of traditional literature was read aloud over and over again in groups and became deeply embedded in the readers’

consciousness.¹⁰ This type of reading habit has been labeled “intensive” reading.¹¹ An “intensive” reading resulted in communal understanding, but it also insured the acceptance of the “correct” interpretation.¹² During the eighteenth century the middle classes—including women and children—became more and more important as readers in all three countries. However, the lower classes remained largely illiterate and had very limited access to education. The nineteenth century saw almost all of these characteristics of the book market replaced by new realities in most of Western Europe and North America.¹³

In France, the 1789 revolution has been called the origin of modern publishing. The revolution awakened the political consciousness of the population and created an interest in literate skills because printed material was a form of receiving information and voicing opinion.¹⁴ This new interest created a larger market for printed matter which in turn spurred on a new industry. Another explanation for the changes posits the Industrial Revolution, which began in eighteenth-century England and then spread to the Continent and the United States, as a prerequisite for the widespread changes in the book market in the nineteenth century. While the new technologies revolutionized the production and distribution of printed matter, the Industrial Revolution also led to the emergence of the “masses,” the future consumers of all this printed matter. The grouping of people in factories, and the ensuing creation of large cities, led to the concentration of people in large urban centers.

Both of these explanations show that in the nineteenth century a revolution¹⁵ took place in the marketplace; a revolution that affected publishers, writers, and readers alike.¹⁶ With the rise of an industrial economy, new inventions facilitated the publishing and printing process. A steam-powered mechanical press (which allowed printing of 1,000 rather than 150 sheets per hour), the paper making machine, the binding machine,¹⁷ and later in the century the linotype,¹⁸ the photoengraving machine, and new methods of binding¹⁹ allowed for faster and better production of more printed matter than ever before. In addition, the decline in paper and ink prices (and the abolition of the newspaper and paper tax in England)²⁰ helped the expanding business of publishing.²¹

By the mid-1800s, the creation of literature and its publishing had become a vast business proposition. Along with mass production came the need for mass distribution. Initially, itinerant book peddlers made printed matter available to even the most remote areas.²² Moreover, the building and extension of railway networks connected these remote areas with the centers of “civilization” and allowed reliable widespread distribution of printed matter.²³

The publishing business produced a new figure—the publisher—who served as an intermediary between author, printer and bookseller.²⁴ As businessmen, publishers did not consider *belles lettres* the goal of their work. Instead, they invented ever better sales tactics to market their products. Advertisements, the bestseller system, the metropolitan tabloids, commercial images and slogans, as well as cheap magazines and the serialized novel of *the feuilleton*, were all invented and used to gain ever larger shares of the reading public.²⁵

Authors adapted to the new system, writing with financial concerns in the back of their minds. They did so grudgingly at times, but they needed to respond to the demands of a mass market. While they catered to the demands of the consumer, the authors and the publishing industry influenced the readership by creating desires and reading habits in the consumers of printed matter.²⁶

Not only did the publishing and producing aspects of the book market undergo dramatic change as a result of these developments, but the readership underwent significant transformations as well. According to one critic, the nineteenth century witnessed the “demise of the gentle reader.”²⁷ The gentle reader was a definable and predictable entity known to the author and the booksellers as well as all other people involved in the production and distribution of books. However, this clearly defined group of readers became submerged in the new mass readership of the nineteenth century, including a large variety of people from different social classes, regions, and with a diversity of opinions. In short, the readership had in one sense become a lot less predictable. However, the market also found the lowest common denominator among the reading public and aggressively marketed printed matter that catered to the desire of the largest possible group. In addition, they manufactured for all these diverse readers the same desires—creating, in a sense, a unified readership.

New inventions figured among the many factors that contributed to the changing makeup of the reading public. Better lighting at home and in public places—first with gas lamps and then with electric bulbs—allowed longer possible reading time. Many towns established public reading rooms which provided good lighting and a more pleasant environment for reading than the overcrowded home.²⁸ In addition, public libraries came into existence, the use of which, however, remained limited due to discriminatory admittance policies.²⁹ Small lending libraries such as the *cabinet de lecture* in France were more successful than these public libraries in making available printed matter to a large group of people.³⁰ Newly designed furniture facilitated comfortable reading, convenient clothes for ladies allowed for more comfortable reading positions, and reading glasses became available to many more people than heretofore.³¹ In addition, a gradual shortening of working hours permitted more leisure time that could be spent on reading. All these factors contributed to easier access and more opportunities to read for those who had read little or nothing at all before.³²

In addition, books became more affordable for a growing number of people, as buying power increased throughout the nineteenth century while the relative price of books declined. In the second half of the nineteenth century in particular, rising wages allowed more employees to spend money on printed matter. Whereas a novel had previously cost more than a week’s wages, many workers were now able to afford buying printed matter.³³ Members of the working class could not afford literature in the strict sense of the word in the early part of the century, where a novel still cost two days’ wages. The few working people who did buy literature acquired it from street vendors, while most of their reading peers concentrated on

even cheaper street literature and newspapers.³⁴ The explosion of print thus affected almost every part of the population.

The result of the above-mentioned changes was a mass consumption of printed matter and an obsession with news, information, and entertainment. People did not read “intensively” as they had done for centuries. Instead of few works read continually by a well-defined readership, readers now consumed a large number of printed texts that they read quickly, one after the other. In lieu of “intensive” reading as practiced earlier, the nineteenth century witnessed “extensive” reading.³⁵ Readers read “all kinds of material, especially periodicals and newspapers, and read it only once, then raced on to the next item.”³⁶ In France, reading became more individualized and less public, as reading was not an activity of the salons anymore. Similarly, in England and the United States, communities of like-minded readers ceased to exist. Instead, individual appreciation and taste came to define the readership.³⁷

One of the main changes in the readership of the nineteenth century was its social makeup. Previously, only members of the upper class and religious and political elites in urban centers had enjoyed access to literacy and to reading material. In the eighteenth century members of the middle class became more and more prominent as readers.³⁸ Now the mass market expanded “downward and outward,”³⁹ reaching the rural areas as well as the lower classes.

Therefore, one of the major changes in the nineteenth century was the unprecedented access of the lower classes to schooling and literacy. In France, in the United States and in Britain, laws regarding mandatory primary schooling ensured that by the end of the century virtually everyone was literate or had at least undergone some years of primary schooling.⁴⁰ Whereas for centuries literacy had been the privilege of a small elite, it now began to reach the mass population. However, the term literacy does not mean that everyone could or desired to read on a sophisticated level. Nevertheless, there were more people than ever responding to print⁴¹ due to the attempts at providing schooling and, therefore, literacy for the masses.

Mass schooling evoked lively debates.⁴² As industrialization proceeded, the social stratification of society corresponded more and more to the levels of education. The established elites maintained their position by limiting access to higher education.⁴³ However, a rising chorus of voices demanded at least primary education for the masses, each with a different motivation. The advocates of spreading literacy and schooling among the lower classes advanced several arguments. First, the religious impetus was very strong. In order to have a religious people, advocates of lower-class literacy argued that the masses had to be able to read the Bible. In addition, the economic need for industrialization and the political need for “popular franchise” favored the spread of literacy.⁴⁴ Observers also perceived that literacy served the goals of nationalism and unity, and lastly it seemed easier to give the lower classes literacy graciously and thereby to control it, rather than to let them discover it freely.

This need to control the spread of literacy shows the intimate link between reading and power. Reading confers power, and not being able to read equals a lack of power. The notion that the spread of literacy and the ability to read are empowering is a recent one. Indeed, the spread of literacy constitutes for many critics a major step toward democratization:

It is only in the last hundred years, as a result of the acceptance of a new and more optimistic attitude to the nature and aptitudes of the average man, that there has spread the idea that literacy is somehow good in itself, one of the natural rights of man, regardless of the uses to which the new means of communication by the written word is put, and that attempts to withhold elementary education from the poor have been wholly abandoned in all advanced societies.⁴⁵

However, many scholars have challenged this view by denying the empowering aspect of literacy and reading. These critics have argued that literacy did not further the enlightenment of the lower classes in the nineteenth century, but instead served as a tool for maintaining a hierarchical social structure and the dominant relations of power.⁴⁶ Indeed, the argument is taken so far as to say that the spread of literacy only reinforced class distinctions and the deep gaps between the different classes. Literacy served as an “instrument of social stability in a time of change, facilitating both progress and development without (or with a diminished) threat of disorder.”⁴⁷ The same old established elites—religious, political, and the upper classes (although now including with increasing importance the middle classes)—made decisions and stayed in power, while the controlled spread of literacy kept the lower classes in their place. The assessment of the spread of literacy as one that reinforces class distinctions and does not empower the newly literate people seems like a logically correct and very appealing interpretation.

However, the fear as expressed by the fictional figure Lady Ludlow, which mirrors the fear of many contemporaries, links literacy and reading to a potential subversion of power. If those in power or in better positions feared the possible outcome of the spread of literacy, they must have perceived literacy as something empowering. Since the elite did not want to empower the lower classes, they vehemently tried to keep literacy at bay, and if they approved the spread of literacy, they did so in order to channel the power that comes with literacy. In fact, the ruling classes were divided in their attitudes toward popular education, sometimes encouraging it to feed their own aspirations, at other times seeking to repress it for fear of social unrest. They aimed for social control via ignorance: it is easier to govern and exploit illiterate people than literate people “for the simple reason that it is extremely difficult to make sure that they never develop a taste for subversive literature.”⁴⁸

Many tactics were used throughout the nineteenth century to curb the power of literacy or at least to channel the power that literacy and reading can imbue. Literacy alone was feared as potentially dangerous. However, a moral basis in instruction insured that literacy would lead to good, morally upright citizens.⁴⁹

Therefore, schooling had to be done properly, that is, proper moral values had to be taught together with literacy.

As moral centers of the family, mothers gave children their first education. One important function of mothers was to socialize the children, that is, they had to teach them reading and moral values. Therefore, mothers achieved a prominent status as guardians of reading materials and moral values. In order to fulfill the function of women as educators, men imposed literacy on them to socialize the children. The women themselves, therefore, had to be “properly” educated in preparation for their role as mother.

In the education of both women and men, several methods sought to curtail the dangerous potential of literacy. In the educational system in England, for example, the catechistic method of learning by rote memorization and the monitorial schools may have taught the rudiments of literacy, but this method also discouraged the critical thinking and consciousness that can come with reading.⁵⁰

The education the people were to receive was clearly not to equip them for free inquiry—
...rather [it was supposed to implant] in the mind, through custom or through pain and pleasure,
an invariable sequence and association of ideas which would conduce in the end to the happiness
of all.⁵¹

The “happiness” would consist of everyone accepting his or her station in life and indeed of the social stratification remaining as before. The penal and disciplinary measures of the school system, which were largely adopted to break the will and to condition the child to routinized labor in the factory, did not invite an evolution of critical thinking.

Similarly, in France, despite its rather early attempts at mass education, Guizot reflected these same notions when he recited the commonly held belief that “far from education being a means of social change, it should rather reflect social distinctions and should accept to be limited by the divisions of society.”⁵² Many members of the ruling class saw education as a means to keep “paternalist authority” over the lower classes rather than as a way of providing the lower classes with independence and individual development.⁵³

As an example of this paternalistic attitude toward reading, the emergence of a national education system and the ever-growing number of literate people prompted the state in France into directing what we would call “mass reading habits.”⁵⁴ Since it was difficult to curb the new rise in literacy directly, the only other means of controlling the dangerous power of reading was to be found in censorship.⁵⁵ Legal controls seemed necessary in France, for example, where fearful observers were experiencing the destabilization of their social and political world through the changes in literate culture. Through censorship of the reading material, the state hoped to hold the danger of a conscious and reading mass population in check.

Each regime justifies its restrictions on the freedom of expression and reception by indicating the power of new discourses such as socialism and anarchism, to move an unschooled and uncritical audience to revolutionary action.⁵⁶

But this notion implies that the act of reading could empower those not in power at the moment and raise their consciousness and even incite revolutionary action. Fear of social unrest remains at the bottom of censorship and all other measures to control and limit the spread of literacy.

These measures—educational methods to curb the ability of critical thinking and censorship—as well as the fear represented by Lady Ludlow’s remarks, indicate that reading and power are closely linked. The destabilization of the book market and the ensuing changes of the readership represent a threat to the established order and to those in power. Their main fear was that the acquisition of literacy on the part of the lower classes could lead to an unbalancing of the social stratification. This fear expressed itself in the wish to control literacy and the act of reading.

Those who feared lower-class access to literacy failed to consider that literacy or reading in itself is a restabilizing factor. What is read reflects the dominant discourse of society and can manufacture desires that lead the reader where he or she should go—“safely.” The promotion of “safe” reading material was widely used as a means of controlling the threat of subversive power that resulted from literacy. Power and reading are therefore linked in two ways. On the one hand, reading bestows power on the reader because he or she has access to knowledge or even subversive ideas. On the other hand, reading imparts power to those who grant literacy and the ability to read to the illiterate. They control the reading in two ways: outward implementations of control such as institutional surveillance of reading material served to curb any danger, and internal mechanisms of control to limit any subversive tendencies inherent in reading. The reading materials not only reflected the dominant discourse but also socialized the reader by creating the same desires in them that control them. Those who have control over who reads and what is read can contain, or restabilize, the threat of reading with inherent messages of submission to the dominant discourse and by numbing a sense of injustice with the feeling of triumph over equal access to literacy.

As the example of *My Lady Ludlow* shows, the fiction of the nineteenth century treats the themes of the acquisition of literacy, the debate about education and the notion of reading as empowerment. In this way, contemporary narratives reflect and engage with historical reality. This is to say that an examination of the literature sheds light on the attitudes prevalent in this historical climate. A discussion of Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), a narrative in which a slave acquires the skill of literacy—as well as Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1867) and Emile Zola’s *Germinal* (1885), two narratives in which members from the lower social classes attain goals in life through the ability to read—exposes many of the issues discussed in this chapter. An American slave, an American boy from the streets and a French mine worker from the lower class each

personify the potentially destabilizing changes that occur due to reading and literacy in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the three authors' different attitudes toward this power reveal a whole spectrum of reaction to the destabilization of the world of reading. The following three chapters show that the three authors treat the empowering potential of reading differently. But each realizes that reading is connected to power, and that the destabilization of the world of reading in the nineteenth century entails a dangerous potential.

Chapter Two

“The Pathway from Slavery to Freedom”¹

Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

[The slave] Robert...enjoyed the distinction of being a good reader. Mrs. Johnson [his master] had taught him to read on the same principle she would have taught a pet animal amusing tricks. She had never imagined the time would come when he could use the machinery she had put in his hands to help overthrow the institution to which she was so ardently attached.

Frances E.W. Harper, *Iola Leroy* (1892)²

Like the slave Robert in Harper’s story about slavery, Frederick Douglass manages to escape to freedom—or to the world in the U.S. North that he perceives to be the haven of freedom. Like Robert, it is Douglass’s mistress who teaches him to read. And like Robert, Douglass becomes literate and a good reader, which is a prerequisite for his escape.³ In 1845, Frederick Douglass—now safely escaped from slavery—wrote the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* as a response to doubts that he really was an escaped slave. The narrative details in autobiographical form Douglass’s life in slavery, his acquisition of literacy, and his subsequent flight to freedom. Douglass’s perspective on his own life as presented in the narrative points to the kind of destabilization of the social order described above. Douglass asserts that he could not have freed himself if he had been illiterate. The acquisition of literacy awoke his consciousness of the reality of slavery and the possibility of freedom from it, and so it enabled him to flee. His fleeing the hierarchical structure of a slave society constitutes a major upheaval, because if one slave could accomplish what Douglass had done, others could too. Literacy and reading, therefore, prove empowering for the slave and dangerous for the established powers. As David Walker noted as early as 1829, “For colored people to acquire learning in this country, makes tyrants quake and tremble on their sandy foundation.”⁴

However, upon closer examination of the narrative, literacy proves to have a much more complex role in the life of Frederick Douglass. While it is certainly an important factor in awakening Douglass's consciousness and empowering him, it is not the sole agent which allows him to seize his freedom. How, then, does reading affect his consciousness? And how does it allow him to challenge structures of domination? In what way do reading and literacy constitute a destabilization of Douglass's life as well as of the established power structures?

Already in the first paragraph of his narrative, Douglass points out that slavery constitutes a state of ignorance and a lack of access to the written word.⁵ He does not know his age, "never having seen any authentic record" (Douglass 47).⁶ In addition, he points to the power relationship between slaves and masters by contending that "it is the wish of most masters... to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (Douglass 47). Ignorant slaves are easier to govern than those who have knowledge. Very early in his childhood, Douglass learns that knowledge equals power, which is in the possession of white people. He does not understand why he is deprived of the same knowledge other little boys had about their age (Douglass 47). Douglass's ignorance extends to not knowing who his father was, not because he did not wish to know but rather because "the means of knowing" were withheld from him (Douglass 48). Indeed, critic Ann Kibbey goes as far as to call his state one of linguistic enslavement "to the extent that... he was left without any social orientation but the name of 'slave.'"⁷

It seems, then, that literacy would be the ideal weapon to escape from linguistic, physical, and psychological enslavement, that is, to attain that which from the slave's perspective appears to be freedom.⁸ Since literacy and nascent consciousness supposedly coincide, literacy could serve as a potent agent of change. However, in Douglass's case, literacy and consciousness do not coincide so neatly.⁹ Indeed, an awareness of the unjust evil of slavery and the wish for freedom bud very early in Douglass's mind. In his authenticating introductory letter printed at the beginning of the *Narrative*, Wendell Philipps observes that "long before you [Douglass] had mastered your ABC... you began to gauge the wretchedness of the slave" (Douglass 44). The first instance of consciousness comes for the young child (who had hitherto lived a rather sheltered life) on the outskirts of the plantation when he witnesses the brutal, bloody beating of his aunt Hester. He remembers the fearful event as "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery" (Douglass 51). However, it is only later that the child begins to understand that slavery is a dehumanizing crime.

Douglass claims that he did not understand the songs of the slaves when he was a slave himself. However, he does remember that hearing those songs—considered by some as a show of the slaves' contentment in their position—filled him with "ineffable sadness" (Douglass 58). More importantly, Douglass traces his "first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery" (Douglass 58) to those songs. Indeed, we find a consciousness of his existence and the evil of it in the young Douglass who is at that point still illiterate.¹⁰ In addition, Douglass reminds us—albeit in hindsight of someone who is now literate and has achieved freedom

from slavery—that “from my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace” (Douglass 75). He mentions this upon being sent to the Auld household in Baltimore, a journey that would prove to be the most fortuitous event in his life since it “laid the foundation and opened that gateway to all [his...] subsequent prosperity” (Douglass 75) beginning with the ABC which his new mistress teaches him.

The move to Baltimore marks a decided change in Douglass’s life. He is removed from the plantation, closer to the north and therefore to freedom from slavery, and he learns the very important lesson of the value of literacy from his new masters. It is important to remember, however, that the foundation for any transformation that literacy might provoke has been laid in his life before Baltimore. The young Douglass was at least vaguely conscious of the meaning of slavery and the possibility of another state of being.

In the Auld household in Baltimore, Douglass meets Mrs. Auld, who is unlike any other white slaveholder he has hitherto encountered. She is a former seamstress and has never owned a slave before. In her innocence toward the slave system, she instructs Douglass in the alphabet. However, her husband soon finds out and strictly forbids the practice. He tells her that

learning would spoil the best nigger in the world.... [T]here would be no keeping him.... He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master [and...] It would make him [the slave himself] discontented and unhappy. (Douglass 78)

Young Douglass learns one of the most valuable lessons from Mr. Auld’s tirade—the value of reading and literacy. For if Mr. Auld considered it “a great evil, to be carefully shunned,” it was for him “a great good, to be diligently sought” (Douglass 79). Douglass had come to understand the power of the word by merest accident.¹¹ “By representing the tension between his desire to read and his master’s objection to his education Douglass captures the distance between the interests of black subordinates and white superordinates.”¹² In addition, he understands “the white man’s power to enslave the black man” (Douglass 78). However, the revelation of the importance of literacy and the strong will to acquire full literacy do not entirely represent new notions for Douglass. When he hears Mr. Auld’s arguments, the words

stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation...with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. (Douglass 78)

Despite the newness of his understanding of the white man’s power and the necessity of his acquiring literacy, Douglass refers to struggles in his youthful mind and indicates that he has thought about and confronted these issues before. While he

had never arrived at such a strident conclusion before the actual acquisition of literacy, his consciousness was awakened before he learned to read.

This analysis does not intend to belittle the value of literacy. For Frederick Douglass, it is literacy that leads to definite thoughts of freedom. His reading allows him to express feelings and emotions he could not voice before. Reading, then, is a tool that helps Douglass order and name reality. "The act of reading provides the intellectual basis of his quest for liberation, introducing him to forbidden and unfamiliar ideas such as freedom and abolition."¹³ In addition, it gives him the possibility of expressing "interesting thoughts of [his] own soul, which had frequently flashed though [his] mind and died away from want of utterance" (Douglass 84). Reading enables Douglass to utter his thoughts as well as to "meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery" (Douglass 84).

Having learned how to read with the help of young white children on the streets to whom he offered food in exchange for reading lessons, Douglass reads whenever and wherever he can despite strict supervision. Among important texts that he reads, the *Columbian Orator* (1810)¹⁴ and, in particular, a dialogue between a runaway slave and his master impresses Douglass. In this book, the slave argues with his master to such an extent that the master gives him his freedom. Again, the power of the word proves itself to Douglass. The message of human dignity and freedom in the *Columbian Orator*, coupled with the practical examples of the results of fine speaking, reinforce two ideas: first, that words can confront authority—the slave can speak back to the master; and second, that the power of the word might be linked to freedom. From this point on, Douglass knows that he can achieve freedom with the help of literacy.

However, Mr. Auld's warnings about literacy ironically prove to contain a certain truth after all. Despite knowing that the "pathway from slavery to freedom" (Douglass 78) lies in literacy, Douglass becomes disenchanted when he does not perceive an immediate change in his enslaved condition.

In fact, the more he reads, the more strongly he abhors slavery and slaveholders, but at times he perceives reading as a curse. "It had given me a view of my wretched condition without the remedy" (Douglass 84). Douglass even comes to envy the state of ignorance of his fellow slaves, for at least they are not tormented by thinking (Douglass 84).

To answer our first question, then, Frederick Douglass's acquisition of literacy indeed alters his consciousness, because it solidifies an awareness of his miserable state of being. Literacy, therefore, serves as an agent in making Douglass conscious of the power structures that constitute slavery. Nevertheless, he realizes that reading and consciousness alone are not sufficient weapons to challenge the power structures and escape the system of slavery.

However, Douglass finds a solution in learning how to write with the express purpose of writing his own pass to freedom. He learns to write (only because he knows how to read) by copying letters written by shipbuilders on parts of the ships. In addition, he challenges young white children to matches of who can write better,

and he receives further instruction in that manner. Having learned sufficiently, he practices by writing in the empty spaces of his young master's own discarded school books.

Being able to read and write, Douglass believes that he should be able to trick his master and to escape slavery. However, unforeseen events in his life—the death of his former master—place him in the hands of a “nigger breaker” (Douglass 105) who is supposed to curb his rebellious spirit. The extremely hard physical labor and cruel treatment succeed in breaking the sixteen-year-old physically and psychologically. What is more, his “disposition to read departed,” creating a “man transformed into a brute” (Douglass 105). It seems, then, that literacy is only helpful in situations such as the one that Douglass found in Baltimore, since domestic slavery is less harsh than plantation slavery. However, it also proves that the power structures of the slave system purposely either forbid or hinder reading and any intellectual development.

Douglass challenges the dominant power structure and rekindles his hopes of freedom with an act of counter-violence.¹⁵ When he is at the mercy of a particularly violent outburst from his overseer, Douglass resists and fights him. After two hours Douglass, who has drawn blood, emerges as the apparent winner. From then on, the overseer, who does not punish Douglass publicly for fear of losing his reputation as a “nigger breaker,” does not bother Douglass again. Douglass perceives of the battle as a turning point in his career. “It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with the determination to be free” (Douglass 113). As critic Valerie Smith puts it, “The acquisition of literacy first enabled him to feel free, the act of physical resistance precipitates his second and lasting period of liberation.”¹⁶ He claims freedom so much already that he sees himself as a slave only in form and no more in fact (Douglass 113).¹⁷

One might argue, of course, that Douglass only resisted physically because he had acquired literacy and therefore learned of his own value, of the dignity of humanity and the right to freedom. This seems plausible, at least according to Frederick Douglass's perception, since other slaves who have not learned to read do not act like Douglass; if these slaves resist at all, they do so passively rather than with force. Another slave, for example, refuses to follow an order and is shot as a consequence. The overseer might easily have shot Douglass as a result of his fighting back but this does not happen. It seems that the combination of literacy, consciousness, and violence allows Douglass to challenge existing power structures. However, they still do not free him from slavery—he remains in captivity at least in form.

Mentally, Douglass increasingly distances himself from his condition as a slave. When he is moved to another plantation, he teaches his fellow slaves to read, and he keeps a secret Sabbath school (Douglass 119). He firmly believes at this point that literacy can improve his lot as well as that of his fellow captives. “I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like better-ing the condition of my race” (Douglass 121). Several of his students learn

to read, and he proudly reports that one of them becomes free through his agency. Interestingly, not everyone who learned to read under Douglass’s instruction is free. The one who is free has achieved freedom only because Douglass seems to have helped and not solely because he has acquired literacy.

However, literacy does prompt several slaves to try to escape with Douglass. Douglass writes a pass for each one of them, and together they develop a careful plan of escape. While they are betrayed, the slaves miraculously do not receive severe punishment. In fact, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore into the care of Mr. Auld. From there, Douglass finally manages to escape but he leaves the details of his flight untold.

Ultimately, then, to answer the second question, literacy does allow Douglass to challenge the structures of domination. By fleeing the system of slavery, he causes the greatest possible destabilization of an orderly status quo. In the face of all restrictions and the powerful grip of his masters, he does run away. Literacy constitutes a destabilization in Douglass’s own life. It raises his consciousness of his situation, reinforcing his first inklings of the inhumanity of slavery. In addition, his literacy and the understanding of the slave’s situation that comes with it, creates or rather reinforces in Douglass the desire to be free and the realization of the possibility of escape. What is more, it ultimately leads to a destabilization of accepted norms because a slave manages to rise from his position and to flee from slavery.

Douglass’s story does not end with his flight. It is important to note that the literacy he has acquired keeps serving him positively. He moves to New Bedford, where he does all kinds of work. It is only when he is “discovered” as a speaker at the 1841 anti-slavery convention in Nantucket that the real value of literacy becomes evident. Douglass is an excellent speaker with much rhetorical power, gained perhaps from the *Columbian Orator* among other texts. He becomes a regular speaker for the abolitionists.

This event ends Douglass’s *Narrative*. Throughout his life Douglass’s literacy and ability with words became more and more important. In keeping with his wish for freedom, he did not let the abolitionists’ agenda control his speeches. They would have liked him to “put more of the plantation” into his speeches and to philosophize less.¹⁸ In the end, Douglass even broke with William Lloyd Garrison—his mentor and recruiter—and published his own abolitionist paper.¹⁹ In addition, we should not forget that Douglass published in 1845 his *Narrative* with very successful rhetoric. All of these acts point to the destabilizing power of literacy. Frederick Douglass became a well-known and unusual public figure, because he created serious problems for the social structure from which he had emerged. He destabilized the master-slave relationship, and even refused to let “freedom” be another form of slavery. He was the master of his own life, of his own words—spoken and written—and he wielded power with words, by moving and influencing his audiences and readers.

But does the acquisition of literacy really constitute an act of empowerment? And even if it does, must one not concede that a certain kind of restabilization

takes place in Frederick Douglass's life?²⁰ Many critics, among them Robert Pattison, deny the empowering aspect of literacy: "literacy did not—does not ever by itself—awaken the passion of the mind."²¹ However, Pattison grants literacy some power although it cannot unfold without the help of other factors. In the case of Frederick Douglass, one could argue that his earlier consciousness, his intelligence, and circumstances helped to let literacy take on such an important role in his life.

Some critics have actually argued that it might be Douglass's status as a mulatto that allows him to rise above the other slaves.²² However, Douglass's description of his "special" position as a slave whose father might have been white (and, in addition, his master) points to a much harder life than that of a normal slave: "... [S]uch slaves [mulattos] invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others" (Douglass 49). Not only is the mulatto slave an offense to the white mistress and may be beaten or sold more often than others, but he is also subject to being beaten by his or her own father and half-siblings. It does not seem that these circumstances prove particularly conducive to acquiring literacy and freedom. The argument seems to indicate that it is the "white portion" of the mulatto Frederick Douglass that allowed him to be successful. However, his own words undermine this opinion.

Harvey J. Graff questions the empowering nature of literacy even more by claiming that western societies believe in a literacy myth. "The assumption is that literacy, development, growth and progress are inseparably linked."²³ Instead, Graff concurs with the point made above that "since the time of the Roman state, literacy has been a tool for social organization and control, inspiring in the learner a respect for authority."²⁴ Indeed, literacy was used to support patriarchy and other powerful groups to suppress the rights of oppressed people. According to Graff,

slaveholders accepted traditional elite conservative fears of the power of literacy ...and considered education and literacy unsettling to the bound underclass, believing that it taught them to despise their condition, unsuited them for menial labor, gave them access to seditious literature, and poisoned their minds and morals.²⁵

Mr. Auld, Frederick Douglass's master, certainly shares this view, and even voices his opinion in front of his slave, and thereby gives Douglass insight into the slaveholder's mind. But in contrast to Graff's perspective, for Frederick Douglass, the allure of literacy is real rather than a myth. He does feel discontented, he does despise his condition, and it does give him access to "seditious" literature which sharpens his consciousness and ultimately aids him in his escape. In one sense, then, literacy is empowering despite Graff's argument.

However, as Graff points out correctly, literacy cannot ever be the sole instrument of empowerment as "no level of equality in literacy or education could have overcome such factors as racism, assumptions about inferiority and structural or institutional inequities."²⁶ Again, it is true that Douglass does not find perfect equal

ity even when free in New Bedford; “I went in pursuit of a job of calking; but such was the strength of prejudice against color, among the white calkers, that they refused to work with me, and of course I could get no employment” (Douglass 150).²⁷ But it seems to be a matter of degree whether the power of literacy is a myth or not.

As Graff points out, the lack of literacy was often felt to be a greater disadvantage than the possession of it was an advantage.²⁸ As discussed above, whenever an institution or teacher decided to impart literacy, they did so with the same goals and motivations as much education provided for lower class pupils in the nineteenth century. The function of literacy then was “collective, stabilizing, and assimilating.”²⁹ However, Mr. Auld only sees the dangerous aspect of literacy: “he does not seem to understand that it might be possible to imprison the slave even more thoroughly” by administering doses of controlled literacy.³⁰

Therefore, literacy is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is empowering: it enables Douglass to achieve a more defined consciousness of his situation and ultimately helps him escape to freedom as well as make a life for himself in freedom. On the other hand, however, literacy is a tool that has been used to further the domination of those already in power. And indeed, literacy does not enable Douglass to break the structures of domination entirely. The slave system persists as if he (and others) had never escaped, those in power remain there, and Douglass even has trouble finding equality in the free states. Yet, in his personal life at least, he has achieved a break in the power structures in that he is now his own master (but even in freedom people try to dominate him like the abolitionists with their agenda). Literacy thus presents a destabilization in Douglass’s immediate sphere, but it leads to a transformation of relationships of domination rather than a break in existing power structures.

Moreover, many critics and contemporaries alike observed a certain kind of restabilization in Douglass’s behavior. According to this argument, Douglass fell into the trap of acquiring—along with literacy—the dominant discourse and, thus, the dominant ideology of nineteenth-century white America. His critics begin by citing the name that Douglass accepted from Mr. Johnson, his benefactor in New Bedford. Douglass is a heroic Scottish chieftain in Sir Walter Scott’s *Lady of the Lake* (1810)—a novel Johnson had been reading. By accepting a name from the dominant literate culture, these critics claim, Douglass gives up his roots. However, one could also argue that he makes use of the power of taking a name and giving himself a name with heroic connotations which might imbue him with power in the context of the literate culture that he has to inhabit.³¹

More importantly, contemporary critics expressed skepticism about Douglass’s authorship because of the high level of sophistication of the narrative’s language and the detachment which, in their view, could not be achieved by a victim of oppression.³² Interestingly enough, some of today’s critics criticize Douglass for using “well-established and well-received narrative conventions”³³ and the sophisticated language of the dominant discourse. Indeed, Houston A. Baker goes

so far as to say that “had there been a separate written black language available, Douglass might have fared better.”³⁴

However, Douglass probably made a conscious choice to use the dominant discourse in both his speeches and his writing. Had he reverted to black dialect—as his abolitionist friends urged him to do—he might have elicited pity and wonder. However, he was interested in engaging his audience and readers in articulate conflict.³⁵ “How could he have spoken any other language than that of the dominant discourse and expected to be heard”³⁶ and taken seriously as a worthy interlocutor? In order for Douglass to resist effectively, he had to share the discourse of “masculine white supremacy.”³⁷ The “criticism of Douglass’s strategies rests on the notion that one can exist, indeed one can think, in a place outside of culture, outside of the language system” we use.³⁸ However, it is not possible to do so.

By using the dominant discourse, Douglass proves that he has appropriated the domain of language held by the dominant powers. If he can prove that slaves are able to appropriate that language, he proves that they can take part in political and social discussion, and that they have a voice that can be heard. Indeed, as Elizabeth McHenry shows in her book *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies*, many middle- and upper-class African-Americans used reading and literary conversation to show that they were citizens active in the literary and political debates of the time.³⁹ Similarly, by choosing the dominant discourse, Douglass paves his way toward integration into a political and human community.⁴⁰ While equality is not guaranteed from the beginning, as Harvey J. Graff points out, equal language can at least serve as a foundation for equality.

We need not assume, then, that literacy for Douglass “involved social betrayal, psychological escape, or any sort of movement away from his identity rooted in traditional black slave culture.”⁴¹ Rather, Douglass adopts the dominant discourse to pursue his own goals.

Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that the adoption of the dominant discourse through reading prods Douglass to a great extent toward an acceptance of the ideology of the white U.S. middle class. Undeniably, Douglass accepts aspects of this ideology. The “liberated self [. . .] is portrayed by Douglass as firmly Christian, having adopted cherished values from the white world that held him in bondage.”⁴² Indeed, the very structure of dominant discourse “embod[ies] values and assumptions that may elude one’s control.”⁴³ Douglass does seem to be aware of at least some of these problems since he criticizes some aspects of dominant ideology, for example, in his appendix about religion.⁴⁴

More interestingly, Douglass’s concept of man, which he was to expound many times in the lecture “Self-made Men” later in his life, is based on an American definition of man and an American concept of freedom.⁴⁵ Indeed, his *Narrative* includes a certain form of the “rags-to-riches” story.⁴⁶ As this myth prescribes, Douglass finds strength in himself to rise above his position and espouses such values as selfreliance, self-respect, industry, perseverance, and economy.⁴⁷ The

concomitant individualism leads Douglass to turn elitist at times when he distinguishes himself clearly from the other ignorant slaves.

To what extent, then, do literacy and reading represent a destabilizing effect and a form of empowerment, and to what extent can we speak of a restabilization given Douglass's espousal of dominant discourse and ideology? At this point, especially since the narrative is an autobiography, one has to take into account the author's point of view and possible intention. Douglass was interested in bettering the position of slaves, that is, in abolishing slavery by non-violent means. His speeches and writings portray language as a powerfully destabilizing force. It is his own emphasis on literacy that grants reading an empowering effect. The restabilization that lies in his acceptance of dominant discourse and ideology can be explained in part because his agenda demanded to be heard and understood by the dominant group in society.

Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* is among the most outspoken in favor of the empowerment of literacy, partly because the author describes his own rise and validates his situation by describing the empowerment. In comparison to Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* and Emile Zola's *Germinal*, the *Narrative* strongly presents literacy as destabilization and empowerment, and the author's treatment of the subject reinforces this notion.

Interestingly, critics have found another connection between Alger's narrative and Douglass's than that of the importance of literacy. Commentators have called Douglass for his inclusion of the rags-to-riches and the self-made-man myth a "black Horatio Alger."⁴⁸ A comparison of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* with the *Narrative*, undertaken in the next chapter, shows, however, that the treatment of literacy and destabilization is very different in these two accounts.

Chapter Three

The Passage to Middle-Class Respectability

Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*

...the girl who taught him spelling and grammar in the school at Lumberville had said she would have him for her husband.

William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)¹

Silas Lapham's rise in the world—his road to respectability—begins with his education. He marries his teacher, an educated woman, which represents his first step on the ladder to a middle-class life. Later, when Lapham has arrived in the business world, he still lacks refinement because he has just not read enough: his future son-in-law's father points out “we must read or we must barbarize.”² For Lapham, then, social ascent is linked to reading.

Similarly, Horatio Alger's hero, *Ragged Dick*, learns that in order to rise in the world, he needs to learn how to read. When Hugh Kenner called Horatio Alger the “laureate of the paradigms of ascent,”³ he reinforced what has become known as the “Horatio Alger myth.” Even today, eight Americans each year who have reached prominent positions and started out in a lower class environment receive a Horatio Alger Award from the American Schools and Colleges Association.⁴

It seems reasonable to label Frederick Douglass, who speaks about the rise of a slave to prominence, a black Horatio Alger.⁵ According to the Alger or “rags-to-riches” myth, everyone can rise from a lower class to a higher one. H. L. Mencken formulated this belief as one of a particularly American nature as follows in *The American Credo*.

The thing which sets off the American from all other men and gives a peculiar colour not only to the pattern of his daily life but also to the play of his inner ideas, is what, for want of a more exact term, may be called social aspiration. That is to say his dominant passion is a passion...to improve his position, to

break down some shadowy barrier of caste, to achieve the countenance of what, for all his talk of equality he recognizes and accepts as his betters.⁶

Superficially, it seems that the “rags-to-riches” or Alger myth corresponds to Frederick Douglass’s ascent from slavery to abolitionist speaker. The “rags-to-riches” myth does not focus so much on the goal of having achieved riches but rather on the process of upward mobility.⁷ Similarly, Douglass’s *Narrative* focuses on the way up and only briefly describes where Douglass arrives.

Both in Alger’s supposedly quintessential “rags-to-riches” story, *Ragged Dick* (1867), and in Douglass’s *Narrative*, learning to read is instrumental to upward mobility. Whereas Alger’s hero, Dick, has to learn to read in order to rise from his lowly position as a bootblack on the street, the slave learns to read and therefore reinforces his consciousness and discovers the possibilities of freedom.

However, the Horatio Alger myth is indeed only that: a myth, and it does not correspond to the realities of the fictional worlds Alger creates. His heroes do not attain riches at all. Their only achievement is moderate success in the white-collar world as clerks or junior partners in merchant firms. In *Ragged Dick*, the hero Dick is a street child, a bootblack, who moves up in the world to a position as clerk in an accounting office. He thus achieves middle-class respectability. Instead of riches, Alger’s heroes strive toward respectability. They desire to leave behind a life of dissipation on the streets for a life imbued with middle-class values and goals.⁸ It is true that some do achieve a certain amount of wealth and prominence in *Ragged Dick*. Dick Whittington became the Lord Mayor of London by saving “pins and needles” (Alger 30),⁹ and Mr. Whitney, one of Dick’s benefactors, was lucky enough to invent a machine which brought him a fair amount of wealth (Alger 55). Frank, Mr. Whitney’s nephew and Dick’s first middle-class friend of his own age, reminds Dick: “you may not become rich,—it isn’t everybody that becomes rich, you know,—but you can obtain a good position, and be respected” (Alger 31). Alger’s heroes—particularly *Ragged Dick*—decide to become respectable and to obtain such a position rather than to strive for miraculous riches.

Douglass, on the other hand, achieves more than mere respectability, and indeed, one could question his respectability. He becomes a publicly known and very visible figure with quite some influence. Frederick Douglass’s story corresponds more closely to the “rags-to-riches” myth, and his status of prominence would much rather merit a Horatio Alger Award than any of the fictional Horatio Alger heroes.

Frederick Douglass’s and *Ragged Dick*’s lives before literacy do not bear much similarity. When Frederick Douglass acquires literacy and thus begins the path to freedom, he has behind him the life of a slave with no personal freedom. *Ragged Dick*, on the other hand, representative of almost all of Horatio Alger’s heroes, leads a rather free life on the streets before he acquires literacy and starts the ascent to respectability. Dick leads a very independent life. He has neither mother nor father nor guardian; therefore, he does not need to answer to anyone about his actions. Unlike other bootblacks of his acquaintance, he does not have to care for a

sick mother and can spend his earnings as he likes. Dick does not have a home and leads the life of a vagabond sleeping in entrances, boxes or on the street. Similarly, Douglass does not have any family ties, because they have been severed by the system in which he has to live and the lack of family does not lead to an independent life style.¹⁰

Before literacy and his rise to respectability, Dick lives in poverty. Dick's poverty as a street child, however, does not stem from a lack of earnings. As a bootblack, he makes up to seven dollars per week, which is more than a clerk at three dollars a week can make. But Dick wastes his money on theaters, gambling, cigars, liquor, and treating his fellow bootblacks to a meal every once in a while (Alger 6–7). He does not save his money, nor does it occur to him to lead a different lifestyle with his earnings. Alger's message in all of his fiction includes the thought that people would live in terrible circumstances even if they had more money. In order to overcome poverty, one needed to attach some value to work, sacrifice, and self-improvement. In other words, to rise out of poverty required a shift in attitude and motivation.¹¹

Dick is not a lost case, however, because he has all those characteristics that are necessary for success. He is intelligent and honest, and he has energy and ambition.¹² "He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one, and had saved him from all mean faults" (Alger 7). In addition to all these good characteristics, Dick is a handsome boy, which also seems to be a prerequisite for success. Despite his faults of carelessness and dissipation, Dick has the makings of success in his character. Alger created a boy who was at the same time gentle (that is, gentlemanly) and dangerous (that is, from the dangerous classes).¹³ The shift in attitude needed for Dick to succeed comes very soon.

Dick's way up has some similarities with Douglass's way out of slavery. These parallels begin in the fact that both Douglass and Dick are not ordinary human beings, but exceptional individuals.¹⁴ Douglass is intelligent, very strong (to the point that he beats one of his masters) and chosen among many other boys to live in the city. In addition, he considers himself different due to his rumored mulatto background.¹⁵ Dick is "ordinary [...] only in the sense of lowly origin," but "in ability and personal character [...] he is] far above average."¹⁶ Both Douglass and Dick prove to be exemplary Americans according to Mencken's definition; they aspire to a higher social class. Douglass wants the status of freedman, and Dick wants to "grow up 'spectable'" (Alger 40), that is, to acquire the status of a white-collar worker.

The influence of other people proves instrumental in the creation of Douglass's and Dick's aspirations. If Douglass had not heard his master lecture about the evils of literacy, he would have never understood the value of literacy for himself. Without literacy, he would not have read enough to strengthen his resolve to flee slavery. Dick seems perfectly content with his street life until he meets Frank, the middle-class boy, whose uncle, Mr. Whitney, hires Dick as a guide to New York City. Frank's

first comment upon his uncle's employment of Dick is that he wished his guide were not so dirty and ragged; he is ashamed to be seen with such a companion (Alger 16). For the first time, Dick perceives himself through the eyes of Frank as dirty and inadequate. He suddenly desires to please Frank and becomes obsessed with appearance "because [...] determine[s] his desirability in the eyes of the other and thus, his acceptability to himself."¹⁷ Dick starts wishing to achieve Frank's middle-class respectability. First, his desire is a simple wish for imitation: "I wish I was more like you" (Alger 56). Dick sets out to change his life in order to show Frank that he "can do something" (Alger 62). Alger's narrator affirms that Dick has gained a "new vision of respectability owing to his recent acquaintance with Frank" (Alger 63).¹⁸

Frank's influence is the impetus for the changes in Dick's life. Frank suggests that Dick look for a room in a boarding house in order to always have a home (Alger 33). It is Frank and his uncle who give Dick a new (used) suit, as well as shirts, shoes and a hat. With this improved appearance, Frank is no longer ashamed to walk around the city with Dick. Frank suggests to Dick that he may not become rich but that he can at least gain respectability, and he tells him what is necessary to achieve this goal: "In order to succeed well, you must manage to get as good an education as you can. Until you do, you cannot get a position in an office or counting-room" (Alger 41).

Frank's main advice concerns reading and writing, which played an equally important role in Frederick Douglass life. He tells Dick: "I should like to see you getting on. There isn't much chance of that if you don't know how to read and write" (Alger 28). Upon the advice of his middle-class friend, Dick sets out to learn how to read and write. Similarly, Douglass sets out to acquire literacy. Neither of them attends school, although, Dick had once gone to school for two days. Instead, they learn through self-education, Douglass in the shipyard and Dick as a newspaper boy. In addition, both pay for their instruction. Douglass pays young white children with bread, and Dick offers Henry Fosdick—a fellow bootblack—a place to sleep in his own boarding house room in exchange for instruction in reading, writing, grammar, geography, and arithmetic. Like Frank, Henry Fosdick is also a middle-class agent because his status as bootblack—and a rather unsuccessful one—is due to the death of his middle-class father which left him destitute. Fosdick received enough education to obtain a position as a clerk, and Dick aspires to be like his roommate. However, Alger does not abstain from commenting about the educated Fosdick that "perhaps he had devoted too much time to study, for he was not naturally robust" (Alger 76). According to Alger, studiousness does not guarantee success, either. Dick's combination of a robust nature coupled with his good characteristics and a good education, however, leads to success in his opinion.

Both Frederick Douglass and Ragged Dick learn from outside sources that the acquisition of literacy would be beneficial to them. They both strongly desire to learn in order to reach their respective goals: Douglass wants freedom and Dick wants respectability. Both achieve their goal by paying others to instruct them instead

of going to school. Whereas Douglass cannot go to school because he is a slave, and it is illegal for slaves to learn, Dick cannot go to school because he has his "livin' to earn" (Alger 41) during the day. At the suggestion of evening school, Dick admits that he has never considered it and that he is too ashamed of his current state of ignorance to attend (Alger 99). Only later, after having learned everything Fosdick could teach him, do the two boys go to evening school together. The similarities between Frederick Douglass's and Dick's way up end here. The striking differences shed light on the empowering nature of reading and literacy and the destabilization it can create.

The meaning of reading in Douglass's and Dick's lives is very different. For Douglass, reading is a certain form of empowerment, as he receives new ideas and a raised level of consciousness from such specific books as the *Columbian Orator*. For Dick, literacy is not the road to freedom as it is for Douglass but rather the road to respectability. Dick studies with his roommate Fosdick every night and is "stimulated by the desire to acquire a fair education as a means of 'growin' up 'spectable'" (Alger 87).

In Alger's novel, reading is only a means for becoming respectable. It does not actually change Dick's inner nature the way that it changes Douglass's consciousness. Dick has recognized that "there is something more than money needed to win a respectable position in the world."¹⁹ In fact, he understands "that in order to grow up respectable, he must be well advanced [in his studies], and he was willing to work" (Alger 98).

Dick's astute assessment of his situation shows that not all work is created equal. When he is invited to Sunday dinner at respectable Mr. Greyson's house, Dick is embarrassed to admit to his host's daughter that he is a bootblack. And although everyone, including his benefactor, Mr. Whitney, and a policeman, tell Dick that his work is honest, he knows that he has to change his line of work in order to be respectable. "To pass the divide into respectability, Dick must prepare himself then, to work with his mind instead of his hands; most crucially he must learn to read."²⁰ Again, reading is an instrument to get ahead in the world, and it does not really serve any spiritually enlightening function.

Dick takes a similar approach to religion as to reading. When he discovers that his roommate Fosdick prays before going to sleep, Dick copies him without hesitation, because he knows that praying must be part of respectability. Ironically, the narrator comments that "he had taken an important step toward securing that genuine respectability which he was ambitious to obtain" (Alger 79), with this act of praying that is an imitation of Fosdick rather than genuine prayer. Both Dick's religion and his reading therefore stem from a similarly instrumental outlook. He attends church "to get in touch with people who further him"²¹ and not for the religious experience. Indeed, he is more concerned with his appearance and with the rituals than with the actual religious significance of the visit.

Dick soon discovers that he needs not only to be able to read and write in order to be respectable, but that he also needs to become a liberally educated man. Looking

at pictures of pyramids, he reveals his utter geographical and cultural ignorance by asking what their purpose might be since they do not have windows, and he wonders whether they are near New York. Based on this embarrassing experience, Dick realizes that he has to learn some geography and what one scholar characterizes as a "smattering of traditional culture."²²

The only two books we see Dick "read" are the hymnal in church and later his bank book. He cannot read enough yet to follow the hymn but in order to "keep up appearances [of respectability, he...] kept his eyes fixed steadily on the hymn-book" (Alger 81). Both the hymnal and the bank book are signs of respectability and at the same time "transmitters of conventional ideology."²³ This is to say that through his reading Dick takes part in a middle-class ideology based on the assumption that success requires literacy and some knowledge.

Indeed, the power of the middle class becomes apparent throughout *Ragged Dick*. Dick rises to respectability due to the patronage of genteel or middle-class benefactors, first Mr. Whitney and his nephew Frank, then Mr. Greyson, who introduces him to church and Sunday School, and finally Mr. Rockwell, who gives him the white-collar position he craves. The help of middle-class benefactors is not something planned, but rather the result of pure luck. If Dick had not overheard Mr. Whitney telling Frank that he could not look around the city without a guide, Dick would have never presented himself as such. And if Dick had not returned some change to Mr. Greyson after blacking his boots, he would never have caught the benevolent attention of the latter. Lastly, if "by chance" Dick had not saved Mr. Rockwell's son from drowning, Mr. Rockwell would not have gone to the trouble of helping Dick, including paying him a larger salary than he could earn. Dick rises "through a combination of genteel patronage and sheer luck"²⁴ and thereby achieves the status of a middle-class worker.

Whereas Douglass's path leads from enslavement to freedom, Dick seems to follow a path in the opposite direction. His acquisition of sufficient literacy and entry into the middle-class world robs him of all the independence that his life as a street child entailed. In the end, Dick abandons all autonomy and becomes an employee instead of his own boss. He affirms his willingness to be Mr. Rockwell's servant: "I'll try to serve you so faithfully, sir, that you won't repent having taken me into your service" (Alger 131). Middle-class virtues such as industry, piety, and frugality coupled with virtues that make a good employee such as fidelity, punctuality, courteous deference, and the willingness to please an employer seem to ensure respectability and a place in the white-collar world.²⁵ However, they also require the surrender of independence.

The factor of luck adds another aspect to the make-up of an Alger hero. In order to be lucky, one has to wait. "Patient passivity rather than competitive aggression" marks the rising street boy.²⁶ Having risen to respectability, the street boy arrives at a comfortable middle-class domesticity. *Ragged Dick*, who now calls himself Richard Hunter, earns ten dollars per week and plans to move to a better room with his roommate, Fosdick. In two subsequent sequels, Dick and Fosdick become a

real family in their domestic space by adopting another street boy, Mark, the Match boy, who is ultimately saved by a rich relative.²⁷

For Douglass and Dick, the way up therefore contains more striking differences than similarities. Whereas Douglass rises from slavery to freedom and to public prominence, Dick rises from the streets to a middle-class, white-collar working world and domesticity. Both have the urge to escape the status as outsiders, but while Douglass seizes upon aid—often given unwillingly and unwittingly—Dick receives benevolent help from middle-class benefactors and quite some help from luck in addition.

While literacy and reading are similarly important in Douglass's and Dick's upward mobility, the two protagonists view the function of literacy very differently. For Douglass, reading and literacy constitute a possibility to think critically, to enhance his consciousness and to receive motivation and justification for a flight to freedom. For Dick, however, reading and literacy are merely means to achieve respectability. Although Dick learns about geography and culture, his mind does not expand and it is not necessary for him that it should. His acquisition of literacy enables him to seize the opportunity when Mr. Rockwell offers him a job in his counting-room. Indeed, had Dick not learned how to read, even the luck that put him in the right place at the right time to save Mr. Rockwell's son could not have made him a possible candidate for the job.

If literacy and reading are only instruments or outward signifiers of respectability for Dick, can one still speak of reading as a destabilization? The answer has to be affirmative and negative at the same time. On the one hand, it is a destabilization of social stratification when a boy from the streets becomes a respected member of the middle class with further possibilities of moving upward in society. On the other hand, the potential danger or unbalancing effect of reading is so strongly contained in *Ragged Dick* that it is hardly possible to speak of a destabilization. Instead, reading and literacy lead to a reaffirmation of middle-class ideology, values²⁸ and ultimately the incorporation of a "dangerous" element of the lower classes into the safe haven of middle-class structures of society. Due to his dream to attain respectability, Dick becomes gentle or genteel and loses his dangerous aspect upon the completion of his ascent into the middle-class.

Despite this strategy of "restabilization," Alger does see reading as potentially destabilizing and dangerous. When he speaks of Micky MaGuire (an ostensibly Irish Catholic street boy who does not possess the positive characteristics of Dick), it becomes clear that reading and just a little education could result in a threat to middle-class society:

If he had been fifteen years older, and had a trifle more education, he would have interested himself in politics, and been prominent at board meetings, and a terror to respectable voters on election day. As it was, he contented himself with being the leader of a gang of young ruffians, over whom he wielded a despotic power. (Alger 64/65)

MaGuire already wields despotic power, and education would transform his power into a threat to the established order; with the help of literacy, he would become interested in politics and probably agitate against the current political and social system. This is a more realistic depiction of what an education could do for a street boy from the lower classes. However, Alger chooses to portray a paragon of virtue like Dick to contain this threat and to restabilize the destabilizing power of reading at least within the fiction.

In Alger's own words, his purpose is "to exert a salutary influence upon the class of whom he is writing, by setting before them inspiring examples of what energy, ambition, and an honest purpose may achieve, even in their case."²⁹ This salutary influence consists of channeling their positive energies into the right path—that is, the road to middle class respectability—and to show that education and reading should have the effects and instrumental value it has for Dick, and not the potentially threatening power it could give to Micky MaGuire. Alger chooses the model of imitation for his hero and his audience. Ragged Dick first emulates Frank and later middle-class behavior. Whereas Douglass's narrative is aimed at an audience who should resist or at least oppose, Alger applies this model of imitation to his audience who is supposed to emulate Ragged Dick and his respectability.

Alger attempts to restabilize a post-Civil War society in constant flux and subject to changes and uncertainty.³⁰ What is true in general for the nineteenth century in the Western world is even more pertinent for the period of Reconstruction in the United States. Change and uncertainty reign during this period, and Alger deals with this instability by looking at reality and presenting it in fiction through "rosecolored glasses of the middle-class ethical tradition of industry, frugality, and integrity and the sentimental Christian version of a benevolent Providence."³¹

Alger seeks to reassert values of a past era. His view of the business world is rather anachronistic. In his world, the good always win, the stronger help the weaker, and social Darwinism does not prevail. While small businesses and mercantile houses rule the scene in Alger's world, big business corporations such as railroad concerns dominated the economy of the Reconstruction- and Gilded-Age-era United States.³² Furthermore, the system did not encourage the self-made man as Alger wants to believe. In the few exceptions to the contrary, the "men who were getting to the top even in the 1870s—the alleged era of the self-made man—had not been poor farm-boys or uneducated immigrant lads starting at the bottom, but instead men who had been given rather exceptional opportunities to make the race to the top."³³

Alger creates a world in his fiction, then, that does not correspond to reality. It is much more tame, and threats can be contained in his world. Alger uses the rags-to-riches myth³⁴ to create an illusion of opportunity for those of the lower classes who did not have a reasonable chance of rising very far. The rags-to-riches myth serves as a "social pacifier"³⁵ to contain "dangerous" elements and to assuage bad discontent about low positions in society.

This issue again highlights differences between Douglass's and Alger's narra

tives. Despite some of the restabilizing effect of Douglass's use of dominant language and ideology, one cannot call his narrative a "social pacifier." Indeed, Douglass desires the opposite; he wants his readers to understand the horrors of slavery and to accept the ability and worth of black members of society. Alger on the other hand, intends to assuage and calm his audience of middle-class readers, and he wants to prevent lower-class readers from getting any threatening ideas. His writing

...served to provide [the middle-class] readers with a vicarious experience of the supposed color and romance of underclass life while reassuring them not only that the "honest" and "deserving" poor could readily transcend the worst effects of poverty but also that the squalor and violence of their lives could be readily contained in slums, workhouses, charity wards and prisons.³⁶

Most importantly Alger portrays the power of reading as something easily to be contained. He shows that reading and literacy as well as cultural education are only the outward signs of respectability necessary to obtain a middle-class position in life.

A comparison between Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*, therefore, reveals more differences than similarities. Whereas Douglass celebrates the destabilizing power of reading and shows that reading enlarged and structured his consciousness which ultimately made it possible for him to escape slavery and to question the social system of the south, Alger does the opposite. He does not critique the system of middle-class dominance but rather participates in it and reaffirms it. In addition, he does not allow reading to have any power that might enlarge the hero's consciousness. Instead, he contains that danger by preaching middle-class values and showing that those who would become dangerous if they received an education are innately too bad to even have the chance. These fundamental differences consequently do not allow us to call Douglass a "black Horatio Alger."

Douglass's *Narrative* and Alger's *Ragged Dick* present two versions of the destabilizing effect of reading in the nineteenth century. Whereas the former affirms the dangerous potential of reading, the latter tries to contain it and to present it as being largely innocuous. Douglass is writing as someone who has risen from a subaltern social group. He can, therefore, take a very different position to Alger, a member of the middle class who holds fast to middle-class values and tries to disseminate them.

In *Germinal*, Emile Zola, a middle-class writer, presents an interesting middle ground between these two extreme positions. From its moment of publication in 1885 until today critics have argued about the message of Zola's *Germinal*. On the one hand, critics such as Henri Mitterand, M.A. Goldberg, and Auguste Dezalay have seen Zola's work about the strike in a mining community as a revolutionary socialist novel.³⁷ On the other hand, critics such as Paule Lejeune, for example, claim that Zola is writing from a middle-class standpoint defending middle-class ideology and showing disdain for the people. He attacks the author because he supposedly perceives the miners as a "lesser race among the workers."³⁸ In the

following chapter, an examination of the reading of the protagonist, Etienne, shows that *Germinal* is partly revolutionary, yet it partly reaffirms middle-class ideology and displays contempt of the lower classes. To apply the terminology used so far, the narrative joins Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* in showing the destabilizing and dangerous power of reading. At the same time, however, it restabilizes this power in the manner of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*.

Chapter Four

The Road to Revolt

Emile Zola's *Germinal*

...and from this reading...[Etienne] created for himself a revolutionary idea of the fight for survival.

Emile Zola, *Germinal* (1885)¹

The hero of *Germinal*, Etienne Lantier, known to the readers of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series as Gervaise Macquart's son, is the protagonist who comes closest to what Lady Ludlow calls "revolution" due to his reading.² When the twenty-one-year-old Etienne comes to the scene of the action, a mine in the north of France, he has just been fired as a machinist in Lille for hitting his boss while in a state of drunkenness. It is important to note that politically revolutionary opinions had not led to his dismissal. The hereditary influence of his family's alcoholism and tendency to murder doom Etienne. Like most of Zola's characters, he will eventually act according to his heredity.³

As a machinist, Etienne is a member of the working class, but his station in life is not as low as his origins in Paris where his mother was a washerwoman.⁴ Unlike Dick, the child from the streets, he is not illiterate, and in contrast to Frederick Douglass's slave existence, he is free to go anywhere he likes. However, as may be noted, when Douglass hits his boss, no consequences or rather good consequences ensue. Etienne, on the other hand, loses his job when he beats a superior. After this violent incident, Etienne is searching for food and shelter on a cold March night when he reaches Le Voreux, a coal mine near Montsou. There, he meets the old Bonnemort, grandfather of the Maheu family, which has spent its entire existence in and around the coal mine. Etienne finds work in the old man's son's group of miners following the death of one of its members. He stays for thirteen months in the mining community, "coron 240," and becomes an exemplary worker. When labor conditions continue to deteriorate, he incites the workers to strike. After the

failure of the strike, he leaves the mining community for Paris in order to do bigger and better things.

What, then, makes Etienne Lantier, a miner among the other workers, who does not even—although educated to do so—work as a machinist in the mine, the hero or the leader of the mass of workers? In what way is he different from the other workers?

Above all, Etienne is a stranger. He comes from southern France, and he has not spent his entire life in Montsou as all the other workers have done. Yves Chevrel goes so far as to compare Etienne to the "*Bote aus der Fremde*," the messenger from another place from the German naturalist theater, indicating that he plays the role of stranger to the miners:

A stranger comes to visit a social group, and before he leaves he reveals or aggravates the antagonism between two parties, provokes a conflict which often results in the ruin of the weaker party.⁵

Much of the development and involvement in the community into which such a messenger comes corresponds to Etienne's experience. As a stranger, Etienne can see the plight of the mine workers from an outsider's viewpoint. Nevertheless, he has enough in common with the workers to understand them; as an unemployed hungry worker, he is a victim of the same economic system and crisis that renders life so hard for the miners.

The main difference between Etienne and the mine workers is his literacy. While Etienne can read and write, most miners of his generation cannot do so: "the grandfathers could not have signed their names, the fathers already did so" (Zola 162).⁶ The sons and daughter can read a little, however their instruction cannot be of great value, since even eleven-year-old Jeanlin Maheu has to descend into the mine to work, and nine-year-old Alzire Maheu (who would also work if she were not hunchbacked) only goes to school when her mother does not need her for household tasks.⁷ Her mother answers "school, well, that will be for another day... I need you" (Zola 86).⁸ Among the older miners, very few can read, and they have trouble spelling out company announcements (Zola 174).

Deneulin, an overseer, calls the miners "brutes, undoubtedly, but illiterate brutes who were starving" (Zola 313).⁹ In the case of the miners in *Germinal* as well as in the case of the slaves in Frederick Douglass's work, a lack of literacy is linked to bestiality. Both the slaves who cannot read as well as the illiterate miners are called "brutes." "Word, both written and spoken, plays a fundamental role in the miners' attempt to differentiate themselves from the bestial... while mediating the difference which separates them from the literate bourgeoisie."¹⁰ The miners know that it is their illiteracy that distinguishes them from the director, M. Hennebeau, when they come to him to plead their cause during the strike.¹¹

Etienne's literacy makes him different from the other workers, but when he joins the miners, he is too much like the workers to be identified with the bourgeoisie.

Maheu admires Etienne for his education: “he felt that this young man had a better education than he had: he saw him reading, writing, drawing plans and he heard him talk about things, that he himself did not even know existed” (Zola 133).¹² Maheu acknowledges Etienne’s superiority, but goes even further in his estimation of his education. He reasons that “the coalminers are crude men, cruder even than the machinists” (Zola 133),¹³ implying that machinists, as Etienne for example, are better due to their education and their innate ability.

Despite Maheu’s admiration, Etienne is not nearly as extraordinary as these passages seem to indicate. He is neither intellectually very mature,¹⁴ nor has he lost his “political virginity” despite ten years in the work force.¹⁵ Instead, in the beginning, Etienne displays the same kind of resignation in the face of misery as the other workers, repeating “If only we had some bread!” (Zola 11)¹⁶ many times, he only hopes to be able to feed himself.

It is in the mining community that Etienne undergoes an education beyond his literacy and instruction. Indeed, his development as leader of the strike can be traced by examining his reading and by asking how the reading affects his consciousness. In keeping with our inquiry, it is also necessary to ask whether and how his reading allows him to challenge power structures, that is, whether reading is a destabilizing force dangerous to those in power.

Etienne’s reading changes his consciousness. He starts reading due to outside influences. The first outside influence is one of Etienne’s acquaintances, Pluchart, an ex-worker turned bourgeois who is a functionary of the International in Lille. In his letters to Etienne, Pluchart “indoctrinated him, struck by the propaganda which he could spread among the miners” (Zola 138).¹⁷ Etienne writes and receives letters frequently, and Pluchart awakens in him the desire to know more about the possibilities of ameliorating the workers’ lot.

The second outsider who influences Etienne in his wish for and choice of reading is his neighbor Souvarine, a Russian ex-nobleman turned anarchist and a machinist in the mine, who discusses his political ideas with Etienne.¹⁸ These discussions have a strong influence on Etienne and lead him to wish for more knowledge:

A bed of dark ideas, dormant within him, awakened and magnified. Consumed with the desire to know, he had hesitated for a long time to borrow books from his neighbor, who unfortunately did not own much except for German and Russian works. Finally, he had borrowed a French book about cooperative societies...he also read regularly a journal that [...Souvarine] received. It was *The Battle*, an anarchist paper published in Geneva. (Zola 141)¹⁹

Like Frederick Douglass, Etienne has some ideas that seem to gain force through his reading. These ideas are not very clear, and he needs help to organize them. Both the letters from Pluchart and the reading material provided by Souvarine encourage Etienne to pursue his thoughts. Whereas Ragged Dick achieved literacy and read in his spare time to belong to the respectable middle class, Frederick Douglass’s reading changed his consciousness. Upon reading the

Columbian Orator, Douglass finds affirmation of his own thoughts of equality and freedom for slaves, and his reading leads him to ask questions that challenge the dominant power structures.

Etienne’s reading is similar to Douglass’s in that it also leads him to ask questions of a challenging nature: “he was faced with many confusing questions: Why were some people living in poverty, while others were rich? Why were some constantly under the heel of others, without hope of ever getting out of their shadow?” (Zola 159).²⁰ When asking these questions, the first step in Etienne’s development consists of the acknowledgment of his ignorance (Zola 159). But his motivation for reading does not come—as in Douglass’s case—from an honest need for knowledge in order to free himself. Rather, like Ragged Dick, who wishes not to be a misfit in middle-class society, Etienne is ashamed of his ignorance. Like Dick, he wants to be able to hold his own in discussions with Souvarine and Pluchart: “A secret shame, a hidden sorrow tormented him...he knew nothing and did not dare to talk about those things that were so fascinating to him” (Zola 159).²¹

Etienne’s ignorance and his shame about not being equal to Souvarine and Pluchart lead him to ever more fervent endeavors to further his education. However, his reading has no direction, and the unorganized manner in which he reads even that which he does not understand does not allow his autodidactic efforts to be successful:

He sent for books. The badly digested reading of these books managed to fire up his imagination: especially a medical book, *The Miners’ Hygiene*, about a Belgian doctor who had summarized the illnesses of which the coalminers were dying; in addition there was literature on political economy with an incomprehensible technical aridity, some anarchist pamphlets which shattered him, some old newspaper articles that he kept to use later as irrefutable arguments in possible discussions. (Zola 160)²²

Even though Etienne does not digest his reading very well—in fact, does not even understand much of it—his reading and supposed knowledge exalt him, and he keeps his knowledge as a kind of weapon for the next possible conversation. Slowly Etienne feels that he can hold his own: “The shame of his ignorance disappeared, and he became proud of the fact that he was thinking” (Zola 160).²³ In good Cartesian manner, Etienne finally perceives himself as a man because he is thinking—that is, reading.

Despite his ambition to shine in the eyes of Pluchart and Souvarine, Etienne does have honest feelings for the plight of the miners: “his heart was overflowing with righteous indignation against the oppressors” (Zola 160).²⁴ He sincerely hopes for and believes in the triumph of the oppressed (Zola 160).

While Etienne soon reaches a new awareness through the synthesis of Souvarine’s anarchist, Pluchart’s Marxist, and the innkeeper Rasseneur’s, moderate ideas that join the notions gained from his reading,²⁵ one can hardly call the jumble of Etienne’s

ideas a new consciousness. Etienne comes to all these political ideas with a very strong predisposition to rebel: "Etienne was fired up. An entire predisposition of revolt threw him into the fight of labor against capital" (Zola 138).²⁶ The only change in consciousness comes through Etienne's false perception that he has learned so much, and that he no longer needs to be ashamed of his ignorance. His new confidence leads him to become very influential among the miners who are already in awe at his ability to read and write, let alone his rhetorical ability to propound politically inflammatory ideas.

Etienne's rising influence first becomes apparent among the Maheu family. Every evening they listen to Etienne's political ideas: "The old society would fall apart, it could not last much longer than a few months, he said firmly" (Zola 165).²⁷ Etienne becomes a prophet for a better world which he envisions based on his reading. And the mining family believes in their new messiah with a quasi-religious fervor:

And the Maheu family seemed to understand, they approved and accepted the miraculous solutions he proposed, with the blind faith similar to that of the Christians of the early church, who awaited the coming of a perfect society, built on the ruins of the old world. (Zola 165)²⁸

For Alzire, the nine-year-old, the new world consists of warm houses where children played and ate to their hearts' content (Zola 165). Each member of the family starts to dream because Etienne has awakened their imagination. This speaks for Etienne's rhetorical competence but not for his organized political thought. He does not induce the miners to think critically and to consider possible ways of action; instead, he invites them to dream of a new society as he does himself:

A new society grew in one day like in a dream, an immense city, resplendent like a mirage, where each citizen had their place and contributed to the common joy. The old rotten world turned to dust; a young humanity, purged of crimes was now made up of a single body of workers...and continually, this dream grew, improved, became so tempting, that it became ever more unattainable. (Zola 164)²⁹

Etienne's speeches become more and more unrealistic, but even the most doubtful start to believe in him. Even Maheu's wife, the skeptical Maheude, succumbs to the seductive pull of Etienne's dreams: "It was so soothing to forget sad reality for an hour!... And what intrigued her, what made her agree with this young man, was the idea of justice" (Zola 164).³⁰ While Etienne dangles ideas of a new world in which justice reigns before the eyes of the miners, he does not know and cannot explain how to achieve such a blessed new state of being. Etienne exerts a certain kind of power with his words, and he rises in the estimation of the miners because he can express his ideas. Nevertheless, he is merely stuffed with jumbled ideas from his reading, his correspondence, and his discussions with Souvarine.

According to the latter, Etienne's ideas will never lead to any meaningful change.³¹ Souvarine is alone in his doubts of Etienne. Most miners are seduced by Etienne's thoughts, and his status rises in the mining community. He even convinces them to create a communal savings account that is, to give up some of their meager earnings to prepare for a strike. This effort constitutes Etienne's first attempt at planning something. However, the small fund cannot be of much help and the only thing Etienne achieves is the negative attention he receives from the directors and the admiration of his fellow miners.

"Etienne's influence grew, he revolutionized the mining community little by little" (Zola 166).³² With his success Etienne changes and becomes ever more content with his lot:

There were pleasures of delicious pride. He got drunk from enjoying his popularity: to be in charge of others, to command them while he was so young, he who had been a plain worker the night before, all this filled him with pride, made his dream of a coming revolution grow. He would play a role in it. His face changed, he became more serious, and he listened to himself talk, so much so that his budding ambition fired his theories and pushed him towards thoughts of battle. (Zola 167)³³

Etienne's reading and the dissemination of his ideas erase the earlier feelings of inferiority brought on by his ignorance and lead to pride in his position as an informed leader. His ideas however, do not seem to become clearer, and he still does not have any plan of action. The only positive action he has undertaken is setting up the savings account. Nevertheless, despite his vague elaboration of how to get to the state of perfect happiness, the masses are fascinated with his speeches and his education.³⁴

Etienne's reading and oratory lead him to take pride in himself, so much so that his consciousness of his own status changes dramatically. Whereas he had seen himself as a miner who was in the same boat as the others, he now acknowledges his superiority over these uneducated people, and he does not find it necessary to provide them with concrete answers about how to achieve a new order:

About the means of execution, he appeared more vague; he mixed up his readings, not fearing, to immerse himself in explanations in front of the simpletons. All the plans were in place, sweetened by the certainty of easy victory, by a universal union, which would end the misunderstanding between the classes. (Zola 165)³⁵

His audience's reaction facilitates Etienne's perception of his presumed knowledge, and he begins to use his knowledge as a means of domination.³⁶

The destabilizing effect of reading manifests itself in the miners' strike, an event that coincides with the apex and decline of Etienne's power. Etienne's reading has made him a seductive orator, and it has induced the miners to listen to him. When the mining company lowers wages by raising fines for mistakes at work, the discon-

tent of the miners coupled with Etienne's earlier agitation make a strike inevitable. Etienne emerges as the miners' educator: transferring what he learns from his reading onto them.³⁷ He knows that education is powerful, and he admits this fact when he tells the miners that "everything would blow up one day, thanks to education" (Zola 162).³⁸ Etienne becomes the leader (Zola 218) of the miners, and when a mass of miners meets in the woods in the night on the eve of the strike, it is his oratory that incites the miners to revolt. They cheer and

Etienne tasted the intoxication of his popularity. It was power which he held, as if materialized, in these three thousand chests. He could make the hearts in these chests flutter with just a word. Souvarine, if he had deigned to show up, would have applauded his ideas, as he would have recognized them, satisfied with the progress his student had made toward anarchy. (Zola 275)³⁹

Etienne gets drunk on the power he feels over the miners and manages to make them see red. The miners decide to bolster their strike by forcing other miners in the area to join them in laying down their work. During the next day, however, Etienne loses control of the angry mob in the furor of the moment. They destroy what they can, hurt their fellow miners who had not participated in the strike, and all Etienne can do is to limit the damage. During the course of the day, Etienne becomes drunk on alcohol, and, following his heredity, he becomes violent himself. He has lost his position of leader for the moment. The enraged mass, which castrates the avaricious merchant Maigrat and destroys several mines, does not need a leader.

Although some critics posit that Etienne's reading and rhetoric lead the miners to gain a new political consciousness which in turn leads them to strike and to violence,⁴⁰ it is much more plausible to link their behavior to hunger. It is hunger that makes them violent, and even in calm moments as when they join the International upon Pluchart's appearance, they do so because they are hungry and poor rather than out of political conviction.⁴¹

The power of his education and oratory has slowly but surely corrupted Etienne. What started as pride in being able to hold his own in discussions with Souvarine changes into a feeling of superiority over the other miners and ultimately leads Etienne to wish for middle-class status. Rising aspirations accompany his rising power: at the outset, Etienne is interested only in himself when he is looking for food and work. With the beginning of his reading, he starts to be interested in the masses and the well-being of the miners.⁴² But the longer he has power over the miners, the more his position as leader becomes a selfish pleasure:

His growing popularity overexcited him more every day...to become the center of attention and feel the world turn around him, was a constant inflation of vanity, for him, the former machinist, the coal-cutter with fat, black hands. (Zola 218)⁴³

More important than pride and vanity, Etienne "entered into the loathed middle-class, with illusions of intelligence and well-being" (Zola 218).⁴⁴ His rise to virtual middle-class status manifests itself after the outburst of violence. He feels superior to his comrades: "How nauseating, this mass of wretches coming to the communal banquet!" (Zola 359).⁴⁵ He despises his fellow miners now, because he has witnessed their ferocious violence and because he considers them too stupid to talk politics with him. "Slowly, his vanity at being their leader, his constant preoccupation with thinking for them, detached him from them and blew into him the soul of one of those bourgeois he loathed" (Zola 359).⁴⁶ His ascent manifests itself in his exterior as well as his interior. As soon as he can, Etienne—like Ragged Dick—buys new clothes and a good pair of boots, which distinguish him even further from the other miners.

Despite Etienne's powerful position, the strike is doomed to fail. In the end, hunger conquers the miners, and they give in to the company's original orders. After hunger and violence have claimed many lives, everything comes full circle to the status quo before the strike. Only Etienne has really changed. His failure as leader of the workers does not make him think about his mistakes. Instead, he dreams more overtly about becoming a member of the middle class, a goal that would allow him to be different from the workers he now despises. Like any other bourgeois, he is now scared of his fellow workers:

He was scared of them, of this enormous, blind and irresistible mass of people, passing like a force of nature, sweeping everything, outside of all rules and theories. Repugnance had detached him from them little by little: the discomfort of his refined tastes, the slow rise of his being towards a higher class [contributed to this detachment] (Zola 427).⁴⁷

Etienne defines himself within a bourgeois capitalist structure, and his dreams of domestic bliss with Catherine Maheu further reveal his adoption of middle-class ideology.⁴⁸

Slowly but surely, then, reading has turned out to be a restabilizing factor in Etienne's life. The man who posed a potential danger to the directors of the company turns out to be not very dangerous. True, he does set the strike in motion, and he makes the workers dream of a better existence. Nevertheless, Etienne does not control them, and at the height of the strike the violence of the masses follows its own rhythm.

Fittingly, in the end, it is Souvarine, and not Etienne, who puts an end to the strike and proves harmful for the dominant powers. In accordance with his anarchist ideas, Souvarine sabotages the mine and destroys the whole structure. Even this nihilistic act, however, does not prevent the workers from going to work under the same bad conditions in another mine. Trapped in the destroyed mine and saved by the same workers who have hated him for inciting the strike and their misery, Etienne leaves with white hair after the disaster. Nevertheless, Etienne has not learned from

his failure. Instead, he looks positively into the future: “His education was finished, he left armed, as a reasoning soldier of the revolution. He had declared war on society, such as he saw it and such as he condemned it” (Zola 499).⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Etienne does not feel much contempt for middle-class society. He dreams of a bourgeois non-worker life in the style of Pluchart:

The joy of rejoining Pluchart, of being a heeded leader like him, inspired him to arrange the phrases for a speech...the middle-class refinement which had lifted him above his class now threw him into an even greater hatred for the bourgeoisie. (Zola 499)⁵⁰

His own accession to middle-class status makes him ostentatiously hate the bourgeoisie even more, and he decides to glorify the workers for whom he really has a strong disgust after his experiences during the strike.

Etienne’s education and his reading prove to be both destabilizing and restabilizing. Like that of Frederick Douglass, Etienne’s reading allows him to challenge dominant power structures. Although Etienne is only the initial influence on the miners, the result of his reading is dangerous for the dominant powers. At the same time, reading restabilizes Etienne and prevents him from becoming a true revolutionary. His aspirations toward middle-class comforts evoke a similarity between him and Alger’s Ragged Dick. Just like Dick, Etienne achieves bourgeois status in part because of his reading. In another Zola novel, *Le Debacle*, we learn that Etienne was part of the “revolutionary” Commune but was then sentenced to death, released, and sent to an island where he married and fathered a daughter. The last we hear of Etienne, the supposed revolutionary hero, is his domestic life on an island.⁵¹

Is Zola, then, revolutionary in intent like Frederick Douglass? Or does he rather resemble Horatio Alger, who writes to contain any danger that could possibly come from reading and lead to changes in social stratification?

Emile Zola lies somewhere in between the two other authors. On the one hand, *Germinal* is a piece of social criticism, because Zola shows genuine sympathy for the plight of the miners. Their own interpretation of the novel speaks for the revolutionary content of *Germinal*.⁵² When Zola died, a delegation of miners accompanied his cask chanting “Germinal, Germinal.”⁵³ The novel shows the potentially destabilizing force of the masses. Despite the failed strike and the return to the status quo, Zola ends the novel with an optimistic message which promises the rise out of the earth of the lower classes and their victory: “Men grew underground: a black, vengeful army, which was slowly germinating in the furrows, was getting larger for the harvest of future centuries. Its germination would soon burst the earth” (Zola 503).⁵⁴ While Zola thus puts off the projected social uprising until the coming century, he attributes the necessary power to move the earth to the workers. In this sense, then, *Germinal* is a revolutionary novel, and the reading of Etienne which makes much of the revolt possible is destabilizing and dangerous to the classes in power.

On the other hand, Zola can be severely criticized for his depiction of the workers. He shows their brutal nature, their ignorance, meanness and violence. In addition, he gives them an egotistical leader with misguided notions about revolt and a mixture of Marxist and Darwinist ideas, who turns into a bourgeois himself and therefore betrays his original cause. In his work, Zola seems to express his own fear of the masses. According to *Germinal*, a demagogue can easily lead the masses into violence and loss of control.⁵⁵ Since this fear of the masses forms part of the bourgeois conception of the world, Zola has been accused of bringing his own bourgeois views of the lower classes to his writing. He sees them as unable to organize and incapable of self-determination, and he views the workers as easily manipulated in their intellectual and political ignorance.⁵⁶ By emphasizing Etienne’s education—flawed as it may be—Zola denies less literate workers any political agency and access to knowledge.⁵⁷

Therefore, *Germinal* is both a revolutionary and a bourgeois novel. Zola’s ambivalence speaks out of the contradictory pieces of information. In the end, according to Zola himself, *Germinal* is an educational novel like Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick*. In his own words, Zola claims to want to enlighten the middle class on the condition, plight and potential danger of the lower classes.⁵⁸

Germinal is a work of pity, and not a revolutionary work. What I wanted was to call out to those who are happy in the world, to the masters: Be careful, look underground, see the wretches who work and suffer. Maybe it is still time to avoid the final apocalypse. But hurry up and be just, because otherwise here is the danger that lies ahead: the earth will open up and nations will be swallowed up by one of the most frightening disasters in History (December 27, 1885).⁵⁹

This purpose to educate emerges from Zola’s pages. One can see the work as revolutionary because it points to the potential of revolution, but it also speaks to the middle class as both warning and affirmation that it is not yet “too late” for social changes that could placate the working class.

Like Alger, then, Zola fears the possibility of an uprising of the lower classes, although Alger does so on a much smaller scale when he worries about Micky MaGuire receiving an education. And like Alger, Zola contains some of the dangerous potential by describing the workers’ negative sides, portraying them as ignorant and giving them Etienne as a leader.

Etienne is at the same time a destabilizing force and a neutralized threat. Etienne’s reading is destabilizing, and it affects his consciousness. Unlike that of Douglass, however, his consciousness does not change as a direct result of what he reads. Rather, Etienne likes the feeling of being educated and “knowing,” and therefore, his consciousness changes toward a bourgeois perception of the working class and the world. Like *Ragged Dick*, Etienne reads instrumentally to obtain a position in a certain group of people. Eventually it is his elevated status among the workers which leads him to middle-class status if not respectability (he owns new clothes and new boots after all). Zola thus restabilizes Etienne by showing that he wishes

to become bourgeois instead of giving him a chance to be a real revolutionary. In *Germinal*, reading is a destabilizing force in that it gives Etienne the power to influence the masses. At the same time it restabilizes Etienne and turns him into a wouldbe bourgeois.

Like Emma Bovary—a protagonist whom we will discuss later—at least Etienne reads and dreams. Souvarine can only speak of anarchism and destroy, and Rasseigneur has been among the miners for years, without ever attempting to do anything for them. Etienne gives the miners hope that things can change, just as Zola simultaneously gives the working class hope for change and the middle-class a warning of that possible change:

By opening for the miners the gates to the ideal city of Justice and Fraternity, Etienne opens up the future for them; he destroys the walls of their imprisonment, he has them believe that "it can change," he lets them enter the marvelous world of hope.⁶⁰

And although it seems at the end of the novel that there is no hope when La Maheude has to descend into the mine again to earn the family's living after the death of her husband and three of her children,⁶¹ La Maheude's last handshake with Etienne tells him that she still waits for the big change:

In this last handshake, he felt again those of his comrades, a long, silent grip which signaled him that they would meet again on the day when they would begin again. He understood perfectly the calm belief he saw in her eyes. See you soon, and this time, it would be the big blow (Zola 498).⁶²

La Maheude stands for all the other miners: she believes that change will come and that the germ of revolution has been sown. Thus, *Germinal* emerges as a revolutionary work after all—which proves that reading is a destabilizing force.

The analysis of the three texts—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Ragged Dick*, and *Germinal*—has shown that reading is presented as a destabilizing force in nineteenth-century fiction. Each author deals with the dangerous potential of reading differently. Douglass admits the importance of reading in helping him escape, but he accepts the dominant discourse and therefore restabilizes his experience in the eyes of the middle class. Perceiving the potential danger of reading, Alger never lets the destabilizing power of reading become a reality by restabilizing it immediately. He relegates reading to being an instrument for reaching middle-class respectability. Zola, in a position between the other two authors, attributes destabilizing characteristics to reading, but he posits that it almost automatically restabilizes because reading conveys power, power corrupts, and thus reading ultimately makes lower-class readers aspire to membership in the middle class.

Authors in nineteenth-century Western Europe and the United States desperately attempted to come to terms with the destabilizing power of reading. Their attitudes range from Lady Ludlow's fear of letting the lower classes come into contact with

the “dangerous power of education,” through Douglass’s advocacy of the power of reading and Alger’s restabilizing of that power, to Zola’s ambivalence toward the dangerous potential of reading.

So far Lady Ludlow’s has been the only female voice heard. How, then, does reading affect women protagonists of nineteenth-century narratives? This question will be answered by examining women’s access to reading in chapter five, as well as by the subsequent comparison between Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in chapters six and seven, respectively.

Chapter Five

Women, Reading, and Power

If novels were the nineteenth-century version of the apple in the home's Garden of Eden, then women were the great apple eaters.

Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*¹

A whole family, brought to destitution, has lately had all its misfortunes clearly traced by the authorities to an ungovernable passion for novel-reading entertained by the wife and mother. The husband was sober and industrious, but his wife was indolent, and addicted to reading everything procurable in the shape of a romance. This led her to utterly neglect her husband, herself, and her eight children. One daughter, in despair, fled the parental home and threw herself into the haunts of vice.... The house exhibited the most offensive appearance of filth and indigence. In the midst of this pollution, privation, and poverty, the cause of it sat reading ...and refused to allow herself to be disturbed in her entertainment.

'T.C.,' *The Christian's Penny Magazine and Friend of the People* (1859)²

In Genesis, the first woman, Eve, is already a reader of a text. She “reads” the tree of knowledge against the command of the creator by eating an apple from this tree.³ In the first epigraph, Nina Baym draws a parallel between the forbidden apple from the tree of knowledge and the novels of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century women readers are thrown out of the domestic “home’s Garden of Eden” if they, like Eve, eat the apple, that is, read novels. And since they are the great apple eaters, they cannot hope to remain in a domestic Garden of Eden.

Intended as a warning against too much novel reading, the second epigraph shows the results of eating the apple or reading novels in the eyes of one observer. It points to the loss of all paradisiacal elements the domestic sphere may have had

due to the "transgression" of a woman. Like Eve, that woman commits the "crime" of apple eating, that is, of reading.

The woman's reading is the cause for the downfall and disintegration of a potentially perfect home paradise. The husband, who is "sober and industrious," cannot be the cause for the "destitution" of the family. It is clearly stated that the wife's character—she is "indolent"—and her addiction to reading produce "pollution, privation, and poverty" instead of a "home Garden of Eden."

Eve's fall is linked to sexuality. Eating the apple, that is, reading novels in the nineteenth century, involves a state of awareness of nakedness or sexuality. The second epigraph shows in only a veiled manner that reading novels can lead to sexual awareness and transgression. It is not the novel-reading woman herself, but her daughter who runs away from home and throws "herself into the haunts of vice." However, much of the criticism leveled against the novel and women's reading more directly established a "link" between reading and sexuality. Women readers were commonly seen as adulteresses: their reading unleashed their sexuality, and therefore they had to leave the comfort of the Garden of Eden, i.e., the home.

As the second epigraph shows, women's reading presents a destabilization of a desired status quo. Women's reading is perceived as potentially dangerous in that it can destroy a perfectly "good" family, where the husband lives an exemplary life but where the wife goes astray in her addiction to reading. Sexual transgression follows in the wake of too much reading and constitutes a further deterioration.

Nineteenth-century critics expressed uneasiness or even fear over this potentially destabilizing force. Many attacks against reading and attempts at controlling the reading material for women were based on this fear of destabilization. Such imagery as "tide, flood, deluge and inundation"⁴ used in description of the phenomenon of mass reading among women shows the observers' uneasiness and fear. In fact, one critic, George Gissing, went as far as to say in 1893: "If every novelist could be strangled and thrown into the sea, we should have some chance of reforming women."⁵ Gissing indirectly pointed to the destabilizing potential of reading by wishing all novelists gone. Since most reading material for women consisted of novels,⁶ Gissing believed that women could be "reformed" if no more existed.

What is it, then, that such observers as Gissing were afraid of losing? What is the threat posed by women's reading? Where does the danger of destabilization lie? Witnesses of the "reading phenomenon" feared not only personal disruption as exemplified in the second epigraph, but rather a more general social disruption.⁷ "In this era industrial and urban growth, transformations in the market economy, a burgeoning women's movement, and an upsurge in female authorship were challenging the traditional status of women."⁸ In addition, the destabilization of the book market with the new methods of printing and, especially, the spread of literacy not only created fears about the possible threat of destabilization which the lower-class reading public could pose. In a very similar manner, women's access to reading and the new prominent role of reading in women's lives created changes in female social roles.⁹ In the United States, England, and France, the nineteenth century witnessed a "crisis

in the definition of gender roles.”¹⁰ Reading played an important part in this definition. It was a “site on which one may see a variety of cultural and sexual anxieties displayed.”¹¹ In addition, women’s reading was an element in the “struggle for authority”¹² as well as the “power struggle over social identity”¹³ for women.

Whereas aristocratic families had controlled their daughters’ reading material for fear of sexual transgression since the Renaissance, by the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries middle- and upper-class families wanted more than merely to protect their daughters from sexual corruption.¹⁴ Their fears were more deeply rooted. As with members of the lower classes, whose literacy and reading was feared because it might lead to politically seditious attitudes, so it was with women. Middle-class ideology led to fears of women’s reading which might challenge the “role of the family and the position of women in relation to authority.”¹⁵ This middle-class ideology was pervasive and influenced the definition of gender roles, not only in that class, but also among the lower classes. However, in the case of the latter it was rather more difficult for women to conform to the ideal, because they were part of the work force and not at home like most middle-class women.

What, then, was the role of women in the family and their position in relation to authority that was at all costs to be conserved? Women’s place was in the home, in the domestic sphere:

Home is the empire; the throne of woman. Here she reigns in the legitimate power of all her limited charms. She is the luminary which enlightens and the talisman which endears it. It is she who makes “home sweet home.”¹⁶

A woman was the domestic center. Images of light and of the talisman portray the vital function of the woman in the home; it was her duty to provide the light and the coziness. In addition, her function as talisman provided the safety of the home—the domestic “Garden of Eden.” She made the home “sweet” and not (as the wife did in the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter) into a ruinous, dirty place. Home was even described as an empire, and words of power such as “empire, throne, reigns” connote the “power” a woman had in her home as the “queen of the hearth” in the eyes of nineteenth-century writers. However, such power was only a “legitimate” power of “limited” charms. This description makes it very clear that there was also an illegitimate power which a woman was not to seize.

It was the male power of the public sphere that was not accessible to women. As Thorstein Veblen pointed out as late as 1899: “The goal and the beautiful schema of life, then... assigns to the woman a ‘sphere’ ancillary to the activity of the man; and it is felt that any departure from the traditions of her assigned round of duties is unwomanly”¹⁷ or rather “improper[ly] feminine.”¹⁸ Whereas women had the obligation to perform reproductive labor as well as create a “good” home pervaded by morality, men performed “competitive, economic, productive labor... in the public sphere of industry, commerce and politics.”¹⁹ With their work in the public sphere came a power that was legitimately held only by men. Even the women’s movement

"scarcely questioned" "the fundamental equivalence of woman and home," although they worked toward "greater equity for women within existing institutions of education, marriage and law."²⁰

In this domestic sphere, reading was not necessarily considered evil. Not all reading had to lead to the "pollution" of the home, as in the case of the passage from the *Christian's Penny Magazine*. Literacy was considered a "domestic skill."²¹ First, women had to learn to read to provide at least rudimentary education for their own children. Second, a woman who could read might make a more interesting interlocutor for a husband, as George Sand put it: "We learned in order to become capable of talking with educated persons."²² However, only in the domestic sphere were women allowed legitimate power, and this power included neither freedom of choice of reading material nor freedom of interpretation. Wives "took their interpretive cues from their better-educated husbands,"²³ and their reading materials were generally controlled—as girls by their families, and as adults by their husbands.²⁴

As the center of the domestic world, then, the ideal woman was the "angel in the house."²⁵ To be properly feminine and to achieve this ideal state, women were supposed to be innocent, have a commitment to duty and self-sacrifice, practice selfabnegation and be dependent on their husbands in everything exclusive of the sphere of their legitimate power, i.e., running the household.²⁶ The perfect middleclass lady was a symbol of refinement, "domestic fidelity, social cheerfulness, unostentatious hospitality and moral and religious benevolence."²⁷ In addition, asexuality and a passionless nature were expected of women. Their "sexual desires were [supposedly] weak or nonexistent."²⁸

Feminine purity—that is, asexuality—was one of the most important characteristics of the ideal woman. Once a woman married, she no longer had a legal identity of her own.²⁹ Instead, she became the property of her husband, and as his property, her purity was vital. A woman's place was defined in terms of property and possession: A "man's name and possessions can only be passed on to those of his own blood if he has absolute possession of a woman's body," and if he can be sure that it is a pure body when it comes to him.³⁰ This perception of purity contained a paradox. Purity was said to be a natural feminine attribute, yet it was considered so valuable that "extreme precautions were needed to preserve it,"³¹ indicating that women might discard this "natural" characteristic.

A similar paradox existed in the perception of morality. Women were said to be moral by nature: as "guardians of moral values,"³² it was their task to create a moral atmosphere in their homes for their husbands and children. In contradiction to this perception, however, much reading was forbidden to women on the grounds of the "moral weakness of [their] minds,"³³ which would cause them to be led astray by their reading. This paradoxical perception led to strict controls of reading in order to prevent a destruction of the ideal angel-woman in the house.

Officially, then, the "angel in the house" was a "monument of selflessness with no existence beyond the loving influence she exuded as daughter, wife, and mother."³⁴

However, many fears lurked behind this image of the perfect angel. The para dox of natural purity and morality—values not so natural since they could be destroyed so easily—shows that the image of the angel has some cracks.

Whenever, one has to control something so tightly, one is trying to contain something dangerous. Maxine Hong Kingston captures this paradox in a fitting image: “Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound.”³⁵ The fear of the dangerous power of women “produced the foot-binding of her officially approved image”³⁶ of domestic angel. A dangerous potential for power lies within a woman’s character. This potential needs to be checked by creating an ideal, by limiting the power to a legitimate use, and ultimately by controlling the dangerous potential of reading. As a destabilizing force, reading might lead to the eruption of the “improper feminine” with its inherent power. Reading threatens the ideal of the angel and could allow the emergence of the improper feminine that permits women to seize “illegitimate” power.

Books had long been considered food for the soul and the body. As Francis Bacon stated:

Some Bookes are to be Tasted, Others to be Swallowed, and some Few to be Chewed and Digested: That is, some Bookes are to be read only in Part; others to be read but not curiously; And some Few to be read wholly and with Diligence and Attention.³⁷

By the nineteenth century, reading appeared a physical appetite, a form of “ingestion to be carefully controlled, in order to avoid temporary ingestion or more longterm damage to the system.”³⁸ Books were a substance taken into the body and soul, where they worked their own influence beyond the control of the person “digesting” the reading material.³⁹ The idea that long-term, serious damage might occur points to the fact that there were beneficial books and bad or “dangerous” books. While men were supposedly able to handle the dangerous influence because of their strength, women—who were considered inferior “by nature”—could be corrupted by “dangerous” reading.

Medical and psychological reasoning figured among the “chief instruments for the definition and regulation of women and sexuality in the nineteenth century”⁴⁰ and allowed scientists to make inferences about the dangers of reading for women. Women were at times characterized as possibly “neurotic, hysterical, morbidly introspective” and “as slaves of the sensuous and sensual.”⁴¹ This statement appears practically in the same breath as the exaltation of women’s purity, morality, and angel-like qualities. The paradoxical perception of women shows itself again in this juxtaposition. Nineteenth-century notions of female anatomy further buttress the existing stereotype. Along with furthering the ideal of the perfect mother, who is to impart morality to her husband and children as the luminary of the domestic sphere, nineteenth-century medical specialists also characterized women as having “inferior brain weight, [a] tendency to brain fever if educated, [...and a] raging

hormonal imbalance.”⁴² These inferior qualities made women likely to be “hysterical, neurotic,”⁴³ and supposedly prone to the dangers of reading excessively.⁴⁴

In particular, medical experts as well as literary critics blamed women’s heightened emotional responsiveness and non-intellectual minds⁴⁵ for their ready corruption by reading materials. Their “allegedly livelier imagination and more acute sensibility could lead them into frivolity, luxuriousness or excessive sexual desire”⁴⁶ when stimulated by “bad” books. As a reviewer in the *National Review* put it:

Novels constitute a principal part of the reading of women, who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily influenced than ours.⁴⁷

Due to their less rational and more emotional nature, women were prone to be influenced by their reading. Therefore, men needed to exercise tight control in order to keep them in their angel-like state.

One way in which reading supposedly proved dangerous to women was their tendency to identify with the heroines of the novels they read:

If women’s ‘natural’ biological function is presumed to be that of childbearing and rearing, of the inculcation of moral beliefs along with physical nurturing with the...presumption that she is thus especially constructed by nature so as to have a close intuitive relationship with her offspring, then such instincts as sympathetic imagination, and a ready capacity to identify with the experience of others are unalterable facts, about her mental operations, and hence by extension, about her process of reading.⁴⁸

The supposed tendency of women to identify with others is again one of the “angelic” aspects of the “good” mother, which paradoxically appears from a different perspective as a very dangerous character trait. An identification with the heroine could lead to a wish to copy the heroine’s life, which could cause flaws such as “indolence” (as in the case of the passage from the *Christian*). Even worse, it could produce adultery and complete disregard for conventions.

The case of supposed identification points to another paradox in the description of the nature of women. Reading was supposedly a leisure time activity in which the “brain [was] passive and the critical faculties [were] asleep.”⁴⁹ However, how can the brain perform such an active feat of empathetic identification if it is passive? Yet again, the nineteenth-century ideal of women contains paradoxical notions. These notions point further to the dangerous qualities in women that need to be controlled in order to preserve the conventional status quo.

Critics who desired to control women’s reading because of the danger of identification applied a double standard in that they ignored male examples of identification in literature. For example, upon reading Plutarch, Rousseau stated in his *Confessions* (1770): “I turn into the character whose life story I have just read.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, as one critic points out, Goethe's protagonist Werther "pushes reading and identification with the fictional characters to the limits of suicide."⁵¹ In Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1787), the lovesick protagonist Werther kills himself upon reading *Emilia Galotti* (1772), in which the hero commits suicide as well. Goethe's work induced many suicides in emulation of the story of Werther. However, only when women identify with protagonists did critics and medical experts perceive such identification as dangerous.

Their fear of the "improper feminine" that lay underneath the perfect angelic ideal strongly influenced many descriptions of women in medical treatises, critical reviews, and advice texts. Because of this fear, many observers portrayed reading as dangerous and women as corrupted by "bad" reading. Their vivid imagination and tendency to identify with fictional characters, they warned, might lead to such lesser evils as discontent with normal life. John Ruskin has pointed out that

the best romance becomes dangerous if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act.⁵²

However, to many commentators the greater danger lay in the horrors of adultery which were also said to come from exposure to reading materials.

The fear of women's reading is not limited to these medical and psychological explanations of their greater sensibility and identification with protagonists. These tendencies pose a threat to the established order because they could lead to discontent, sexual awareness and even adultery. However, another aspect of reading novels posed an even greater threat to the domestic center, as exemplified by the wife in the *Christian's Penny Magazine*. She "refused to allow herself to be disturbed in her entertainment." On the one hand, reading was an activity of the domestic sphere, which might bring the family together: a reading husband did not go out at night and a reading mother could teach her children. On the other hand, reading could imperil the position of the domestic caretaker. The wife in the epigraph is neglecting all of her duties toward her children and husband. She does not convey morality (or else her daughter would not have become a prostitute), and she lets the house fall into ruin. Even a woman of the upper middle class who had servants to do the domestic chores had to supervise the running of the household to ensure the perfection of the domestic sphere.

Reading thus "encourages a dangerous privatism and individualism by providing a solitary self-centered activity."⁵³ The mother who does not interrupt her reading for the duties toward the family ceases to be the domestic angel. She ceases to be feminine in that she abandons one of the fundamental characteristics of the woman: self-abnegation. Instead, she satisfies her own desires. "In gratifying the self, novels foster self-love and self-assertion that make the mind ungovernable and thus jeopardize the agencies of social and psychological control."⁵⁴ A woman who pleases

her self rather than those around her in her domestic circle poses a threat to that institution.⁵⁵

On the other hand, this solitary, individualistic activity also fostered community among women, which in itself could be perceived as threatening. Millions of women shared the same emotional experiences because they read the same fiction. Often, women read “together” in that they shared books or discussed them. In particular, women met to discuss *feuilleton* novels, and they conjectured together how the plot would develop.⁵⁶ Such a community of women who shared emotional experiences and who satisfied their desire for pleasure did not correspond with the image of the angel of the house, who exists exclusively for the husband, the children and the domestic sphere.

Members of the dominant patriarchal structure therefore feared that reading would lead their angels astray and pollute the domestic sphere. Their fear stemmed from the paradox that a woman is both the embodiment of all celestial goodness and the carrier of a subversive force beneath the layers of angelic being. It was this subversive force that they tried to contain when they warned of the dangers of reading that could potentially activate that force. All of the “explanations,” whether medical or psychological, pointed to a “hidden” nature of women which could not be left unguarded. Reading can foster the “improper feminine”⁵⁷ by creating a “demon”⁵⁸ out of the angel. The woman who was improperly feminine was:

[a] demon or wild animal, a whore, a subversive threat to the family, threateningly sexual, pervaded by feeling, knowing, self-assertive, desiring and actively pleasure-seeking, pursuing self fulfillment and self-identity [and] independent.⁵⁹

Such a creature cannot create a “home sweet home”: she could only cause havoc and uproot all the structures of the status quo.

Reading could therefore be dangerous if it managed to convert the angel into a demon. And although the angel was as much a myth as other constructions of gender in any given society, it was an ideal to which women were held. This image in itself constituted an attempt to control women and their dangerous potential. Reading was dangerous in so far as it fostered this dangerous potential or the “demonic” side of women’s characters.

Thus, women’s reading resulted in a threat to the desired domestic order, to the patriarchal structure of domination, and to the class structure of society. The epigraph at the beginning of the chapter shows that reading could completely disrupt the desired domestic order if it changed the woman—the supposed angel of the house—into an improperly feminine woman. With this destabilization came a threat to the patriarchal structure of domination.⁶⁰ A woman who refused to be an angel could be assertive and pleasure-seeking, and she could refuse self-abnegation. She could be a sexual being, denying men the purity they expected to be sure of their ownership of their property. Lastly, nineteenth-century women’s reading was perceived as a

threat to class structure. Millions of women of both the middle and lower classes read the same fiction such as the sensation fiction of the 1850s and 1860s. This community of readers “broke down the desirable status quo in terms of the ways in which social stratification could be gauged through cultural taste.”⁶¹

Such a destabilization in the domestic area, in patriarchal structure and in social stratification constituted a major threat to the makeup of a society. In order to keep the status quo and to come as close to the ideal of an angel as possible, many set out to control the damaging effect of reading so as not to allow the eruption of the dangerous potential of women. Because “perceptions of power cannot be untangled from the impulse to suppress it,”⁶² the nineteenth-century idea of the power of the subversive demon lurking beneath the surface of the angel provoked concerted effort to suppress that power.

What, then, did the dominant society do to control the perceived danger of women’s potential power and the danger of reading? In the domestic sphere, the protection of the women from dangerous reading remained one of the duties of the head of the household. Paternalistic surveillance of this kind worked particularly well in a hierarchical system which posited a hierarchy consisting of God, King (in England and France), father, and husband.⁶³ The system that oppressed women was the same one that oppressed slaves, workers, and minorities.

Both a woman’s husband and her father, who prepared the woman for her role as a wife, cooperated in her oppression.

[A] married woman could not be a subject but only an object who was subject to the absolute control and authority of her husband [...a] husband owned his wife’s personal property, her earnings, her children and even her body.⁶⁴

In order to protect the purity of their property, husbands had to monitor not only their outward possessions—that is, their wives’ bodies—but also their soul. Husbands tried to monitor their wives’ reading, and “wives took their interpretive cues from their better-educated husbands.”⁶⁵ Wives were neither free in the choice of their reading material nor in their interpretive practices. With the attempt to control their wives’ reading, husbands tried to contain the perceived danger of reading which might arouse the demon within the woman.

In order to assure the greatest degree of purity in a future wife, fathers had to monitor their daughters carefully. Women’s accounts of their reading experience as daughters show that they experienced “differing degrees of supervision exercised over their consumption of print.”⁶⁶ The areas which seem to have been controlled most rigidly by fathers were sexuality and religion.⁶⁷ In addition, the accounts of nineteenth-century women show that in many families heavy control was exercised “particularly concerning the ideas and emotions which were considered suitable for girls to encounter”⁶⁸

The father played an important part in the monitoring of a girl’s reading, especially once she left the nursery. He became the

custodian, censor, [and] facilitator of access to the printed word...Reading could be an area in which the father could reinforce his authority and influence. At its most pronounced, paternal power became fused with spiritual jurisdiction.⁶⁹

Girls were not allowed to read just anything; in some instances, monitoring went so far that parents pinned together those pages that were perceived as “dangerous” in an otherwise acceptable book.⁷⁰ Constraints such as these began before the girls left for school in their own homes; they became even stronger during their school and teenage years; and they culminated in the surveillance exercised by careful husbands.⁷¹

Fathers and male guardians had long supervised a daughter’s reading material by means of “advice texts.” In Molière’s *L’École des Femmes* (1662), for example, Arnolphe tries to prepare his daughter Agnès for marriage with some reading material:

And here in my pocket is an important essay which will teach you about the role of women. I don’t know its author, but it is written by some good soul. And I demand that it will be your sole occupation [to read it]. Here you go. Let’s see whether you will read it well.⁷²

Agnès dutifully reads the *maximes* that are supposed to prepare her for marriage. An advice text such as these *maximes* helped the father in his surveillance of a girl’s emotional and spiritual development.

Advice texts assumed a very important role in the nineteenth century.⁷³ Advice manual writers “stressed the vulnerability of the young, unprepared, inexperienced girl”⁷⁴ and they recommended courses of action for parents to prevent girls from “falling.” A “good” selection of reading material, these advice manuals counseled, could ensure the girl’s proper upbringing, since reading at its best could be seen as social education:

Reading is seen as operating in a socially mimetic way, introducing the girl vicariously to situations which she might well come across in her own life, or which she would do well to avoid;...rules of etiquette and good behavior and above all the capacity to make moral judgments [...could] be inculcated, if only by reiteration.⁷⁵

Advice manuals stressed the importance of “good” reading not only for the girl herself, but also for her choice of a good husband: “never marry a husband who has not a collection of books of more general interest than his cash-book and ledger. The reading young man makes a stay-at-home, fireside-loving husband. Like to like.”⁷⁶ Both male and female advice manual writers shared these views on reading. One cannot say that the female advice manual writers had more revolutionary

notions about reading for girls and women. It is highly unlikely that readers actually followed these advice manuals very consistently. However,

[...the] reiteration of the views about a woman's proper role and the way in which reading helps form her social functions and attitudes must have served as a confirmation and consolidation of the dominant ideology of the period.⁷⁷

Yet, it is interesting to note that

the role of fathers in selecting and interpreting a girl's reading is seldom addressed in all this advice although...paternal influence frequently seems to have been as influential as the maternal in literary matters.⁷⁸

A strong maternal influence complemented the father's role in supervising their daughter's education. Mothers were victims of a double identity. On the one hand, they were mothers who might have wielded some power over their children in choices of reading and education. But on the other hand, they remained wives under the surveillance of their husbands who regarded them as their property.

The absolute power of the father and husband in this hierarchical system changed somewhat throughout the nineteenth century. Fathers and husbands still retained the central power, but a shift in domestic ideology occurred during this period:

a shift from old style patriarchy with an emphasis on paternal prerogative, hierarchy and the exercise of force to new style patriarchy with its appeal to reason, co-operation between the sexes and the non-coercive exercise of authority.⁷⁹

This "non-coercive exercise of authority" by the husbands and fathers was at least as effective, if not more so, than the older use of force. This new form no longer used fear but the "more psychologically compelling themes of guilt and obligation."⁸⁰ This new strategy still devalued women as potentially dangerous with demons lurking beneath the surface of the domestic angel. However, paradoxically, the new ideology valorized women as guardians of morality, purity, and—most importantly—of education.⁸¹

Mothers played a crucial role in the system of paternalistic surveillance of women. As educators of their children, they inculcated the ideas of the domestic ideology and a patriarchal culture. This position as guardians of education partially empowered women, since it enabled them to shape their daughters and also their sons up to a certain age. But the duty of educator also further restricted a woman, as the male head of the family supervised her in this activity. A woman's "power" as educator was therefore firmly limited by her submission to the husband. Women became at once "infantilized"—that is, treated as children to be supervised by their husbands—and celebrated in their role as educator of children and, ultimately, as civilizers and socializers of men, since their influence socialized the young male

children as well.⁸² "Although women might be denied entry into men's sphere, the home existed to educate and rehabilitate those who operated in the outside world."⁸³ "In place of her former active role of helpmate, the wife was offered the noble mission of influencing husband and children toward the good."⁸⁴ Thus, women were hailed as the "mothers of civilization."⁸⁵ "The purpose of women's vocation was to stabilize society by generating and regenerating moral character."⁸⁶ One can imagine that a mother who read and therefore abandoned her role of "mother of civilization" did not function as a stabilizer anymore. Instead, such a wayward mother presented a strong threat of destabilization not only to the family but also to society.

If one can speak of a mother's power due to her role as educator of the children, one needs to remember that this power was ultimately still subject to the supervision of the husband and father. It is true that they were "apparently being granted special status [as educators and inculcators of morality] more as a substitute for power than as an acknowledgment of it."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, a shift in the forms of discipline that accompanied the shift in domestic ideology allowed women indeed to become, in comparative terms, more prominent in the exercise of power, at least in the domestic sphere.

This new form of discipline⁸⁸ avoided fear and bodily harm as measures of authority. Instead, it functioned by means of the strength of love: it "enfolds the child with love [...] and] knowingly aims to awaken a reciprocal strength of love."⁸⁹ This bond of love tied the child to the mother so strongly that according to the *New York Mother's Magazine*, it was harder to burst "these silken threads...than the iron chains of [paternal] authority."⁹⁰ A mother's form of discipline, then, did not rely on coercion but rather on the same "psychological themes of guilt and obligation" as the relationship of power between husband and wife. This bond of love proved a form of "inward colonization" which engendered outward obedience.⁹¹

Women were to a large extent socialized through what they read, and they, in turn, socialized the next generation.⁹² In this manner, the mothers passed the values of a patriarchal culture such as morality and purity on to their children. As reading played an important role in the socialization of the mother, reading also held a prominent place in her education of her children.

The teaching of reading and the choice of reading materials was a particularly important aspect of a mother's education for her children. Despite Rousseau's earlier warnings in *Emile* (1762) that reading was the "curse" of childhood,⁹³ it was considered an important part of raising children. Originally, the Protestants had to teach their children and women to read so that they would be able to read the Bible.⁹⁴ By the nineteenth century, one of a mother's main tasks consisted in imparting religious values.

Children's books also helped the mother in her teaching of reading. In the early nineteenth-century, the few children's books that existed were geared toward instruction. In particular, religious education played a major role in these early children's books. Not until later in the century did publishers begin to print children's books for pure entertainment.⁹⁵ Maria Edgeworth, for example, "helped invent

modern children's fiction" and she "developed throughout her novels and tales a 'motherdaughter educational narrative.'"⁹⁶ Even this newer children's fiction, however, remained true to the didactic goals of socializing children in the right way within a patriarchal society.⁹⁷

Mothers not only taught the skill of reading, but they also needed to establish "good" reading habits in their children. Of course, these reading habits had to be "good" so as to perpetuate the patriarchal values that had been inculcated into the mothers. In an article entitled "Female Influence on Reading" (1878), one nineteenth-century observer stressed the importance of mothers in the teaching of reading and the choice of reading matter:

On them, as mothers and sister, rests a great responsibility for, as is well known, they are childhood's first teachers. In these days, it is as important to teach our children what to read, as how to read, and thus it is imperative that a mother should read so that she might direct her family in their choice of books.⁹⁸

However much influence women possessed, men always contained their "power." In particular, this containment manifested itself in the teaching of reading and the choice of reading materials, for the

same ideology which entrusts mothers with the production of rational, autonomous individuals [mainly their sons] also attributes to women an irrationality, rooted in the body, which continually threatens to erupt unless carefully managed.⁹⁹

Even in her role as educator and inculcator of morality and purity to her children, the mother figure remained subverted by demonic aspects. She needed to be controlled, and her submission to her husband mitigated her power over her children. In an attempt to control the demon in women, men set up a system of paternalistic surveillance over women's reading. When mothers became the educators of their children, they only came to form an element in this system of control. Since the father often stayed out of the house, he gave the mother limited control over the children in the domestic sphere. One can never forget, however, that his control or power bestowed on the mothers remained limited and part of a larger male effort to contain a potential danger posed by females.

Such a system of surveillance of women's reading existed in the public as well as in the domestic sphere. In particular, school became the main institution for public control of women's reading. In this context, education for girls and women together with the distribution of literacy to the masses became hotly discussed issues.¹⁰⁰ In the end, innovations in women's education were "accompanied by cautious rhetoric, which attempted to forestall contemporary fears about the different types of damaging effect created by different types of reading."¹⁰¹

Both male and female reformers participated in this debate. However, if women campaigned for better education for women, it was not "merely seen as social rebel

lion, but rather [...as] a revolt against nature.”¹⁰² Women needed their energy for reproductive labor and not for learning. Despite this rhetoric, the debate about the education for women continued throughout the century. The discussion focused on two related questions: what kind of knowledge would be useful and not dangerous for a girl, and what reading material would prove beneficial rather than harmful to the female student?

Despite attempts at innovation, the idea that a girl would become a wife and mother, that is, the center of the domestic sphere with the responsibility of reproduction, remained at the base of the discussion about women’s education.¹⁰³ This meant that most of the programs for women’s education pursued the “agenda of perpetuating male domination”¹⁰⁴ and patriarchal cultural values. Education proved a perfect vehicle to control girls’ reading material and their intellectual development, and it provided a tool for keeping the demonic aspect of women’s character in check.

What studies, then, did girls follow in school? First and foremost, their curriculum included domestic science and home economics. “Eugenicist ideas influenced educational policy;”¹⁰⁵ these notions provided the justification that this kind of curriculum would produce perfect mothers who in turn would ensure that the condition of the species remained at a high level. “Housewifery” constituted a major part of the girls’ curriculum because it provided perfect preparation for the girls’ future role as wives and mothers. In addition to domestic skills, girls were to receive religious and moral training that reinforced “domesticated sex-roles, male authority” and women’s “subservience to men.”¹⁰⁶

Apart from these core areas of study, the curriculum for girls remained rather slim. They were not expected to “study serious subjects in depth or to develop analytical skills.”¹⁰⁷ Instead, they needed to learn—either by imitating “the models of attitude and comportment they observed in their mothers and teachers”¹⁰⁸ or by memorizing in a formalistic, ritualistic manner—those moral and religious tenets which would make them perfectly submissive wives in the future.

Thus, the limited curriculum for girls contained “no ancient languages and literature, philosophy, and mathematics.”¹⁰⁹ This lack of a classical education—“soci-ety’s highest wisdom”¹¹⁰—was a means to control and to deprive girls of intellectual power. In the nineteenth century, intellectual power (and therefore also effective power) consisted among other things of the “ability to draw at will on the canonical writers of the past.”¹¹¹ This kind of intellectual power was a preparation for the effective power of acting as an individual in the public sphere. If women were to seize this power, they would threaten a system that regarded “the ability to act as the prerogative of white men who saw themselves descended—sexually, racially, and spiritually—from the canonical heroes of the past.”¹¹²

Some women aggressively pursued this intellectual power in order to be equal to men. For example, George Eliot used quotations from the canonical works of the past at the beginning of each chapter in *Middlemarch* (1871–1872).¹¹³ With these epigraphs, she created a community of those who held the power of such knowledge:

“to employ a literary reference is to assert ones place within the cultural assumptions of that society.”¹¹⁴ As Douglass does, Eliot participates in the dominant discourse in this manner, thus at the same time restabilizing the dominant discourse and empowering herself. Eliot has forced her access to the world of this knowledge. By virtue of her choice of name and her eccentric behavior, George Eliot further emphasized her unusual access to a male world.

In contrast, Jane Austen ridiculed the wish of girls to acquire that same power in *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Catherine Moreland is a very mediocre heroine in training and “read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.”¹¹⁵ But Catherine does not acquire any intellectual power from the “light” quotations she memorizes.

The problem with intellectual power lay in the kind of knowledge women supposedly needed to seize in order to shake the foundations of a male-dominated system. As this knowledge is traditional, “male” knowledge, those women who acquired it against all odds became participants in a dominant discourse without rebelling against it. But the same argument that holds for Frederick Douglass’s use of dominant discourse proves true for women who managed to acquire male knowledge. From their perspective, it was better to engage in the dominant discourse than not to have a voice at all. In the nineteenth century, the participation of women in a traditionally male curriculum amounted to a great success indeed. Some women managed such a curriculum in their private studies and escaped the dominant domestic ideology of the nineteenth century to some extent. But even George Eliot reverts in her fiction to conventional domestic solutions for her heroine in *Middlemarch*, who marries and becomes the perfect wife by giving up her aspirations toward male knowledge.

School long prevented most women from attaining this knowledge. If women were educated in some traditionally male knowledge, it was for the benefit of others. As Lydia Maria Child put it in 1861:

it is most desirable that [... women] should possess such an amount of literacy and scientific knowledge as may fit them for appreciating the pursuits and sharing the interests of their brothers, fathers or (hereafter) their husbands.¹¹⁶

In this view, which is similar to George Sand’s description of women’s education, reading and learning prepared women to become good companions, in addition to housekeepers, mothers, and wives.¹¹⁷ Only limited knowledge could prepare a woman for her role as angel of the domestic sphere. In order to be a companion for her husband and a good hostess, she needed to learn just enough not to embarrass him.

Education for girls in the nineteenth century “underscore[d] woman’s debased status”¹¹⁸ since it remained limited to a very narrow curriculum that fostered accomplishments if it was not entirely withheld. Control over education constituted

control over women and therefore ultimately provided a means of keeping the demon beneath the angel in check.

The book market was the other area in the public sphere in which a male-dominated society exercised control over women’s reading. “A man’s book is a book. A woman’s book is a woman’s book.”¹¹⁹ This statement shows the imbalance of gender in a nineteenth century book market almost exclusively managed by men. Men owned the publishing industry, and men served as the most important critics of published works.¹²⁰ The women writers who produced massive numbers of novels, advice manuals, and some criticism constituted the only exception to this rule. Despite this presence of women in the book market—the place in which culture was defined through books—men occupied the important place of deciding what culture was. They

occupied positions as cultural brokers and cultural entrepreneurs, they argued amongst themselves about what sorts of literature should be valued. Resolving those arguments they foisted their tastes upon other groups. Their definition of cultural traditions became the great tradition.¹²¹

Some women did venture into the realms of male dominance and became critics, for example. However, they did not challenge the dominant view of culture. George Eliot’s comment about the large number of women writers shows that she agreed with the male critic who wanted all novelists thrown into the sea. She described their writing as “silly novels by silly lady novelists.”¹²² Women never “possessed the power to define the nature of good literature.”¹²³ They accepted the dominant male cultural discourse and “displayed their internalization of male standards as universal standards.”¹²⁴ What is more, men “invaded the field of novel writing where women had once been prevalent. From 1840 through 1917 men “made the high culture novel their own,” dismissing the product of women writers as low or popular culture not to be taken seriously as literature.¹²⁵

The division between high and low culture followed along lines of separation of gender:

In the gender inscription in the mass culture debate...woman is positioned as a reader [and writer] of inferior literature—subjective, emotional and passive—while man...emerges as a writer of genuine, authentic literature objective, ironic and in control of his aesthetic means.¹²⁶

With the division of high and low culture comes the emergence of “regulated popular literature” that was “disseminated through schools and centralized publishing venues, and managed by a professional group of critics and interpreters.”¹²⁷ The objective that motivated this regulation was that of containing possible damage to patriarchal power structures, and of controlling what kind of material came into the hands of women. Novels were often written with the express purpose of being marketed for women.¹²⁸ Yet, none of these regulating measures could detract from the

fact that “bad” literature such as sensation literature in England in the 1860s, the new woman literature at the end of the century, and the supposedly immoral French literature remained readily available for girls and women.

Paradoxically, the publishers who determined what came on the book market did not abolish all “bad” literature. Indeed, the sales of the penny magazines and popular literature became, in financial terms, some of the most successful ventures of the publishing houses. The publishers catered to the wishes of the female readership, and they ignored warnings from those who feared the emergence of the demonic due to such reading. On the other hand, they also created the wishes and desires of the female reading population. If men remained in control of the publishing houses, how could they hope at the same time to control the demonic and foster those desires in women that lead them to read “bad” literature—literature that in turn could lead to the eruption of the demonic? Arguably, profit might have played a more important role in capitalist societies of the nineteenth century than we wish to believe.

In another possible scenario, the demonic in women contained attractive aspects: that which is most feared becomes a source of fascination. Viewed from another angle, one can posit other hypotheses to explain this paradox. Possibly, publishers did not regard the texts that some feared so strongly as too dangerous. Or perhaps publishers noticed that the texts—despite possible subversive tendencies—incorporated control mechanisms that ultimately perpetuate dominant patriarchal structures.

Books were often seen as friends for young girls and women. This perception of books as people easily leads to the view of books as institutions of authority as strong as a real person of authority.¹²⁹ Echoing the message of advice manuals, approved books served as the perfect transmitters of social propriety and in this sense served a regulatory function in the social behavior of female readers.¹³⁰

Another less openly didactic form of narrative—the *Bildungsroman* that details the education and development of a protagonist—reveals itself as even more controlling and regulatory. The protagonists receive an education, and the reader simultaneously learns the same modes of behavior. The “*Bildungsroman*...as an institution multiplies a moral code.”¹³¹ It perpetuates those values and social structures in the reader’s perception of the world with which the narrative itself is imbued. The *Bildungsroman*, then, constitutes a very strong form of social control. As it shows the mode of socialization of the protagonist, it functions as an instrument of socialization for the reader.¹³²

Other methods of control within the text were more recognizably didactic and directed at the female reader. The condemnation of other genres served as one such method. By showing horrible examples of what happened to women who read too many romances, these narratives condemned the genre of romance. As their “most common lesson,” they implied that the “consumption of romance led to a narrow and at worst self-delusory outlook...potentially arousing false ideals and expectations.”¹³³ Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* represents one such

attempt at a cautionary tale of this genre. Although it shows Emma as an adulteress with very immoral behavior, Flaubert managed to extricate himself from a lawsuit against the lack of morality in his work. His defense pleaded that this work contained a covert attempt to control women readers' "immoral" tendencies, by showing them the horrible example of a woman gone astray due to her reading. In particular, Flaubert seems to condemn quite a few genres, among others the romances of Emma's childhood reading. The fact that this defense worked to Flaubert's benefit seems to show that such methods of deterrence had become common. Chapter seven, a closer examination of Emma's reading, will discuss whether this defense was not just a clever way to extricate Flaubert from a serious accusation, and whether the author had set out in his work to control women readers.

Ridicule figured as another method of control. Instead of dire warnings about the bad effect of too much reading on a woman, Jane Austen ridicules her heroine's excessive reading. Catherine Moreland's reading provides mental food for her overactive imagination. The Gothic novels she has read lead her to be very scared when visiting Northanger Abbey. Outwardly, then, women readers were to get the message that too much reading would lead to silly and ridiculous behavior. But did Catherine not have quite a few things of which to be afraid at Northanger Abbey? Is her "ridiculous" fear not an expression of her reaction to real "danger" to her person in the house of the Tilneys?

It seems that even in a case as "clear-cut" as Jane Austen's attempt at controlling female readers some subversive thoughts lurk underneath the surface. However, the outward signs of control prevail so strongly that they make the subversion virtually undecipherable. Austen clearly participated in male cultural judgments when she lets Catherine and the educated Henry Tilney discuss books. Whereas Catherine only talks about books such as the *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Henry Tilney shows his superiority in taste and culture by talking about "good" books. The man serves as guide to the reading woman in an attempt to teach her what is "good" and "bad," "high" and "low" literature or culture.¹³⁴ Therefore, Austen's work reinforced patriarchal power structures that served as both a didactic model and attempt at control of female reading.

If some doubt remains as to the effectiveness of the methods of control in Jane Austen's work, the same is true of another genre of narratives often regarded as reinforcing patriarchal structures. In domestic fiction, which was highly recommended for consumption by women, reading appeared in the narratives themselves in didactic guise. The heroines learned self-abnegation or other desirable social qualities from their reading. This in turn was to make the female reader of the domestic novel strive to be like the heroine.

However, critics "take at face value the novelist's endorsement of the domestic ideal and ignore the actual not very flattering portraits of domesticity which emerge from their works."¹³⁵ Indeed, in the domestic novels, families were hardly ever fully intact, and the heroines had to depend on themselves to find the perfect husband at

the end. These happy endings of marriage and conventional distribution of power are mostly not as conventional as they may seem at first:

The weakening of the male figure is so central to the happy ending that it can hardly be seen as other than a symbolic codification of an emotional perception that a partnership-marriage is impossible unless men are forced to give up some of the power which law and social conditioning have embedded in their characters.¹³⁶

Whereas the happy endings lead to the assumption that writers of domestic fiction give their assent to patriarchal power structures, they “register protest against the authorities of fathers and husbands”¹³⁷ with the negative portrayal of many domestic scenes, the weakened male authority as well as the clear independence of the heroines.

However, some critics argue that this subversion does not exist or that it is not very potent:

But smuggling reform in through the kitchen means limiting social change to what can be effected from within the domestic sphere and to what can be advocated...[within the framework of] the language of duty and indirect ‘influence.’¹³⁸

This statement brings us back to Frederick Douglass’s supposed lack of freedom because of his participation in the dominant white male discourse. Of course it would be better for Douglass as well as for women reading or writing domestic fiction to voice their protest in ways other than the dominant discourse or the dominant pattern of thought. But looking at the reverse side of the issue, it becomes clear that this form of protest is valid, effective and important. Douglass gains power from using the dominant discourse, while women at least manage to protest in the face of such tight social restrictions and limitations on their voices.

Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that much domestic fiction did function to control women’s possible dangerous side. As this fiction reinforces to a large extent patriarchal power structures, it contained control mechanisms of which publishers and fathers who allowed such reading must have been aware.

Sensation fiction—then believed to lead women astray—was deemed a much more dangerous genre. Many female protagonists in sensation fiction are figures of transgressive women. Their “dangerous” behavior would, it was feared, lead young girls and women readers into the depths of immorality and vice. However, this interpretation assumes that women readers wholeheartedly identified with the transgressing protagonists. As one critic has pointed out: “it is not clear that the reader of the sensation novel is placed unequivocally in a masochistic position of identification with the suffering heroine.”¹³⁹ Rather, this critic posits, the female reader of the sensation novel became an observer or spectator of the female character. Therefore, these narratives offered the women readers a paradoxical position as

spectator, that is, "a culturally masculine position of mastery."¹⁴⁰ This position allowed women to judge the female characters and to be masculine observers, which led them to participate in the value judgments of patriarchal society.

This discussion of control mechanisms in the texts shows that many narratives read by and written for women encoded the patriarchal power structures, therefore functioning to control women's demonic aspects, rather than as triggers for the demons to emerge from beneath the angelic surface. However, some cracks can be observed in these methods of control as well. Several forms of narrative in the nineteenth century seem to have registered protest against a society that was so restrictive for women. Ultimately, most of these narratives outwardly reinforced patriarchal structures, thereby undercutting the subversive message or making it hard to detect.

A discussion of the attempt to exert control over women's reading habits both in the private as well as the public sphere has shown a variety of strategies to contain the supposedly demonic aspects of women. In the private sphere, fathers and husbands remained the guardians of their daughters' and wives' reading habits, and the wives who had internalized their fathers' and husbands' patriarchal values became mothers to impart these values in turn to their children. Despite the growing role of mothers as educators and the clear gain in power, they still reinforced male power structures. In the public sphere, the education system kept girls and women in check. By withholding traditional male knowledge and by preparing women to be wives and mothers, the educational system robbed them of the possibility of attaining a certain form of intellectual power. Even the book market—although it published many works by women writers—controlled and restricted women as readers. The predominantly male publishers and critics set up male cultural standards and regulated popular literature. Moreover, if women attempted to enter the field as critics, they often had internalized these cultural values. Finally, even the texts of the nineteenth century themselves contributed to control the dangerous potential of women that might surface if they read. Narratives by men and women alike contained mechanisms of control in order to lead girl and women readers onto the morally and culturally right and acceptable path.

Given all these strategies of social and cultural control, how do we explain the pervasiveness of the fear of female reading? Was this fear really only a perception of danger, or could women indeed gain power from reading and shed the restricting form of angel to come into their own as demonic powerful creatures? Can women actually gain power from their reading? The answer to these questions has to lie both in the affirmative and the negative. Reading could prove both expanding and limiting for women. To some extent, it could give them power, which then gave rise to fears of the destabilizing potential of reading. At the same time, it robbed them of this power and enmeshed them ever more deeply in the patriarchal structures of society.

The fears of the destabilization of gender relations show the existence of a perception that credited women with different characteristics than men—characteris

tics that supposedly made them more susceptible to dangerous reading material. Do women read differently than men? Is that why their reading was perceived as so dangerous? The question has been posed many times.¹⁴¹ William Blake acknowledged that readers can read the same text and perceive different realities:

The vision of Christ that thou doest see
Is my Vision's Greatest Enemy
Thine has a great hook nose like thine
Mine has a snub nose like to mine
...
Both read the Bible day and night
But thou read'st black where I read white.¹⁴²

Marcel Proust commented on the same phenomenon positing that readers only read what already exists in themselves:

In reality, each reader reads only what is already within himself. The book is only a sort of optical instrument which the writer offers to the reader to enable the latter to discover in himself what he would not have found but for the aid of the book.¹⁴³

While neither Blake nor Proust attributed difference in reading to gender, some nineteenth-century women writers pointed out that men and women read differently. For example, the woman in the attic room in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1891) reads the wallpaper, and she is the only one who can see the woman crouched behind the pattern of the wallpaper. Even though this "reading" is impossible for her husband to achieve, it does not give her any real power. Nevertheless, it prompts her to write what could have been a source of power, although in the end she succumbs to madness.¹⁴⁴

Another more distinct description of women's different manner of reading is presented in Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" (1927). Upon the death of a farmer, authorities suspect his wife of killing him. The sheriff and his helper take their wives to the farmhouse to look for clues. The men look for a weapon around the house and the shed whereas the two women enter the kitchen. They notice several details in this kitchen that portray the miserable life the wife must have led under the sway of her brutal husband. At last, they find a killed canary which must have been the trigger for the wife's murder of her husband. The women know how to read the text of the clues left in the kitchen. It never even occurs to the men to look for that kind of text. The women as readers do attain some power—that of knowledge. They let some of the clues disappear and the farmer's wife, guilty of killing her husband, is acquitted by the men of the community.¹⁴⁵ In this case, the women's ability to "read" differently from men gives them the power to act.

As Eve's example has shown, reading can provide women with power. She "reads" the forbidden tree of knowledge and manages to seduce Adam to do the

same. The sexual knowledge that they attain forces them to leave the Garden of Eden. Not all women who read to gain knowledge are forced to leave the Garden of Eden. Indeed, many women acquire knowledge and therefore power. However, as much as this kind of reading is empowering, it is also limiting in a sense. The knowledge that women aspire to attain is male knowledge. They read traditional texts that are written by men and for men—such as the great classics—and imbibe male cultural values embedded within these texts. It is always the sexual knowledge which proves to be most “dangerous.” Women who possess that knowledge have more control of their bodies, which is dangerous to the accepted notion that a woman’s body is the property of her husband.

Reading can also provide women with another form of knowledge. For centuries, reading has been regarded as opening new worlds to the reader: “If reading was in any sense a ‘window to the world,’ in the thirteenth century as it has often been claimed to be since the Industrial Revolution, then the world in question was an extraterrestrial one only.”¹⁴⁶ Even a “view” of an extraterrestrial world would provide women with power. However, nineteenth-century society in the United States, France and Great Britain did not consider that kind of world to lie behind the window opened by reading:

The notion that reading ‘opens new worlds’ is a later one, shaped in part by the claims of Renaissance printers and writers who urged that the contemporary reader (and writer) already standing on the shoulders of those giants, the Ancients, could thereby see beyond them. More immediately it is part of a postEnlightenment ideology of reading.¹⁴⁷

Standing on the shoulders of the Ancients, however, implies the great white male tradition—a point of departure from which women could not gain much power.

For the women readers of the nineteenth century, these new worlds took on much more concrete forms. For many women, reading provided them with a vicarious life and a “world of imagination.”¹⁴⁸ They could identify with characters who led lives different from their own. Simone de Beauvoir recounts how she identified with two heroines of her reading. She first saw herself as Jo in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, despite her disappointment in the fact that Jo marries the professor and gives up her literary and independent aspiration. Later, de Beauvoir found another “fictional self...Maggie Tulliver [from George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)...] closer to her personal ideal.”¹⁴⁹ Maggie provides a little more powerful source of identification because she refuses to end up in a conventional marriage. Such an identification with heroines could “supply readers with some of the excitement missing from their middle-class lives”¹⁵⁰ and give them imaginative realms of power. They could assume as their own characteristics of the heroines about whom they read.

In addition, girls read boys’ books, for example, which “opened up a sense of the imaginative possibilities to be found for travel and action in the world.”¹⁵¹ Boys’

books, or later men's accounts of travel and action, allowed them to glimpse a world that was off-limits to them and gave them an "imaginative means of entering an active environment."¹⁵² However, even if this kind of vicarious life proved empowering in that it allowed women to leave their restrictive environment at least imaginatively, it also reinforced patriarchal values. In most cases, women were "presented with an idealized, thoroughly reassuring image of patriarchal society.... [T]hese fictions control threats to what they make the reader believe is the firmly established order."¹⁵³ This "cultural reassurance"¹⁵⁴ subverts any empowering effects the discovery of new worlds and a vicarious life might have had for women readers.

The fact that the fiction women read often creates the desires they experience and live out constitutes another problem with the notion of reading as empowering in terms of access to new worlds and a vicarious life. The women's desire is mimetic: instead of coming from inside themselves, fiction has created it for them. Even if they lived out their desires, e.g., if Emma Bovary had managed to escape to a land of wonderful fantasy with her lover, she would have lived a life of conventions as described in the fiction she has read. Reading in this case poses a challenge to traditional values because it leads Emma to plan escape from her domestic life. But it also represents a concession to those same conventional values because the romantic books Emma reads have fabricated her romantic dreams. Thus patriarchal structures of power remain intact in this dream world.¹⁵⁵

Is reading, then, entirely harmless, and are the fears of a male society unfounded? Can the demon even be awakened by "dangerous" reading? Reading can certainly enrich women's lives and lead them to a kind of knowledge that can make them more powerful and therefore dangerous or demonic to male society. However, the inscription of dominant values in most texts does not allow for a truly empowering or liberating reading experience for women. But the same argument that held true for Frederick Douglass and his participation in the dominant white discourse applies to the women readers of the nineteenth century. If they did not read to gain knowledge or to dream, this possible avenue of empowerment would be entirely closed to them. Even at the risk of participating in the dominant discourse—and accepting traditional patriarchal values in the process—reading is valuable to them.

Whether women's reading is only a perceived threat or a real danger, the attempts at control over women's reading show the degree of concern about their reading in the nineteenth century. In particular, novelists attempted to deal with the "destabilizing potential" and the possible eruption of female demonic characteristics in their fiction. In the next two chapters an examination of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* shows how the two authors dealt in different ways with this "dangerous potential" of reading and presented the destabilizing effect of women's reading with different attitudes.

Chapter Six

The Demonic Underneath the Angelic Little Woman

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

Two devils...as yet I am not quite divine enough to vanquish the mother fiend and her daughter.

Bronson Alcott, *Journals* (1844)¹

"It seems as if I could do anything when I'm in a passion. I get so savage, I could hurt anyone and enjoy it."

Jo March in *Little Women* (1868)²

Always hopeful, happy and serenely busy with the quiet duties she loved, everyone's friend, and an angel in the house.

About Beth March in *Little Women*³

Amos Bronson Alcott's journal entry refers to demons in his own household. He was writing about his wife Abba May and his second daughter, Louisa May. On November 29, 1832, he announced with "great pleasure" the birth of this second daughter and still found her a "fine healthful child."⁴ To him, her name was "full of every association connected with amiable benevolence and exalted worth." The proud father hoped that "its [the name's] present possessor [... might] rise to equal attainment, and deserve a place in the estimation of society."⁵ Louisa May Alcott lived up to her father's expectations in that she became a celebrated author, the "Children's Friend,"⁶ and the provider for her family.⁷ She gained the "estimation of society" as he wished, but her father's approval and her own self-esteem lagged behind this positive image.

Louisa May was a very energetic and strong-willed child. As the thirteen-year old noted in her journal: "People think I'm wild and queer."⁸ Her father preferred

her older sister Anna, because she was less wild and active. Indeed, he often found Louisa "demonic"⁹ and as "the demon of discord...[in his] vision of domestic harmony."¹⁰ Very early on, Louisa perceived of herself as the demon of the family: "I was cross today, and I cried when I went to bed. I made good resolutions, and felt better in my heart. If I only kept all I make, I should be the best girl in the world. But I don't, and so am very bad."¹¹ Forty years later, upon reading and commenting in her journal, Louisa May added: "[Poor little sinner! She says the same at fifty.—L.M.A.]"¹² Along with her father, she always doubted herself and perceived herself as a sinner and "cried over [...her] bad tongue and temper."¹³ Louisa always tried to please her father, but his love was conditional upon her behavior.¹⁴ Even if her behavior met his standards of domesticity, she still saw herself as "good on the surface but bad, angry, and unforgiving underneath."¹⁵ As a result of her attempts to please her father and her internal conflict about her own nature, she could neither "rebel nor fully...accept the self-sacrificing feminine role" that her father and society expected her to assume. She was "left...a smoldering, resentful, emotionally damaged woman."¹⁶

Despite her father's constant disapproval, Alcott strove toward those virtues her father set before her. Bronson Alcott espoused the values of "obedience, service, dependence and repression"¹⁷ as well as self-abnegation gleaned from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1675), a work he "favored in his teachings" among others.¹⁸ Self-abnegation was the hardest value for Alcott to learn. One way that allowed her to live out her feelings was the theater. She "learned to use family theater to curb her frantic demands for personal freedom and bring herself into conformity with her father's domestic ideal."¹⁹

Another venue for her emotions was reading. At age fifteen she noted in her journal: "Reading Miss Bremer and Hawthorne. The *Scarlet Letter* is my favorite. Mother likes Miss B. better, as more wholesome. I fancy 'lurid' things, if true and strong also."²⁰ The "lurid" allowed Louisa to live out at least vicariously her "wildness" and "queerness." Thus, reading directly affected her emotions. The ten-year-old wrote on a Tuesday: "I am so cross I wish I had never been born." However, the next day, already, she "had a very happy day" for she "read the *Heart of Midlothian*" (1818).²¹ Reading provided Louisa with an outlet for her emotions as well as a tool to manipulate them.

More importantly, she found that she could express her feelings in her writing.²² She could assume roles not open to her in a restrictive domestic setting both in the plays she wrote for herself and her sisters, as well as in her stories, fairy-tales, poems and later novels. However, self-fulfillment in this manner is not accepted by the "cult of true Womanhood."²³ To play the role of a proper "little woman," as her father wished, Alcott imagined her writing to be in the service of others. In this manner, she avoided being egotistical in the eyes of others and could be "good," i.e., writing or working to sacrifice herself for her family: "...the act of writing itself may have been liberating but Alcott paid for such self-indulgence by making the writing instrumental by sacrificing herself and her writing to duty."²⁴ "Duty's

faithful child” delighted in the income from her writing because she could support her family with that money: “\$300 to pay debts and make the family happy and comfortable till spring.”²⁵ In her writing, Alcott had found a way of self-expression, as, for example, in the Gothic thrillers written in the “lurid” style that she confessed to prefer. However, here she could not openly admit to writing such self-fulfilling texts and created the pseudonym A.M. Barnard. And she always had the excuse of saying that she could support her family with the money.

In this altruistic vein, Alcott even accepted a job for writing something she did not want to do at all:

Mr. N. [Mr. Niles of Roberts Brothers] wants a girl’s story, and I begin *Little Women*. Marmee, Anna, and May all approve my plan. So I plod away, though I don’t enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it.²⁶

Although she did not enjoy writing *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott created a very successful work, and she did in one sense gratify herself by creating her heroine Jo. Jo March is a strongly autobiographical fictional version of the author. Jo, the tom-boy, is just as “wild and queer” as Louisa and feels just like her creator that she has a “dreadful temper” and could “do anything when...in a passion [because she gets]...so savage,...[she] could hurt anyone, and enjoy it” (Alcott 96). Like her creator, Jo tries to some extent to be “good” on the outside, but initially she does not claim to be the “angel in the house” (Alcott 289) like her sister Beth.

What role does reading play in passionate Jo March’s life? How does Louisa May Alcott treat reading and power in *Little Women*? Is reading an empowering force letting the demonic power erupt from underneath the surface of the angelic little woman? Does reading destabilize the gender relations in the society portrayed in *Little Women*? If reading is a “dangerous” activity for little angelic women, who tries to control it, and how? Finally, what is Louisa May Alcott’s own attitude toward the power of reading? These questions will be addressed in this chapter.

Books play an important role in Jo’s life. First of all, books and reading bring her pleasure. Jo remembers that as a little girl she would play in her Uncle March’s library where the “kind old gentleman...used to let her build railroads and bridges with his big dictionaries” (Alcott 46).²⁷ Libraries are Jo’s favorite places: “the wilderness of books, in which she could wander where she liked, made the library [of her deceased Uncle March] a region of bliss to her” (Alcott 47). Upon discovering the library in the Laurence household, Jo shows extreme pleasure because reading means “happiness” to her (Alcott 47). When the girls take a “vacation” from their duties, Jo is not interested in resting and “revel[ing]” as is Meg, nor does she want to play like Amy and Beth. Instead, Jo “laid in a heap of books” and intends to spend her week “reading on [...her] perch in the old apple tree” (Alcott 132).

The satisfaction derived from the library and books is not entirely mental. When reading, Jo is literally satisfied in body as well as mind, for reading is linked with eating.²⁸ When we find her reading for the first time, she is eating apples (Alcott 29), and on another occasion, she sits on an apple tree (Alcott 133). When Jo reads to Aunt March, the elderly lady asks her niece “what [...she] meant by opening [...her] mouth wide enough to take the whole book in at once” (Alcott 50). Jo is a “bookworm” (Alcott 4)—a creature that literally eats books, like Jo’s pet rat that eats the leaves of her manuscripts (Alcott 179). Jo “devoured poetry, romance, history, travels, and pictures like a regular bookworm” (Alcott 47).

Reading makes her happy, it satisfies her, and to read and own books remain two of her strongest desires. Jo’s castle in the air, that is, her dream for her future, includes “rooms piled with books” (Alcott 173). When given the choice of one single Christmas present, she wishes for the book *Undine and Sintram*.²⁹ It is only one year later that she receives the “long-desired” (Alcott 264) book. Reading and books are one of Jo’s “vices” because they are an aspect of her selfishness. She emphasizes that she wants the book for herself: “I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy *Undine and Sintram* for myself. I’ve wanted it so long” (Alcott 4). Jo wants to possess books, a selfish desire as the narrator seems to suggest.³⁰

In addition, Jo can selfishly enjoy her books and escape the duties she is supposed to fulfill. All of her places for reading are far removed from the everyday lives and duties of the family: Jo reads in the garret

... wrapped up in a comforter on an old three-legged sofa by the sunny window. This was Jo’s favorite refuge, and here she loved to retire with half a dozen russets and a nice book, to enjoy the quiet and the society of a pet rat who lived nearby and didn’t mind her a particle. (Alcott 29)

As the words “retire,” “refuge,” and “quiet” indicate, Jo relishes being alone. Does the mention of the pet rat who does not mind her mean that other society might mind her? On one occasion, an excited Meg who tells her of an invitation to a ball interrupts Jo. When Meg is frantic about what to wear, Jo discusses the subject with her yet longs to get back to her reading in solitude (Alcott 30). Similarly, Jo escapes duty—that of reading to Aunt March—and finds refuge in her uncle’s library where she goes as soon as her Aunt slept or received visitors. She reads in “this quiet place ... curling herself up in the easy chair” (Alcott 47). She enjoys reading so much “in large measure because of the freedom it affords from the female pre-occupations she is expected to cultivate.”³¹

Reading also allows Jo to live out her emotional and imaginative experiences. Jo’s tomboyish nature:

...her preference for boy’s work and manners stems from a deep awareness of how the limitations on feminine possibility make it difficult for her to express what

is in her. Indeed, she is as a girl, constantly being told that she is not supposed to express what is in her.³²

Apart from “boy’s work and manners,” in reading Jo finds another way to express what is inside her. Literature proves to be “one of the few sanctioned outlets for [...her] emotional and imaginative energies.”³³

Indeed, a comment Proust made about reading applies to Jo: “As long as reading is an instigator for us and as long as reading is a magic key that opens deep inside of us the door to places we could otherwise never reach, it has a healthy role in our lives.”³⁴ Reading allows Jo to find aspects of her own self that she is not allowed to present to those around her. For Jo, reading simultaneously provides escape and selfdiscovery.³⁵

Apart from a sense of escaping in space and in time as well as from the duties of the household, reading produces “reverie, tears, and pleasure.”³⁶ We find Jo crying over her reading many times. The tears provide an emotional release. She is “crying over the *Heir of Redclyffe*” (1855) (Alcott 29)³⁷ and “crying over *The Wide, Wide World*” (1850) (Alcott 133).³⁸ One might argue that there was not much for Jo to find in these novels that would lead her to make self-discoveries or think rebellious thoughts. Indeed, *Heir of Redclyffe*, a novel by the English writer Charlotte Mary Younge, was considered “proper fare for the young being heavily weighted with moral teachings.”³⁹ Similarly, the sentimental novel *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner was standard reading for young girls because of its advocacy of self-abnegation and feminine propriety. However, many recent critics have pointed to the subversive nature of such sentimental novels, an indication that a covert message lies beneath the overt one.⁴⁰ As Susan Harris points out “...women searching for alternatives to conventional roles might perceive them [the sentimental novels] as far more radical than their cover stories suggest.”⁴¹

Another novel that attracts Jo is the *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). She reads this book in secret at her Aunt’s house, until her laughter wakes her Aunt who finds out what a “frivolous work” (Alcott 51) she is reading. The *Vicar of Wakefield* includes abduction, mock marriage, seduction, imprisonment, debt, villains, revenge, and of course a happy end with a good marriage. It may be that the overt message prescribes marriage at the end, but Jo’s pleasure comes from the other elements such as “where they all tumbled into the water” or the “thrilling place[s]” (Alcott 51). In addition, her reading in this instance is a rebellion against her service to her aunt.

Jo is shown as being absorbed in the reading of all three novels. If possible, she would not ever stop but rather read them through at once. She reads with “intensity and conviction, [with] the feeling of being in bondage to the book unable to break free from its powerful spell.”⁴²

Intensity is something that Jo craves, because the intensity of reading allows her to live through some of the “passions” she so unhappily confesses to her mother (Alcott 96). Passionate reading as practiced by Jo could be described as follows in the words of one critic:

Our feeling is more intense than easy pleasure, more dashing and ferocious than delight, more gorgeous than distraction. We are grateful to the beloved text for being there.... In our gratitude, we treasure the books we love. We may even become addicted to them. For they provide some of love’s relational and terrifying thrills: its ecstasies, the threat of the loss, the closure of these ecstasies; union with a different being; the threat of loss, the closure of this union; the sensation of inhabiting a world apart from the world that normally inhibits one; an oscillation between control and self-abandonment; a dance with the partners of amusement or consolation; the gratification of need that a reader has concealed.⁴³

Jo indeed loses her inhibitions while reading, letting her tears and her laughter come. And she “gratifies” the need to be alone, away from her duties, the need to indulge in her emotional and imaginative worlds which she normally “conceals.”

In addition, Jo changes from “self-abandonment to” “control over” her reading. The reader who loves a book as in the quote above can “experience a sense of sovereignty, domination and autonomy.”⁴⁴ When Laurie first hints of being in love with Jo, she is not very happy. She does not like “twilight confidences, tender pressures of the hand, and eloquent glances of the eye” (Alcott 392). Jo prefers her books because she dominates them: “with Jo, brain developed earlier than heart, and she preferred imaginary heroes to real ones, because, when tired of them, the former could be shut up in the tin kitchen till called for and the latter were less manageable” (Alcott 392).

In her books Jo can experience emotions at will, when she is not happy they can make her happy, when the emotions become too much she can put the book away. But when she chooses, she can sit “safe and happy in an imaginary world full of friends almost as real and dear to her as any in the flesh” (Alcott 322).

Jo’s reading not only allows her to live in an imaginary internal world, but it also influences her real world. Jo takes her reading as a guide to life. When Marmee asks Jo whether she thinks that Meg might have fallen in love with Mr. Brooke she answers:

‘Mercy me! I don’t know anything about love and such nonsense!’ cried Jo, with a funny mixture of interest and contempt. ‘In novels the girls show it by starving and blushing, fainting away, growing thin, and acting like fools. Now Meg does not do anything of the sort. She eats, drinks, and sleeps like a sensible creature...’ (Alcott 243)

Jo takes her knowledge about love “and such nonsense” out of her books. But Jo’s book guide is wrong, because Meg has fallen in love with John despite being a “sensible creature.” Along the same lines, Jo mistakenly judges Beth’s behavior toward Laurie as that of one in love: “But having given the rein to her lively fancy, it galloped away with her at a great pace and common sense, being rather weakened by a long course of romance” does not help her understand the situation (Alcott

392). Beth is not in love with Laurie, and Jo again misinterprets the situation due to her knowledge gleaned from books.

Jo gains something else from her books. Apart from guidance about her life and vicarious living, Jo enacts that which she encounters in books that most matches her own desires. In her play, “The Witch’s Curse,” staged by the four sisters,

Jo played male parts to her hearts content and took immense satisfaction in a pair of russet leather boots given her by a friend who knew a lady who knew an actor. These boots, an old foil, and a slashed doublet once used by an artist for some pictures were Jo’s chief treasures and appeared on all occasions. (Alcott 22)

Similarly, Jo and her sisters make vicarious living a reality by creating the Pickwick Club. They base their personalities on Charles Dickens’ characters. Meg is Mr. Pickwick and Jo is Augustus Snodgrass. They address each other as gentlemen, and Jo actually lives out her dream of an “inkstand” by being the editor of the Pickwick Portfolio (Alcott 121). As a male character, Jo can live out her fantasy of not being a restricted little woman.

Reading, then, has many functions for Jo. She derives pleasure and satisfaction from reading and owning books. She can vent her emotional and imaginative energies in her reading. She can live vicariously, use her reading as a guide to real life, and ultimately she can enact what pleases her in her reading—i.e., male roles that allow her more independence and freedom and, most of all, the right to express herself.

Being an active reader leads Jo to become an active writer which allows self-expression in a much more direct way. Jo claims power over language and is elevated by her writing as blissfully as by her reading:

She did not think herself a genius by any means, but when the writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world...Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. The divine afflatus usually lasted a week or two, and then she emerged from her Vortex, ’ hungry, sleepy, cross, or despondent. (Alcott 322)

Jo’s writing makes her happy, she enjoys it, and it is blissful: these are the same words used to describe her reading experiences (Alcott 29, 46). Jo’s writing is also like her reading in that it physically separates her from the family and lets her escape from her household duties. “Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit, and ‘fall into a vortex,’ as she expressed it, writing away at her novel...for till that was finished she could find no peace” (Alcott 321). Jo does not seem part of the family activities during these “vortex” times: “...her family, who during this periods kept their distance, merely pop[ped...] in

their heads semioccasionally to ask, with interest, 'does genius burn, Jo?'" (Alcott 321). "Writing provides the promise of escape;"⁴⁵ escape from the family, from her duties and from the world she inhabits.

However, since the ideology of little womanhood forbids the selfish acts of closing in on oneself and being entirely busy with one's own fantasies, Jo needs to justify her activity. When her first story, "Rival Painters," is accepted for publication without pay, she sees that there are financial possibilities in publishing. She declares: "I am so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls" (Alcott 188). Jo manages to combine her justification for her writing with one of her dearest wishes: "She justifies the activity on altruistic grounds—if she earns money by her writing she can help her parents and the other girls—but the need for it is far deeper than the need to earn money."⁴⁶ Jo wants independence, an entirely unfeminine aspiration. However, coupled with altruistic motives and a desire to please, it can be accepted as the narrator tells us: "for to be independent and earn the praise of those she loved were the dearest wishes of her heart, and this [writing and publication] seemed to be the first step toward that happy end" (Alcott 188).

More so than reading, writing allows Jo to express her feelings. She puts her whole self into her writing: "It was only half a dozen little fairy tales, but Jo had worked over them patiently, putting her whole heart into her work" (Alcott 92). She gives herself to her "writing fit[s]" with "entire abandon" "writing . . . with all her heart and soul" (Alcott 321–322). Louisa May Alcott's journal entry of September 1864—a period in which she wrote sensation fiction—shows that she also expressed her feelings in her writing: "wrote a blood and thunder story or novelette of several hundred pages to relieve my feelings."⁴⁷

Like her creator, Jo relieves her feelings by writing. In addition, she feels that she has control over her imaginary world just like the world within the books she reads. She promises that if Meg were in one of her books, she would create a happy end for her (Alcott 189) because she has control over events and characters in her writing.

The secrecy of Jo's writing adds another dimension of independence and a form of rebellion. Jo is "merry and mysterious" (Alcott 179) about having taken the "Rival Painters" to the publishers. Later, she takes her sensation fiction to the publisher pretending that a friend had sent her and agrees to publication only under a pseudonym (Alcott 419, 428). "The writing of sensation stories is linked to the secretive—to what must be left unstated—so that she might 'have her own way first.'"⁴⁸ She does not share her intentions and excursions with her family and keeps her writing to herself. The fact that she deems it necessary to conceal her attempts indicates that she thinks others might not approve of her endeavor. However, instead of asking for permission, she keeps her secret.

Jo's writing and reading are intimately linked, for it is her reading that inspires much of her writing: "Her theatrical experience and miscellaneous reading were of service now [that she was writing sensation stories], for they gave her some idea of dramatic effect and supplied plot, language, and costumes" (Alcott 324). If her writ

ing might cause disapproval so that it has to be kept secret, then her reading—the source of inspiration for her writing—must be equally threatening.

How, then, does Jo's reading pose a threat? Is it not a supposedly "harmless amusement" (Alcott 22) like her theatrical experiences? Indeed, her reading is dangerous for several reasons. Until Beth dies, an event that contributes to Jo's ultimate submission to patriarchal authority, her reading leads to a discontent with normal life, to a neglect of duties, and a disregard for conventions—just as the *Christian's Penny Magazine* had predicted. More seriously, it leads to a destabilization of gender relations and ultimately to the release of the demonic underneath the surface angel.

As John Ruskin has pointed out, reading is dangerous if "it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting"⁴⁹ and perpetuates the wish for a life other than that available. Jo feels that life is much better in her stories than in reality. When the four girls are particularly unhappy about their hard life, Jo exclaims:

Oh, don't I wish I could manage things for you as I do for my heroines! You're pretty enough and good enough already, so I'd have some rich relation leave you a fortune unexpectedly, then you'd dash out as an heiress, scorn everyone who has slighted you, go abroad, and come home my Lady Something in a blaze of splendor and elegance. (Alcott 189–90)

Jo dreams about a life that she encounters in her reading and then recreates in her writing where she "manage[s] things" according to her wishes. However, Meg, although also a reader at times, has a more realistic view of life: "People don't have fortunes left them in that style nowadays. Men have to work, and women to marry for money" (Alcott 190). Interestingly, despite the unhappiness that Jo feels over the clash between the real and the imaginary world, it is her dream that comes true. "Some rich relation" turns out to be Aunt March who leaves Plumfield to Jo. She does become an "heiress" and in a sense scorns everyone because she runs her school as she pleases and not according to conventions.⁵⁰ Lastly, Amy does go abroad and comes home not as "my Lady Something" but as Lady Laurence, and she does not marry for money. However, Meg's reply is true to some extent. Men have to work, and women have to marry.

This episode shows that literature can indeed appear dangerous when it leads the reader to be unhappy with reality. However, when such dreams as excited by literature come true, it becomes clear that the dreams are not so "rebellious" as might have been feared. Indeed, the desires have been created by the literature and remain very conventional if romantic and happy at best. While romances of the kind Jo reads and writes allow her to dream of a different life, these dreams, far from threatening to the status quo, only reinforce the established order when they become true. Even in the dream turned truth, the men have to work and the women have to marry as Meg points out realistically and bitterly (Alcott 190).

However, in Jo's case, reading threatens the status quo of the domestic sphere, because it leads her to neglect her duties. When Marmee gives her daughters per

mission to neglect their duties for a week in an experiment to make them learn the value of these duties, Jo reads endlessly “till her eyes gave out” (Alcott 134). In this instance, Jo learns to value her domestic duties as her mother expected. In another instance, Jo’s self-indulgence leads to much greater damage. Jo is so busy writing her story (Alcott 212) that she does not attend to her duty of visiting the needy Hummel family. Instead, she lets Beth go, who already complains about fatigue and a headache. Beth reluctantly makes the charitable call, witnesses the death of the youngest Hummel, and contracts from the family the scarlet fever, which almost kills her. “A fall into self-absorption teaches that a woman must put service to others before indulgence of the self: Jo’s selfishness all but kills Beth.”⁵¹

At this point in the story, Jo’s reading (and, by extension, writing) proves to be very dangerous and threatening to the domestic order. Her supposed self-indulgence leads to neglect of her duties. Jo is punished for her lack of self-abnegation by the near-death of Beth: in consequence she takes a step away from the independence she craves toward self-effacing little womanhood when she says “Don’t care if I do [catch scarlet fever myself]. Serve me right, selfish pig, to let you go and stay writing rubbish myself!” (Alcott 214). Like the mother in the example of *The Christian’s Penny Magazine*, Jo does not interrupt her reading for the duties toward the family and ceases to be angelically domestic, but unlike her she soon repents.

In addition to neglect of duties, reading destabilizes the status quo because it leads Jo to disregard conventions. When asked to make social calls with Amy, Jo would like to refuse and shun her “duty” again, but Amy manages to make her older sister come with her. Jo, however, keeps her rebelliousness in spirit. When Amy asks her at the first house they visit to be “calm, cool, and quiet—that’s safe and ladylike,” Jo follows that directive to the letter, drawing on her reading and acting experience: “Let me see. ‘Calm, cool, and quiet’—yes, I think I can promise that. I’ve played the part of a prim young lady on the stage, and I’ll try it off. My powers are great, as you shall see, so be easy in your mind, my child.” (Alcott 350). Jo manages to be “icily regular, splendidly dull” (Alcott 351), to Amy’s mortification. Jo’s reading and her fondness for acting allow her to be unconventional while pretending to make an effort to behave according to conventions.

The next visit is equally disastrous, for Amy asks Jo to be sociable. Not lacking a model for this type of behavior either, Jo agrees: “I’ll be agreeable, I’ll gossip and giggle, and have horrors and raptures over any trifle you like. I rather enjoy this, and now I’ll imitate what is called ‘a charming girl’” (Alcott 351). She overdoes the characteristics of the “charming” girl and makes Amy uncomfortable. Her reading and acting lead Jo to disregard conventions, and she is punished shortly thereafter when the two sisters visit Aunt March. Now left to behave as she wishes, Jo is so outspoken about her opposition to social conventions that her aunt decides it should be the more polished Amy who should go to Europe instead of Jo, who had always thought that she would be the one invited to go.

Jo’s theatrical interpretation of the social role expected of her is, however, less threatening than another aspect of her role-playing. In her play-acting “Jo played

male parts to her heart's content" (Alcott 22). "Fiction allows Jo to enact her masculine fantasies of power."⁵² Therefore, fiction, in reading as well as in writing, threatens a destabilization of gender relations. Jo acts male parts in her plays, but her "maleness" is not limited to that sphere.

Before Beth's death, Jo assumes the male role in her domestic world. As critic Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests, in this kind of world

The nature of women. . . is to be frivolous, foolish, vain, and lazy. They must be laboriously taught to be otherwise. . . . Boys, on the other hand, are naturally enterprising, gay, and bold. Masculine society may lead a young man to play pranks; such boyish high spirits will be admired and envied by young women, who beg to be told of them. At worst such society leads a man to drinking—but a word from a good woman will make him swear off. A man may fall into depression; a woman can bring him out of it. Such power is her highest achievement.⁵³

This description is true for the world of *Little Women* to some extent. The four sisters do seem to have those "faults" mentioned, Laurie indeed is a young, gay man who plays pranks, tells the girls about them, and upon Meg's request he swears never to drink. When Laurie is depressed about Jo's rejection, it is Amy who can bring him out of it. But is such power really a woman's highest achievement or only a form of power? It may be, if she is a conventional woman.

Jo, however, does not want to accept the conventional role for women. She boldly states "I am the man of the family now Papa is away" (Alcott 8). Jo's male role begins with simple tasks such as bringing wood and setting chairs, whereas the other girls perform more "female tasks" such as arranging the table and fetching the supper (Alcott 11). In accordance with those supposedly male standards Jo wants to uphold for herself, she leans on the back of the chair when her mother reads the father's letter to the family so that "no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching" (Alcott 12) for "tears were an unmanly weakness" (Alcott 93).

Jo goes so far in her "male position" as to assume "gentlemanly behavior" (Alcott 36), even outwardly becoming like a boy. She cuts her hair. However, this action that makes her look "boyish" (Alcott 195) is also a self-sacrificing act: she donates the money earned from the sale of her hair to benefit the father's health. Jo is not entirely able to give of herself as a little woman should. Instead, she grieves about her sacrifice (Alcott 198), telling Meg that it is her "vain selfish part" (Alcott 198), that is unhappy. Selfishness, however, is a dangerous characteristic for a little woman and must be overcome to conform to the ideal of angelic self-abnegation. Even her sisters admit that Jo is "rude" and "unladylike," partly because she whistles on the street, and partly because she uses slang words like a boy (Alcott 5). Jo's only reply is that she hates "niminy-piminy chits," that is, girls, and that she "like[s] good strong words that mean something" (Alcott 5).

Jo's wishes and dreams are all related to the male sphere: she wishes for "a stable full of Arabian steeds, rooms piled with books [like the libraries of Uncle March and Mr. Laurence]," and she claims she would "write out of a magic inkstand so that my works should be as famous as Laurie's music" (Alcott 173). Not only does she yearn for such typically male possessions as horses and books, but she wants to become a great writer, a supposedly male profession, because women writers were not great. *Little Women* incorporates a "binary opposition" with "littleness," "triviality," and women on the one hand and "bigness," "greatness," and men on the other hand.⁵⁴ Jo's desires place her in the male sphere because she aspires to bigness (many rooms full of books and many horses), greatness, and fame rather than the littleness and triviality of little womanhood. Her reading helps her live out some of these fantasies. It reinforces her dreams and allows her to feel independent and to have some mastery.

It is true that reading does not only reflect and reinforce wishes and desires already inherent in Jo's character. Her reading also creates wishes for her, as for example, the scene in which she dreams the future for her sister Meg. In the latter case, however, as we have discussed, the dream or desire created by the reading has a message of conventional gender roles embedded. The interplay of desires inherent in the character with reading, as well as that of reading with new desires created by it form a dialectic or dynamic relation. On the one hand, reading allows the character to live out wishes and dreams she has had for a long time. In a similar manner, Douglass's reading allows him to become conscious and to structure in his thought his understanding of the master-slave relationship and the need and possibility to be free that had lain in incomplete form in his mind. On the other hand, reading creates new desires and provides scenarios and possibilities a character might not have dreamed before. Created by reading, these new dreams often have encoded messages of dominant power structures. Therefore, they do not seem as threatening as the former. Reading in the former manner appears dangerous, especially in the case of women, where there is fear of an underlying demonic nature that might erupt.

Jo's desires continually revolve around fantasies of male power. Her reading and play-acting allow her to give voice to such wishes—a case of the former kind of reinforcing and therefore destabilizing nature of reading. Many of her desires would place her in a male role. She dreams of fighting in the Civil War with her father or rather to be a drummer (Alcott 6, 11). Jo also dreams of going to college like Laurie (Alcott 36), and she rejoices at the idea of having a "capital time" upon running away with Laurie (Alcott 256). Despite Jo's tomboyish behavior and characteristics in her early rebellious phase before Beth's death, she realizes the limits of her taking on the male role in her domestic sphere: "I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy" (Alcott 6). She knows that and "can only stay at home" and contribute to the war merely by knitting "like a poky old woman" (Alcott 6). When it comes to running away with Laurie, Jo knows that "'Prunes and prisms' are my doom, and I may as well make up my mind to it" (Alcott 256).⁵⁵

Although Jo calls old women “poky” and considers staying at home a “doom,” she does not look down on women for not wanting to be boys. Despite her boyish fantasies, she “remained in a community of women; she did not desert them or demean them, or look upon them as less worthy than herself.”⁵⁶ Instead, Jo sees her female entourage as her responsibility, and she “possess[es] status and power in the lives of other women.”⁵⁷

[through the] arrogation of masculine mannerisms, language and roles, Jo instinctively and correctly identifies the opportunities for independence, selfreliance, adventures and assertion [and power] as those conventionally reserved for men.⁵⁸

Jo’s penchant for independence, self-reliance and power, in large part reinforced and created by her reading and play-acting, is perceived as a threat to the domestic order.

Jo as a writer manages to threaten a disruption of the hierarchical patriarchal structure of her society. Jo is put at the top of the literary hierarchy when both Beth and Laurie compare her to Shakespeare (Alcott 10 and 183). Not only is she compared to a male writer, but to one of the highest stature. Jo indeed expects greatness of herself. When Meg complains of her poverty, Jo tells her to wait until she has made her fortune as a writer for then Meg “shall revel in carriages and ice cream and high-heeled slippers and posies and redheaded boys to dance with” (Alcott 45) by Jo’s graces. Jo sees herself as the provider for her sisters and even divinely as able to create future lovers.

In an ultimate male fantasy, Jo would like to keep her sisters to herself instead of letting them marry out of the family, for when they leave the family, they are not under her own “jurisdiction” anymore. She wishes that she were male so that she “could marry Meg herself” (Alcott 244) when the latter has fallen in love with John Brooke.

In direct consequence of her reading and writing, Jo takes on the role of head of household vacated by her absent father. Mr. March abdicates the role of male head of household, since he is weak and old: “too old to be drafted and not strong enough for a soldier” (Alcott 11). What is more, he is a failure in the world of men, whereas Jo is young and strong and very successful in providing for the family. It is Mr. March who has been remiss in the duty of provider by losing the money (Alcott 5) and the property of the family “in trying to help an unfortunate friend” (Alcott 45). In addition, his action of nurturing a friend “feminizes” him in this world of separate spheres.

Other men are also “feminized,” for instance Laurie who rather acquiesces in being called by that name than Dora, the feminine shortened version of his name Theodore. But Laurie is also a female name, and Laurie’s relationship with the March family makes him one of the girls. John Brooke is the only man who actually goes “out into the world” to provide for his family. But he also takes part in the female domestic sphere by sharing the duties of the nursery with his wife Meg

(Alcott 481). "Traditional gender boundaries are crossed frequently by 'feminized' men, if not by 'masculine' women."⁵⁹ The masculine woman is Jo. *Little Women* "tolerates deviations from normative gender identities unknown to earlier works in the domestic genre."⁶⁰ However, in the domestic and sentimental and even in Gothic fiction, men are often portrayed as "feminine" to show the relative power of the women.

In *Little Women*, Jo does acquire power through her "male" position in her domestic world. However, as some critics have pointed out, she has this power "only as long as the world is entirely female."⁶¹ That is, she loses it when her father comes back from the war and, according to one critic, supplants her.⁶² However, a close reading shows that this is not the case. As another critic points out, "Mr. March disappears permanently from the reader's ken; more present in his absence than in the flesh, Mr. March loses all influence and importance since he has been reclaimed from the public world."⁶³

Mr. March's presence and authority is felt more when he is at war than when he comes home. The war imbues him with "heroism" and authority. When he comes back, it is Jo, and not her father, who has taken over the role of head of household. Her dominance shows itself in that she is successful in her literary endeavors. Jo reads and writes, deriving insights from her reading material for her writing, and she publishes successfully. Her father, on the other hand, still has not published after trying for many years to do so, "having waited patiently thirty years for fruit of his own to ripen, and being in no haste to gather it, even now, when it was sweet and mellow" (Alcott 327).

As a result, Jo provides for her family, and this role of provider carries a form of power that she enjoys in a very "un-little womanly" fashion:

She did earn several [prize checks for her writing] that year, and began to feel herself a power in the house, for by the magic of a pen her [works] turned into comforts for them all. "The Duke's Daughter" paid the butcher's bill, "A Phantom Hand" put down a new carpet, and the "Curse of the Coventrys" proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns. (Alcott 326)

Jo is happy about this power and revels in her financial independence: "Jo enjoyed a taste of this satisfaction [which comes from successful work...] taking great comfort in the knowledge that she could supply her own wants and need ask no one for a penny" (Alcott 326). While Jo couches her success and power in the family in altruistic terms—"Dr. Jo" (Alcott 326) is doing her good deeds for the benefit of the others—she also feels satisfied to have gained finally the independence and power usually only accessible to men.

Jo's struggle for "maleness" points to the "complexities of female power and the struggle to maintain it in a male-dominated society."⁶⁴ The reading that informs her writing poses a threat to the patriarchal structure of the world she inhabits.

Another aspect of her reading and writing stands in even greater opposition to little womanhood: like Louisa May Alcott, Jo is a demon underneath the not-quite-perfect but expected angelic exterior of a little woman. When she begins to write sensation fiction in earnest, the narrator perceives the reading she does in preparation for writing as dangerous, deeming the outcome an “unwomanly” little woman (Alcott 422). Jo researches her stories in the “tragic world which underlies society” (Alcott 422), leaving her protected and innocent domestic sphere. Her reading gives her access to hitherto unknown worlds.

But Mr. Dashwood rejected any but thrilling tales, and as thrills could not be produced except by harrowing the souls of readers, history and romance, land and sea, science and art, police records and lunatic asylums had to be ransacked for the purpose...Eager to find material for stories, and bent on making them original in plot if not masterly in execution, she [Jo] searched newspapers for accidents, incidents, and crimes. (Alcott 422)

As the narrator tells us, Jo loses her “purity through acquiring knowledge”⁶⁵ because she “was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman’s character” (Alcott 422):

...she excited the suspicions of public librarians by asking for works on poisons; she studied faces in the street and characters, good, bad, and indifferent, all about her; she delved in the dust of ancient times for facts or fictions so old that they were as good as new, and introduced herself to folly, sin, and misery as well as her limited opportunities allowed. (Alcott 422)

Such insights into otherwise inaccessible worlds for a middle-class woman prove to be dangerous:

She was living in bad society and, imaginary though it was, its influence affected her, for she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food, and was fast brushing the innocent bloom from her nature by a premature acquaintance with the darker side of life. (Alcott 422)

A little woman just does not read such things, for she is bound to become impure and “unwomanly.”⁶⁶ Jo’s new knowledge is dangerous for two reasons. On the one hand, “knowledge is power of a real sort,”⁶⁷ and with this knowledge, Jo feeds her activities that lead her to independence and power in the family. At the same time, and worse, she begins to look at her own self more closely after studying other people: “She was beginning to feel rather than see this, for much describing of other people’s passions and feelings set her to studying and speculation about her own” (Alcott 422). Jo becomes “a dangerous figure”⁶⁸ because she discovers through her reading unacceptable feelings in her reading material and finds those same unacceptable passions in herself. Once again, the

reading of a character reinforces feelings, desires and wishes that have long remained more or less dormant.

Among these unacceptable passions inside of Jo, violence, anger, and passion are the most demonic. These three “unwomanly” emotions represent her demonic aspect. Her reading rouses this demon, and the narrator/author quickly manages to quell any demonic outbursts. Jo’s unacceptable feelings, however, cannot be quenched.

We encounter the violence in which Jo delights as early as the first chapter. Showing Amy how to act, she gives a “melodramatic scream which was truly thrilling” (Alcott 9). And in demonic fashion, Jo likes *Macbeth* (1606) not because it is a great play but because she would like to have a “trapdoor for Banquo” since she “always wanted to do the killing part.” In her mind, she already envisions herself doing the killing: “‘Is that a dagger that I see before me?’ muttered Jo, rolling her eyes and clutching at the air, as she had seen a famous tragedian do” (Alcott 10). Jo’s inclination to violence becomes evident in all of her reading, acting and writing. Upon reading *Pilgrim’s Progress*—one of the few sanctioned books considered beneficial for little women—Jo picks out the violent scenes to remember: “‘What fun it was, especially going by the lions, fighting Apollyon, and passing through the valley where the hobgoblins were!’” said Jo (Alcott 13). When playing rigmarole with Laurie and his English friends, Jo equally shows her penchant for dramatic violence. When it comes her turn to continue the story of the knight, her part is the most violent of them all:

“‘Thankee,’” said the knight politely as he took a pinch and sneezed seven times so violently that his head fell off. “Ha! Ha!” laughed the ghost, and having peeped through the key hole at the princesses spinning away for dear life, the evil spirit picked up her victim and put him in a large tin box, where there were eleven other knights packed together without their heads, like sardines, who all rose and began to—’ (Alcott 156)

Jo kills off the hero of the story they had all been spinning, inventing eleven other beheaded heroes.

Killing off her heroes, one of Jo’s techniques in much of her acting and writing, is an expression of her violence. The “Rival Painters”—her first story to be published, and one that the narrator later calls a “very mild romance for the Spread Eagle” as opposed to her “bad” sensation fiction—could not contain any less violence than a real sensation story: “the tale was romantic, somewhat pathetic, as most of the characters died in the end” (Alcott 187). As in sensation fiction, the violent end is typical. Upon reading sensation fiction, Jo does not discover much that is different from her own romance: “the usual labyrinth of love, mystery, and murder, for the story belonged to that class of light literature in which the passions have a holiday, and when the author’s invention fails, a grand catastrophe clears the stage of one half the dramatis personae, leaving the other half to exult over their downfall” (Alcott 323).

The theater constitutes Jo's greatest outlet for her violent feelings. "Acting... allows the expression of unacceptable emotions"⁶⁹ and the "Witch's Curse" is an example of an "explosive, violent, passionate self-expression."⁷⁰ Jo plays the violent villain Hugo:

After pacing to and fro in much agitation, he struck his forehead and burst out in a wild strain, singing of his hatred to Roderigo, his love for Zara, and his pleasing resolution to kill the one and win the other. The gruff tones of Hugo's voice, with an occasional shout when his feelings overcame him, were very impressive (Alcott 22–23).

Jo's feelings of violence equal her other unacceptable feeling: anger. A little woman has to learn to repress anger, because anger is demonic and "unwomanly." When Amy destroys Jo's book out of anger for having been left behind, Jo goes beyond performance in living out her feelings of violence and anger: "Jo's hot temper mastered her and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying in a passion of grief and anger: 'You wicked, wicked girl!...I'll never forgive you as long as I live'" (Alcott 92). Against her mother's recommendation, Jo does let the "sun go down upon...[her] anger" (Alcott 93), and the next day she fails to warn Amy of thin ice when they are ice skating because she took

...a bitter, unhappy sort of satisfaction in her sister's troubles. She had cherished her anger till it grew strong and took possession of her, as evil thoughts and feeling always do unless cast out at once (Alcott 94).

"Female anger is so unacceptable that there are no degrees to it, all anger leads to murder."⁷¹ Jo's anger almost leads to Amy's death when she falls through the ice. "The consequence for Jo is horror at herself which in turn results in contrition... [and] repression."⁷² Jo accurately describes her demonic, passionate nature: "It seems as if I could do anything when I'm in a passion. I get so savage, I could hurt anyone, and enjoy it. I'm afraid I shall do something dreadful someday" (Alcott 96).

In the narrator's eyes, Jo does do something dreadful and unwomanly (Alcott 422): she writes sensation stories. Jo's manner of writing exemplifies the "pairing of the tropes of writing and uncontrollable passion."⁷³ When Jo writes, she "fall[s] into a vortex" from which she does not emerge for quite a while. In this almost "erotic"⁷⁴ vortex, she receives pleasure and self-fulfillment. "Jo embodies a version of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 'madwoman in the attic'⁷⁵ attempting to empower and define herself by engaging in the forbidden [and passionate, demonic] act of writing."⁷⁶ Her creativity is like a subversive eruption in the quiet family life. Tellingly, the *Weekly Volcano* makes public her "volcanic creativity"⁷⁷ (Alcott 418).

Like her creator, Louisa May Alcott, Jo publishes thrilling stories in which the "passions have a holiday," and she can express her violent emotions—her anger as well as her wish for power:

her [Louisa May Alcott’s like Jo’s] gallery of femmes fatales form a suite of flesh-and-blood portraits. Her own anger at an unjust world she transformed into the anger of the heroines.... [T]he psychological insights of A.M. Barnard [Alcott’s pseudonym] disclose the darker side of the character of Louisa May Alcott.⁷⁸

Although Jo herself cannot really be called a *femme fatale* of Alcott’s thrillers, she represents an incarnation of Alcott’s own anger at the world. Not in vain did Bronson Alcott call his daughter a “devil.”

In *Little Women*, Jo finds to her surprise that she is not the only woman with demonic character traits. Her mother tells her: “I’ve been trying to cure it [my temper] for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it, and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so” (Alcott 97). The supposedly “real” “angel in the house”—Marmee—has demonic tendencies herself. She explains that her husband has been “helping” her to repress her anger, and her statement indicates that it is not very likely that she will ever not be angry. Whereas female anger has to be repressed, “John’s anger is male and must be attended to,”⁷⁹ as Marmee warns Meg of the frightening situation she might find herself in if she does not submit to John’s anger.

If we take Jo as the fictional Louisa and Marmee as the fictional Abigail May Alcott, we can understand Bronson Alcott’s journal entry about the “two devils... the mother fiend and the daughter.”⁸⁰ Mother and daughter, fictional and real, are both angry women. In *Little Women*, the mother has learned to repress her anger, that is, to hide her demonic aspect beneath an angelic exterior. Jo, however, still an apprentice little woman, has not yet succeeded in such masquerading.

Jo is a real threat to the ideal of the angel in the house. She is “improperly feminine”⁸¹—that is, a “demon or wild animal;” “a subversive threat to the family”—since she breaks up the traditional structure of the family by becoming the breadwinner and ousting the father. Moreover, the improperly feminine woman is also “threateningly sexual.”⁸² Jo’s writing is her sexual outlet, for she falls into a quasi-“erotic”⁸³ vortex when she writes. She abdicates, however, any real possibility of sexuality when she refuses to marry Laurie. In addition, in the discourse of the improper feminine, the demonic woman is “pervaded by feeling, knowing, and [she is] selfassertive.” Jo indeed is full of feelings: tears over her books, as well as anger and violent emotions. She becomes too knowledgeable through her research and remains self-assertive in the circle of her sisters. The demonic woman is also “desiring and actively pleasure-seeking, pursuing self-fulfillment and self-identity and [she is] independent.” Jo has big dreams and desires for fame and fortune. She is pleasure-seeking, she would rather evade chores, and she finds self-fulfillment, identity and independence through her reading and writing. Jo fits the description of the demonic woman.⁸⁴ Her reading, performing, and writing cause these demonic aspects to surface.

However, Jo the demonic woman does not really challenge the dominant structures of authority. “If Jo [were to] examine...the causes of her own feelings, her own anger, she [would]...be led to question the role of little women.”⁸⁵ It is this potential that makes the demonic aspect of her character so dangerous to the hierarchical patriarchal structure of her domestic world. However, Jo—like her mother—does not question her anger. Instead, it “manifests itself in her writing,” reading and acting. “By finding an outlet for her anger, Jo does not use that anger to question [those]...situations which cause it.”⁸⁶ Her reading, writing, and performing provide emotional excitement and the possibility of living out her anger and violent feelings. In a sense, they provide her with catharsis, which in turn restabilizes the foundation of the domestic structure that might have been harmed by her violent anger.

This restabilization, however, cannot sufficiently lessen the perceived threat of a demonic woman. Louisa May Alcott builds many controls into her story of Jo, the demonic woman who turns into a little woman. The author does not portray a “truly” demonic woman, since Jo does not resist the control exerted upon her and ultimately allows herself to be transformed into a little woman. Almost all the other characters in *Little Women*—the father, the mother, Meg, Beth, even Mr. Laurence, Aunt March, and ultimately Professor Bhaer—control and restabilize Jo.

Jo’s father, Mr. March, is one of the main authorities to control and neutralize Jo’s dangerous potential. Mr. March is portrayed as an “absent, passive, feminized father,” and yet he “ruthlessly diminishes his little women.”⁸⁷ His attitude and disciplinary strategy toward his daughters is expressed in a letter he writes from the war:

I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women. (Alcott 12)

This letter influences the daughters’ lives more thoroughly than if the absent father had been present to give a lecture about good behavior. It asserts patriarchal powers and explains how “this power works, literally naming the strategy of familial love that fosters inner self-discipline.”⁸⁸ Throughout the novel, the girls try to do their duty, fight their faults in order to conquer themselves and to become angels in the house—that is, little women.

To achieve this goal, the father encourages “good” reading. Representing the absent fathers encouragement for self-reform, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*—the “virtually sacred *urtext* of sentimental Christianity”⁸⁹—shapes the lives of the four daughters. It “helps the girls refigure the disorderly process of growing up as an orderly progression of moral development.”⁹⁰ As Meg clearly understands, “Bunyan is made to stand for advice from the father.”⁹¹ “It is only another name for trying to be good, and the story may help us, for though we do want to be good, it’s hard work and we forget, and don’t do our best” (Alcott 14).

Reading about self-reform, then, serves to initiate self-reform.⁹² In this instance, reading is also an influence on a personality that can create desirable character traits. In this manner, reading is restabilizing since the expected result is a good little woman. The absent father can control Jo's demonic tendencies by directing her to read "good" reading material that teaches self-discipline. In an attempt to internalize the values gleaned from "good" reading in order to control unconventional and unacceptable feelings and behavior, Mr. March makes Jo fight against her inner self.⁹³ *Pilgrim's Progress* therefore serves "as an explicit gloss on...[her] inner struggles."⁹⁴ By reading this "guidebook" that expresses her father's goals of creating a self-reformed and self-disciplined little woman, Jo attempts to repress all the violent unacceptable emotions like anger and selfishness fostered by her reading, writing, and performing.

Although Mr. March returns from the Civil War, he becomes less and less visible in the life of the family. He only becomes a player in the action twice more when he passes judgment on Jo's writing, that is, when he is directly trying to control the demonic aspects of her character. When Jo wins the \$ 100 prize for publishing a story, her father deals her a crushing blow by telling her on the height of her victory: "You can do better than this, Jo. Aim at the highest, and never mind the money" (Alcott 325). Thus, the father who fails to earn money for his family attempts to prevent Jo from replacing him as the breadwinner of the family by advising Jo to give up her wish for financial independence and the power that comes with it.

While the father's advice goes unheeded for a while, Jo's consciousness of what father would say—her conscience—finally contributes to her decision to stop writing sensation fiction, a decision that amounts to curbing her demonic characteristics and to writing domestic fiction instead. Only then does her father praise her for having found her own "style at last" (Alcott 525). Of course, writing domestic fiction makes her no longer threatening, and Jo is "more touched by her father's words than by any amount of praise from the world" (Alcott 525). The narrator tells us that Jo goes on writing her "little" stories (almost as a perfect little woman) taught by "love and sorrow" (Alcott 525). The love of the father imposes other reading on Jo, leading her to repress those elements which led her to writing sensation stories and lead her into the safe haven of domestic fiction.

While the father therefore plays an important role in repressing Jo's "demonic" aspects, the narrator transfers much of the customary paternal power to other sources like Jo's conscience and, most importantly, her mother. Marmee's "tone and language" are "eerily identical"⁹⁵ to those of her husband. The mother takes the role of guide and controller of the four girls, and, most importantly, of Jo. Marmee is not a "savior but...[the] primary if inadvertent enforcer of patriarchal values as well as their victim."⁹⁶

As a victim of patriarchal values, Marmee is just as much a little woman as the four girls are expected to be. She is just "an older, more experienced version of the girls."⁹⁷ Interestingly, as we have seen, she is most like Jo, with similar demonic anger beneath the surface of the "angel in the house." However, she has learned to

“fold [...her] lips” (Alcott 97) in repression of her anger or to leave the room before letting her anger come out. Her own “good” (Alcott 97) mother and her husband had combined to rein in her feelings: “He helped and comforted me, and showed me that I must try to practice all the virtues I would have my little girls possess, for I was their example.” Jo observes that she “used to see Father sometimes put his fingers on his lips and look at...[her mother] with a very kind but sober face, and . [she] always folded...[her] lips tight or went away” (Alcott 98). In that way, Mr. March made sure that the demonic anger in his wife could never erupt and that she would show his daughters the example of a perfect little woman. Marmee—the mother figure who seems so much in control of her matriarchal world—admits that she depends very much on her husband for child-rearing: “Then Father came to the rescue [of my child-rearing efforts], quietly managed everything, and made himself so helpful that I saw my mistake, and never have been able to get on without him since” (Alcott 473). It is therefore Marmee who represents the father’s wishes and power in his absence.

Some critics have pointed out that Marmee could not possibly be the “executive” of the father’s discipline and wishes because she gives the girls the “freedom to remain children, and for a woman the more precious freedom not to fall in love.”⁹⁸ However, she makes it very clear to her daughters that marriage should be their goal (Alcott 118). Her non-authoritarian style pursues “highly regulatory goals.”⁹⁹ In fact, she keeps her daughters in control, that is, she wants to keep them “dependent, undeveloped,...[and] diminutive”:¹⁰⁰ perfect little women according to her husband’s wishes.

In her child-rearing methods, Marmee becomes her husband’s voice. She manages much of the girls’ education with the help of the kind of reading materials that the father would have chosen for them. In this fashion, she encourages the girls to adopt Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and she gives them the “beautiful old story of the best life ever lived” (Alcott 16)—either the New Testament or even *Pilgrim’s Progress* itself.

Marmee literally “speaks” with the father’s voice. When the girls tell of their workday, Marmee draws moral lessons from their stories. The girls remark that she has given them “a sermon instead of a romance” (Alcott 55). It is Beth who most perfectly represents her father’s wishes in saying that she likes that kind of sermon, for “it’s the sort Father used to tell us” (Alcott 55). The mother’s choice of reading materials, as well as her storytelling, impresses upon the girls the values of little women.

Marmee’s education serves its purpose because Jo ends up internalizing the values her mother has taught her. When told that it is “wrong” to write sensation fiction, a conscience well trained by her mother and father ultimately leads her to abandon this type of writing:

I almost wish I hadn’t any conscience, it’s so inconvenient. If I didn’t care about doing right and didn’t feel uncomfortable when doing wrong, I should get on capitally. I can’t

help wishing sometimes that Father and Mother hadn’t been so particular about such things. (Alcott 430)

Marmee recognizes the moment in which Jo has finally repressed her demonic aspects and learned to be a little woman. It is only then that she encourages her to write a little. Before, she always “looked a little anxious when genius took to burning” (Alcott 324). Now, however, she can condone Jo’s writing, because she realizes that it is safe.¹⁰¹ In writing domestic fiction, Jo no longer channels violent, angry emotions into her writing.

Both Mr. March and Marmee try to curb Jo’s demonic aspects. They both influence her by giving her reading materials that they consider beneficial and by condemning Jo’s writing of sensation fiction. Reading therefore serves as a very powerful tool. It leads Jo to try to perform self-reform as in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and it teaches her to internalize the values of little womanhood: self-sacrifice, obedience, submission and domestic duty.

As extensions of the family circle, the two other main adult characters in *Little Women*—Aunt March and Mr. Laurence—reinforce the values that Mr. March and Marmee are trying to impart. Both Aunt March and Mr. Laurence try to guide Jo by giving her certain reading materials. When Jo goes to keep Aunt March company, she has to read to her aunt “Belsham’s *Essays* by the hour together,” (Alcott 47) something she does not enjoy at all. However, her aunt considers Belsham “worthy and instructive,” whereas she regards the books Jo prefers as “frivolous” (Alcott 51).

Mr. Laurence allows Jo access to his library. She pretends to like the reading material that he deems worthy for her. She pretends that she has come to ask for a “second dose of Boswell’s *Johnson*, as he had recommended that lively work” (Alcott 257). Ironically, it is not a very lively work and Jo considers it boring. Nevertheless, Mr. Laurence, like Aunt March, tries to influence Jo with good reading material.

Despite the power of all of these authority figures, however, it is Jo’s sister Beth who manages to curb Jo’s rebelliousness and tomboyish character and to make her into a little woman. While her mother and father play a large role in repressing her demonic aspects, Beth, with whom she has a special bond, manages to reform the tomboyish Jo.¹⁰²

Beth has always been a good little woman so that her burden or “bosom enemy” is almost negligible: she is the “angel in the house” (Alcott 289). “Beth...seizes her dying as a moment of worldly power, making her deathbed a pulpit.”¹⁰³ Literally with her last breath, she manages to transform Jo into a little woman by telling her: “You must take my place” (Alcott 504). Jo becomes Beth in that she is told to assume the role as “spinster sister as caretaker of her father’s house.”¹⁰⁴ As Beth tells her, “[you must] be everything to Father and Mother when I’m gone (Alcott 504).”

With these few words, Beth manages to quell Jo’s passion and independence: “if it’s hard work alone [to give yourself up and to only care for father and mother], remember that I don’t forget you, and that you’ll be happier in doing that than writ

ing splendid books or seeing all the world” (Alcott 504). She makes Jo give in to her parents’ pressure, and Jo

renounce[s] her old ambition, pledged herself to a new and better one [that is, to the ambition of being a perfect little woman], acknowledging the poverty of other desires [the desires of expressing herself in her reading and writing]. (Alcott 504)

Jo “defer[s] the desire for greatness and choosing the ‘small part,’ aim[s] at the moral goodness which in a future life might be recognized as greatness.”¹⁰⁵

“Alcott kills off [her] madwoman [in the garret], leaving only the angel in the house.”¹⁰⁶ Beth forces Jo to take on her own role¹⁰⁷ and to “assume a kind of death in life, to impersonate the dead Beth.”¹⁰⁸ Beth does not use literature in the strict sense of the word to control Jo. However, her deathbed sermon also functions as a text that Jo internalizes.

The other main player in Jo’s transformation from independent tomboy to little woman is Professor Bhaer, her future husband. Unlike Beth, Professor Bhaer does use literature and reading to provoke the change.

To many readers of *Little Women*, Professor Bhaer comes as a disappointment because he so thoroughly destroys the Jo of the early part of the novel. Simone de Beauvoir writes that “his intrusion upset” her.¹⁰⁹ Louisa May Alcott herself was not too fond of her creation, but she saw him as a necessity because she “wouldn’t marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone.”¹¹⁰ “Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman’s life.”¹¹¹ In Alcott’s opinion, “Jo should have remained a literary spinster.”¹¹² She even lets Jo acknowledge that “literary spinsterhood” is not too terrible for “old maids are very comfortable when they get used to it” (Alcott 503). But in deference to convention, Alcott lets Jo end her sentence with an open-ended “but—” (Alcott 530), indicating that being an old maid may not be enough for Jo. And indeed Jo finds a husband: the poor German professor Bhaer. Alcott justifies her choice:

[S]o many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, or somebody, that I didn’t dare to refuse and out of perversity went and made a funny match for her. I expect vials of wrath to be poured out upon my head, but rather enjoy the prospect.¹¹³

If Alcott does not neutralize Jo’s dangerous potential as independent woman who can disturb the patriarchal hierarchy, *Little Women* could not support the ideology of the little woman in its overt message. Thus, Jo must be “given a man who can control her.”¹¹⁴ Interestingly, it is Professor Bhaer who can achieve this control, and in a sense Jo betrays another part of herself when she agrees to marry him. As his name indicates, Professor Bhaer is a foreigner, thus an outsider to the society against which Jo rebels. Therefore, it is easier for her to accept him as an authority figure. In addition, he is a professor, a teacher, a natural figure of authority. When she

rejects Laurie, she denies sexual passion and romance, and when she gives up spinsterhood for the professor, she also gives up her independence.¹¹⁵ "Jo's rebellion is neutralized"¹¹⁶ and she comes safely to "rest...in the snug harbor of 'Kirche, Küche, und Kinder'"¹¹⁷—that is in the realm of church, kitchen, and children.

Professor Bhaer is the most father-like suitor that Jo could have chosen. First, Laurie is like her twin brother, and later he becomes "her boy" for whom she has rather maternal feelings. But "little women can only love up, not across and down; they must marry their fathers, not their brothers or sons."¹¹⁸ Therefore, Jo can only marry Professor Bhaer who immediately has paternal feelings for Jo when he meets her in New York:

He only remembered that she was young and poor, a girl far away from mother's love and father's care, and he was moved to help her with an impulse as quick and natural as that which would prompt him to put out his hand to save a baby from a puddle. (Alcott 428)

The ideology of the domestic sphere that Professor Bhaer upholds and represents "gave such sweeping powers to men and so closely circumscribed the arena of women's competence...[that the narrator ends up] structuring all male-female relations as essentially those between a father and his daughter:"¹¹⁹ Meg marries John Brooke who is a mentor figure, Marmee is constantly educated by her husband Mr. March, the younger Amy can "love up" when she marries Laurie whom she calls "my Lord" (Alcott 551).

As father figure, or "mentor-as-mate,"¹²⁰ Professor Bhaer worries about Jo's purity and her state of little womanhood. He "neutralizes Jo's rebellion"¹²¹ and quenches all her vivacity, independence and passions. He sets out to remedy Jo's demonic aspect by stopping her from writing. With that, he takes away her power¹²² and can build on the void with an education geared toward making Jo into his wife.

In order to steer Jo onto the right path, away from sensation fiction and toward domestic fiction and desires, Professor Bhaer uses literature and "good" reading, just like Jo's parents do. As a real "professor," he teaches Jo how to be "good," and as a means to do so reads "good" literature such as Schiller's *Wallenstein's Death* (1799) to her (Alcott 427). When Jo laughs about something funny in his appearance, Professor Bhaer makes their relationship and what he expects of it quite clear: "'Mees March, for what do you laugh in your masters face? Haf you no respect for me, that you go on so bad?'" (Alcott 427). As her "master," Professor Bhaer teaches Jo German. Due to the difficulty of this task, the professor invents a new "fun" method. As a father would have done to teach his child, he uses Hans Andersen's fairy tales. But the fairy tales are not "fun" but rather a "sugarcoating for Jo's German lessons."¹²³

Professor Bhaer goes even further in using books to make Jo see the error of writing sensation fiction. He gives her a "fine Shakespeare. It is one he values much, and...Jo has often admired it, set up in the place of honor with his German

Bible, Plato, Homer, and Milton” (Alcott 414). The professor also tells Jo how to read Shakespeare: “Read him well, and he will help you much, for the study of character in this book will help you to read it in the world and paint it with your pen” (Alcott 414). No longer can Jo relish in *Macbeth* for the killing, instead she now knows how to read Shakespeare correctly: “I never knew how much there was in Shakespeare before, but then I never had a Bhaer to explain it to me” (Alcott 414). Her fathermentor-soon-to-be-husband interprets “good” books for her so that she may understand the works and the world according to his view.

Indeed, Jo finally comes to see the world as the professor would wish her to see it. She puts on the “professor’s mental or moral spectacles” and discovers to her dismay “the faults of...[her] poor stories” (Alcott 430). The professor’s “education” has in fact been so successful that Jo “wrote no more sensational stories” (Alcott 431). She tries to write something at the other extreme but “produced a tale which might have been more properly called an essay or a sermon, so intensely moral was it” (Alcott 431). However, neither this attempt nor her attempt to write a child’s story for a religious fanatic is successful, and Jo gives up writing entirely. The professor has managed to tame her. When he finally marries her, the professor “steered her safely into calmer waters” (Alcott 584) of Plumfield, the boarding school Jo has inherited from her aunt, where the couple teach together. Jo has taken on the ultimate domestic role, that of mother for all the boys who come to the school. Professor Bhaer has successfully controlled the independent, passionate Jo, and Mr. March, Marmee and Beth have laid the foundations for his success.

Interestingly, the narrator seems to have ambivalent feelings about Jo’s wild nature. Especially in Part One, the narrator seems to be winking an eye at Jo’s disrespectful treatment of those books that are deemed to be “good” for her. For example, when Jo manages to get her Aunt March interested in the “frivolous” *Vicar of Wakefield* or when she uses the excuse of wanting another dose of Boswell’s *Johnson* to appease Mr. Laurence, the narrator appears to be on Jo’s side. However, in the second part and the closer we get to Jo’s marriage, the narrator becomes increasingly moralizing. The writing that in the beginning carried positive terms is now “trash” and “rubbish” (Alcott 323 and 326), and when Jo wishes that her parents were not so particular the narrator injects:

Ah, Jo, instead of wishing that, thank God that ‘Father and Mother were particular’ and pity from your heart those who have no such guardians to hedge them round with principle which may seem like prison walls to impatient youth but which will prove sure foundations to build character upon in womanhood. (Alcott 430)

The narrator has an ambivalent attitude toward Jo. Despite the narrator’s earlier support and approval of the tomboyish Jo, she ultimately comes to uphold the ideology of little womanhood.

Jo the tomboy, the girl who read, performed and wrote to express her rage at an unjust world and who threatened to disrupt the patriarchal structure of her domestic world disappears with the emergence of Jo, the “angel in the house” who replaces Beth and turns into the *Professorin* Bhaer, who becomes mother to many boys in the domestic sphere of her school Plumfield.

Is reading, then, an empowering activity for Jo? Is it a destabilizing force? In a sense, these questions have to be answered with yes. Jo is a heroic figure on a quest for autonomy and power. Her reading allows her to express her unacceptable emotions of anger, violence and passion, and in turn, it leads her to perform and to write. Her writing gives her a sense of self-fulfillment (something a little woman should find only in service to her family, and that is how Jo justifies her writing), financial independence and power in the family circle. So her quest is successful before it fails, and “Jo March remains the image par excellence of the bold and independent young woman”¹²⁴ who reads and writes for her own goals. As Susan K. Harris has pointed out, “readers tend to remember protagonists’ extended quests for autonomy rather than their sudden and fairly formulaic renunciations.”¹²⁵ *Little Women* has proven to the reader that a Jo March is possible.

Louisa May Alcott certainly loved her protagonist’s independence and was not happy about the outcome of her story:

I don’t like sequels, [the part in which Jo marries and the narrator becomes more and more moralizing] and don’t think No. 2 will be as popular as No. 1, but publishers are very perverse and won’t let authors have tier [sic] way, so my little women must grow up and be married in a stupid fashion.¹²⁶

But she does allow Jo to lose the empowerment gained by reading and writing and the independence she enjoyed in her own life as spinster.¹²⁷ In the first part of the novel, Alcott “questions traditional sources of authority”¹²⁸ through Jo’s “wildness.” Alcott lived vicariously through Jo, since she had already given up writing sensation fiction under the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard when she wrote *Little Women* “I think my natural ambition is for the lurid style. I indulge in gorgeous fancies and wish that I dared inscribe them upon my pages and set them before the public.”¹²⁹ “How should I dare to interfere with the proper grayness of old Concord?,”¹³⁰ asked the author who saw “sensation fiction as a low achievement.”¹³¹ But this is the same author who had produced sensation fiction with strong, passionate, and angry heroines.

Alcott’s attitude remained ambivalent about her writing as well as about the ideology she seemingly supported by killing off Jo:

Through the character of Jo March, Alcott performed literary penance for her greatest sins against the cult of domesticity: her flight to Washington [Jo does not run away to Washington with Laurie], her Gothic period [Jo renounces sensation fiction] her consuming literary ambition [Jo gives up her ambition for Beth and Professor Bhaer].¹³²

But in a letter to Maria Porter, Louisa May Alcott, the “children’s friend” and the dutiful child of Bronson Alcott, shows her demonic side and her anger at an unjust world. She took a firm stand against the domestic ideology that expects women to become the “angel in the house.”

Let us hear no more of ‘women’s sphere’ either from our wise (?) legislators... or from our clergymen in their pulpits. I am tired, year after year of hearing such twaddle about sturdy oaks and clinging vines.... Let woman find her own limitations and if, as is so confidently asserted, nature has defined her sphere, she will be guided accordingly, but in heaven’s name give her a chance: Let the professions be open to her, let fifty years of college education be hers, and then we shall see what we shall see. Then, and not until then, shall we be able to say what a woman can and what she cannot do and coming generations will know and be able to define more clearly what is a ‘woman’s sphere’ than these benighted men who now try to do it.¹⁵³

Jo has some of the spirit that speaks out of these lines but she gives up her fun reading and her writing, turning to domestic writing and “good” reading. Jo conforms to the expectations of the “cult of true womanhood”¹³⁴ and becomes the “angel in the house” as Louisa Alcott never did. Bronson Alcott did never get “quite divine enough” to vanquish his devil daughter.

Louisa May Alcott created in Jo an alter ego, but only the Jo of the beginning of *Little Women*. The later Jo cannot live in the surroundings Alcott invented for her, and therefore she kills her heroine off metaphorically transforming her into an “angel in the house.” In *Madame Bovary*, as the next chapter will show, Emma Bovary can never be an “angel in the house.” Since her reading and writing does not allow such an outcome, she is killed off not metaphorically but literally.

Chapter Seven

A Little Woman Gone Astray

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

To leave a woman the freedom to read books of her choosing... But that is to introduce a spark of fire in a holy bush, it is worse than that, it is to teach your wife to do without you, to live in an imaginary world, in a paradise.

Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage* (1829)¹

In *Madame Bovary* (1856), the story of a young girl—Emma—starts where Jo's story in *Little Women* ends: with her marriage. Emma marries a country medical officer, and like Jo she lives in the provinces, which affords her a limited field of vision and action.

Perhaps Emma's husband, Charles Bovary, should have read Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage*, in which he warns all husbands that they might lose their wives if they be allowed to read whatever they want. Emma reads to her heart's content before as well as after her marriage. Unlike Professor Bhaer, who controlled Jo's writing and reading in order to have a good "little woman" as wife, Charles thinks that he has married a perfect "little woman" or rather an angel. Since Emma is an angel in his mind that is, the incarnation of the proper wife and mother, he does not even think of controlling her reading. Balzac could have told him in advance that this is not a wise course of action:

Women who are more susceptible to excitement, should experience intoxicating ecstasy when reading dramas and novels. A woman creates an ideal existence next to which everything pales. She does not waste time in trying to live out this full life, to try to summon this magic within her. (Balzac 144)²

Indeed, Emma is a reader like Jo. Like the protagonist in *Little Women*, Emma dreams of escaping her life. But whereas Jo realizes that she cannot run away with Laurie, and that she has to stay at home to be a good "little woman," Emma never

gives up hope. She constantly thinks that somewhere else is a better place. Emma channels all her energies into getting away from her existence as a bourgeois country doctor's wife in provincial France.³

Emma's hope for escape from her marriage is not the first time she wishes to escape from a confining environment. She is educated in a convent in the town of Rouen. The convent “is an unnatural community composed of women only... bound to...repetitious forms of routine and discipline.”⁴ Like Jo, Emma lives among women who are in the final instance subject to male authority. But whereas Jo cherishes the female community and her mother who nurtures her and serves as a “moral and social guide,”⁵ Emma rebels against this female community. She does not have a mother who “guides” her. Instead, it is her father who spoils her and takes her to the convent in town. He considers her very clever, “in fact too clever for their station in life.”⁶ While Emma excels in the female community of the convent at first, she soon starts to rebel “against the stringencies of convent life and places herself at odds with the community”:⁷

The good nuns...noticed with great amazement that Miss Rouault seemed to escape their care. They had so garnished the duties, retreats, novenas, and sermons, so preached about the respect that one ought to give to the saints...that she behaved like a reined in horse: she stopped abruptly and the bit protruded from her teeth.... [S]he rebelled even more against the discipline, which was contrary to her nature. (Flaubert 73)⁸

Emma's rebellion against the rules of the convent reflects itself in the forbidden activity of reading, which proves pivotal in her character's development.⁹ The reading habit that she acquires in the convent as an act of rebellion against her education there serves her throughout her short life. Thus, she continues to read after her wedding.

What role does reading play in Emma's life? How does Flaubert treat reading and power in *Madame Bovary*? Is reading an empowering force that lets Emma's rebellious nature erupt? Does her reading allow Emma, like Jo, to escape the image of angel and perfect “little woman”? Does reading destabilize the gender relations in the society portrayed in *Madame Bovary* as it does in the society of *Little Women*? If reading is a “dangerous” activity since it comes from rebelliousness, who tries to control it, and how? Finally, what is Flaubert's own attitude toward his protagonist and the power of reading? These questions will be addressed in this chapter.

What does Emma read? Like Jo, Emma really does not read anything that is “entirely bad”¹⁰ according to the standards of nineteenth-century observers of reading material. However, those around both Jo and Emma perceive their reading material as dangerous. Carla Peterson is of the opinion that “much of Emma's reading is popular literature”¹¹ in which she resembles Alcott's Jo. Emma, like Jo, devours books (Flaubert 91). Eating and reading become almost synonymous¹² in Emma's life when “even to the dinner table she brought her books, turning the pages, while

Charles ate and talked to her” (Flaubert 91).¹³ Therefore, reading is for Emma as essential a part of life as for Jo.

At the convent in Rouen where Emma first receives an education, she experiences religious literature which parallels Jo’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the “story of the best life ever lived.”¹⁴ Soon, however, it is romantic literature that attracts Emma. Like Jo who reads the *Heir of Redclyffe* and *The Wide Wide World*, Emma reads romantic novels and Sir Walter Scott. Later she also tries some history and philosophy texts (Flaubert 159). However, just like Jo who is bored with Belsham and Boswell, Emma abandons “serious” literature very soon. Instead, she ends up searching for “stronger stuff”¹⁵ that parallels Jo’s sensation fiction. Thus, Emma’s reading repertoire is quite varied, and she resembles Jo in her preference for mystico-religious readings, romantic texts in all forms, and the “stronger stuff.”

Emma’s religious reading—the only sanctioned kind of reading—mainly takes place in the convent. Although she comes back to religious texts later during a crisis in her life, it is in the convent that her relationship with religious mysticism is formed. The students in the convent may hear a summary of a “holy legend”¹⁶ or the *Conferences of the Priest Frayssinous*¹⁷ during the week, and on the weekend Chateaubriand’s *Genius of Christianity* (1802) (Flaubert 70).¹⁸

Early on, Emma reads only that which interests her. Because she knows nature from her life on the farm, Chateaubriand’s lyric descriptions of nature do not move her. Rather, “she turned...towards fatality, she liked the ocean for its storms, and the greenery only when it was scattered among ruins” (Flaubert 70).¹⁹ Similarly, Emma looks at the “pious vignettes” in her books when she should have been listening to mass, and she loves the suffering and not the religious message she could read there: “she loved the sick lamb, the Sacred Heart pierced with sharp arrows, or the poor Jesus, falling while bearing his cross” (Flaubert 69).²⁰ While reading “sanctioned” literature in the convent, Emma already manages to draw that which pleases her from the texts.

What is more, she soon discovers other, “forbidden texts” that she has to read in secret. Because of its forbidden status, this reading becomes an “essentially private act...undertaken secretly and alone.”²¹ While Jo looks for the peacefulness of solitude for her reading, Emma has to read alone so as not to be discovered in an illicit act in the convent. She maintains this habit of solitary reading throughout her life. Whereas Jo keeps her reading and writing of sensation fiction a secret, Emma has to read clandestinely the Romantic novels, poetry, and keepsakes²² smuggled in by an old washerwoman or by her fellow students. In secrecy, Emma reads nothing but:

Love stories, lovers, ladies fainting in lonely pavilions after being pursued by suitors, postillions killed at each and every relay, horses ridden to death on every page, dark forests, troubles of the heart...gentlemen as brave as lions.... (Flaubert 71)²³

These themes prove to be central to Emma's imagination throughout her life. Her romantic novels are not too different from Jo's story, "The Rival Painters," or the sensation fiction she reads and writes. But whereas Jo enacts the male role in her plays and actually creates such stories in her writing fits, Emma only consumes passively at this point.

Her consumption increases when she discovers Sir Walter Scott's novels: "she was in love with historical things" (Flaubert 71).²⁴ The "white plumed knight on a black horse" (Flaubert 71)²⁵ of whom Emma dreams would have also pleased Jo immensely. However, Jo would have preferred acting the role of that knight rather than that of the "ladies of the manor with the long bodices" (Flaubert 71),²⁶ with whom Emma identifies and who merely wait all day long for the gentlemen.

Emma encounters further images of romantic women in the forbidden keepsakes of her fellow students.²⁷ She is fascinated with these images that depict "the railing of a balcony, a young man in a short coat holding a young girl dressed in white in his arms," "English ladies with blond ringlets," or women "dreaming on sofas, contemplating the moon, with an unconcealed note nearby," (Flaubert 72),²⁸ In addition, Emma finds images that represent the romantic interest in exoticism: "sultans with long pipes, hidden under arbors, in the arms of the *bayadères*" (Flaubert 72).²⁹ Not only are her readings forbidden, but these images are considered downright dangerous. An 1852 police report judges the engravings in the keepsakes as "one of the most dangerous ways to shake feelings of reserve and morality."³⁰ But to Emma, the texts and images are almost "sacred, revelatory of [the]...mysteries of existence."³¹

In her married life, Emma soon moves from her religious and early romantic reading to the "vicarious passions of George Sand, [Eugène Sue] and Balzac."³² Eugène Sue's stories are "racy adventure stories,"³³ and Sand provides "images of passion...of women finding physical satisfaction in adulterous relationships."³⁴ Thus, Emma moves from romances to adventures and depictions of adultery.

Reading remains a central activity in Emma Bovary's life. While we encounter the heroine reading many times, we almost never learn exactly what titles make up her reading materials. Instead, we come to understand how the reading affects her consciousness.

Most importantly, Emma reads for utilitarian purposes:³⁵ "She had to be able to derive some sort of personal benefit from things [from books]; and she rejected as useless anything that did not feed her heart directly" (Flaubert 70).³⁶ Everything Emma reads either serves to justify her,³⁷ or she interprets it to suit her own needs.³⁸ She loves the church for its flowers, the music for its romantic words and "literature for its passionate excitement" (Flaubert 73).³⁹ Indeed, "she read Balzac and George Sand, looking to them for imaginary satisfactions for her personal desires" (Flaubert 91).⁴⁰

But she does not only search for passionate excitement in the books she reads. Even more pragmatically, she searches for "material profit" in her reading.⁴¹ In Sue's novels, she studies descriptions of furnishings (Flaubert 91) to perfect her

own taste in interior decoration. Similarly, she reads the two magazines *La Corbeille and Sylphe des salons* (Flaubert 91). These readings teach her everything from the latest fashion in Paris to the opera program. Reading, then, also bestows knowledge on Emma as a reader. Like Jo, Emma's reading should therefore empower her. Knowing should equal having power.

But whereas Jo's knowledge of the "underworld" threatens the status quo by making her "improperly" feminine, the knowledge Emma seeks and finds is very properly feminine, albeit not of her class and sphere. In this sense, the knowledge she gleans from reading does not empower Emma at this early point in her marriage.

Nevertheless, her reading introduces Emma to a kind of knowledge which never reaches Jo through reading: sexuality. Both Emma and Jo read avidly during puberty. Whereas *Little Women* focuses entirely on puberty, only the time in the convent covers Emma's puberty. But while Jo seems to avoid erotic hints in her romances, Emma focuses on the "primary subject" of her novels: that of "erotic intrigue and adventure."⁴² Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1787) presents a key experience for Emma. As someone who loves romantic texts, Emma finds in *Paul et Virginie* plenty of material to dream about: "She had dreamed of the bamboo house, of Domingo the black man, of the dog Fidèle, but most of all of a good little brother's sweet friendship" (Flaubert 69) :⁴³

no wonder, Emma, like many of her contemporaries was drawn to the beauty of [...*Paul et Virginie*'s] descriptions of tropical landscapes; the spontaneity of the relationship between two adolescents, and the powerful depiction of the blossoming of their sexual personalities.⁴⁴

As a result, Emma's taste for the erotic comes more and more to the fore. "So obsessed has Emma become by her erotic texts that she starts to eroticize all the other kinds of literature that she reads, especially religious books."⁴⁵ She reads the religious books in the same way as she had her romantic novels, looking for emotions (Flaubert 70) and hints of eroticism.

When religious and romantic discourse gets jumbled in Emma's consciousness, this process creates an eroticized religion for her. She combines notions of romantic love with religious feelings: "The comparisons to fiancé, spouse, heavenly lover, and eternal marriage which recur during sermons stirred up unexpected tenderness from the bottom of her soul" (Flaubert 70).⁴⁶ Later, after Rodolphe has left her, Emma's prayers address to God "the same words she had previously murmured to her lover, in the heat of adultery" (Flaubert 248).⁴⁷ She considers the love of Jesus or God "another love among all others, with neither intermittence nor end, and which increased endlessly" (Flaubert 247).⁴⁸ In fact, it is Jésus on the cross who receives "the biggest kiss of love she had ever given" (Flaubert 357).⁴⁹ Reading, then, introduces Emma to sexuality, and provides her with a framework to interpret other texts and particularly to eroticize religion.

In addition, reading allows Emma to feel, release, and express emotions. She prefers those books "which one reads all in one sitting and of which one is afraid" (Flaubert 117).⁵⁰ Later, when she reads outrageous books she scares herself at times. Emma likes those readings that evoke intense emotions. Like Jo, she can live vicariously through emotions while reading.

For Emma it is "splendid to discover...[her] own sentiments expressed in books."⁵¹ When Léon talks of finding "in a book, a vague idea that one had, some obscure image which comes from afar, like an expression of one's innermost feelings" (Flaubert 117),⁵² she agrees that she has experienced the same while reading. With Emma, reading functions as an "outlet for pre-existing tendencies."⁵³ She searches for those emotions in the texts that are important to her, for example her sensuality/eroticism. Therefore, the books "respond to the needs of her character...and her reading is not the cause of her sentimentality but the logical extension of it."⁵⁴

Because Emma sees her emotions as mirrored in her readings, she adopts the language in those books to express her own inexpressible desires and longings. When she becomes Rodolphe's lover, she adopts the romantic language of her novels to speak with him and to express her love: "You are my king, my idol! You are good! You are handsome! You are strong!" (Flaubert 224).⁵⁵ Rodolphe, who has heard these same clichés from "dissolute or venal lips...only weakly believed in the naivety of [the words]" (Flaubert 224).⁵⁶

But Emma's emotions are real: she does love Rodolphe with more energy than he can possibly imagine. For once, the narrator comes out of hiding and sides with Emma, emphasizing that her emotions are genuine although Rodolphe cannot recognize their authenticity: "as if the fullness of the soul did not sometimes overflow in the emptiest metaphors" (Flaubert 224).⁵⁷ Emma cannot express her emotions other than in those forms and with the language that she has learned to use from the novels she has read.⁵⁸

Emma makes use of the language she has learned to associate with a particular emotion in her books, when she wants to express or evoke just such an emotion. For example, she attempts to enliven her already boring marriage: "she wanted to devote herself to love, according to the theories in which she believed. In the garden, under the moonlight, she recited all the passionate rhymes that she had learned by heart" (Flaubert 77).⁵⁹ However, Charles is just as unmoved by her language as Rodolphe. In a similar manner, she sings part of Lamartine's poem, *Le Lac* (1823), while on the water with Léon (Flaubert 292). And when she for once decides to pay some attention to her daughter Berthe, she uses poetic language and "declares that she loves children; they were her consolation, her joy, her madness, and she accompanied her caresses with lyric expansions, which had been borrowed from the chapters of *Notre Dame de Paris*" (Flaubert 140).⁶⁰ Again, Emma borrows, in this case from Victor Hugo's work, language to express emotions: however, these emotions are not authentic but rather borrowed just like the language.

Emma constantly seeks intensity in her emotions; in fact, she detests "tempered emotions like those present in nature" (Flaubert 117).⁶¹ The expression of her emo

tions becomes less credible when she actually uses her readings to heighten her emotional experience. For Emma does not have a naïve consciousness; instead, she knows how to control her emotions.⁶² When her mother dies, she prolongs her sadness with her reading:

She let herself slip thus into the world of Lamartine, listened to harps played on the lake, to the songs of the dying swan, the sound of falling leaves, the pure virgins climbing to heaven, and the voice of the Eternal one running through the valleys. (Flaubert 73)⁶³

Soon enough, she gets bored with this heightening of her emotions, and she finds that she has no more sadness left (Flaubert 73). Emma nurtures her emotions: she puts herself in certain situations to create them, and she then observes and enjoys the growth of those emotions.⁶⁴

Emma reads not only to feel emotions, but also to escape the reality of her environment in both time (when Emma imagines medieval scenes) and place. Place is Emma's favorite scapegoat to blame for everything: "ennui," that is boredom, frustration, unhappiness, and the emptiness of life. If only she could live somewhere else, preferably in Paris, she could be happy. Emma has the-grass-is-greener-on-the-other-side-syndrome and constantly dreams about traveling, because "everything that surrounded her, a boring countryside, middle-class imbeciles, and the mediocrity of her existence" (Flaubert 92)⁶⁵ is hateful to her. In her mind, her options are either dying or going to live in Paris (Flaubert 93). As one critic points out: "every time she reads, she negates the world."⁶⁶

To travel at least in her imagination, Emma buys herself a map of Paris and subscribes to magazines that describe life in the city: "Paris, more obscure than the ocean, shimmered in Emma's eyes in a scarlet haze" (Flaubert 91).⁶⁷ Traveling in imagination only becomes one of Emma's favorite pastimes. It is no wonder that she falls for Léon who so accurately describes her own imaginative process: "You walk without moving in a country you seem to see, and your thoughts, intertwining with fiction, play out details that take the shape of adventures" (Flaubert 117).⁶⁸ Reading, then, allows Emma to escape an environment she abhors and the "narrow confines of female domesticity."⁶⁹

Like Emma, Jo also dreams of escape, and she manages to do so at least imaginatively through her reading. Later, she even escapes from the "confines of female domesticity" at home to go to New York but only to substitute this confinement for that of domestic service and later for that of marriage. Jo never really thinks that escape is possible as her down-to-earth-answer to Laurie shows. She knows that not being a boy, she cannot run away with him.

Emma, however, not only wants to escape in her imagination; she wants to realize her fantasy. In addition to constantly dreaming about escape, she also tries to manipulate her environment so as to make escape possible. She extracts the promise of escape from Rodolphe. But given Rodolphe's brutal nature, would the place to

which she wants to escape not have been just as confining as that which she inhabits beside Charles?

When reading, Emma almost always dreams "between the lines" (Flaubert 93).⁷⁰ Emma thinks or dreams in "pictures"⁷¹ that resemble the images she contemplated in the keepsakes. Her dream of a honeymoon (Flaubert 74) "is a mental picture of driving in the mountains," her dream of an exciting existence in Paris (Flaubert 91) "is a group of neatly compartmentalized images of the different worlds of ambassadors, duchesses and artists in the capital," and her dream of running away with Rodolphe (Flaubert 228) "takes the form of an exotic travel fantasy."⁷²

Emma's dreams all have a similar form. They start with a general notion; for example, in her dream of running away with Rodolphe, Emma sees herself and her lover: "For eight days, four galloping horses had carried her away towards a new country, from where they would no longer return" (Flaubert 228).⁷³ Then her imagination "breaks it down into more specific concepts which are then further broken down into a multiplicity of concrete and specific images:"⁷⁴

Often, from a mountaintop, they suddenly glimpsed some splendid city, with domes, bridges, lemon forests and cathedrais of white marble whose pointed steeples housed stork nests. One walked along large pavestones, and strewn over the floor were bouquets of flowers offered by women dressed in red corsets. The bells rang; the mules neighed, amidst the strains of guitars and the gush of fountains whose flying vapor freshened piles of fruit, stacked in pyramids at the foot of pale statues, which smiled under the jets of water. (Flaubert 229)⁷⁵

From the more general details of the city—the domes, bridges and other architectural details—Emma sees in her imagination such little details as nests on the spires, the red blouses of the women, and the fruits that are displayed in the form of a pyramid. "Emma's imagination is thus analytical rather than synthetic; she seeks to cling to details rather than to contemplate the whole."⁷⁶ Emma "takes...[these details] literally,"⁷⁷ thereby giving her dreams a kind of reality.⁷⁸

Emma transfers the details emphasized in her dreams to her own life literally. Her reading and the dreams that spring from it serve as models for her life. Therefore, she tries to fill her life with as many of those details as she can, since they stand metonymically for the whole. That is, if she possesses some such detail, she possesses what she dreams of, i.e., life in Paris, a real honeymoon, a romantic life: "not to have the things is not to have the feelings they represent."⁷⁹ For example, when Emma dreams of running away with Rodolphe to travel, she asks M. Lheureux for a long coat (Flaubert 229). She could have left without such a detail, but then the flight would not have seemed right to Emma. Details such as this one ensure in her mind that the dream may come true. Similarly, it is the riding habit that determines her decision to go riding with Rodolphe (Flaubert 191).

Emma takes these details from her readings and uses them in real life to recreate the fictional model. In this case, Emma goes far beyond Jo's treatment of her reading. Whereas Jo also dreams and wishes that life were modeled after her fictions, she

realizes that this is not the case. Emma, however, takes her reading literally and almost forces her own life to follow the model of her reading as much as possible. She identifies with the heroines, she copies their actions, she justifies her own actions by citing to herself those about whom she has read, she plays roles she encounters in her reading, and she always measures her life according to the fictional model.

In identifying with her heroines, Emma “attempts to lead her life as if she were living a novel.”⁸⁰ Already in the convent, upon grieving for her mother, Emma “was internally satisfied to have reached, with the first try, that rare ideal of a pale existence, which mediocre hearts never reached” (Flaubert 73).⁸¹ Over and over, Emma identifies with the heroines of the novels that she reads. In their discussion about literature, Léon sums up Emma’s attitude toward the fictional characters: “It seems that it is you who is breathing in their dresses” (Flaubert 117).⁸²

Emma’s favorite heroine to emulate is the woman in love. After committing adultery with Rodolphe, Emma “authenticates”⁸³ her experience by exclaiming “I have a lover! A lover!” just like the women in her novels (Flaubert 196).⁸⁴ Her identification with the fictional heroines is so strong that she manages to “legitimize”⁸⁵ her behavior with Rodolphe: after all, she is like the heroines in the novels. She is not only like them, but in her mind the identification is complete, and she is one of dream of her youth, by seeing herself as one of this type of lovers which she had them: “She became herself truly a part of these imaginations, and achieved the always envied so” (Flaubert 196).⁸⁶ So “turning from literature to life Emma... find[s] for herself the same kind of erotic fulfillment experienced by the heroines in her novels.”⁸⁷

Emma does not stop at identifying just herself with characters from her novels. She reads most people as characters in novels. Rodolphe is the dashing romantic hero who wears for the seduction scene “long soft boots, telling himself that, without doubt she had never seen boots such as those before” (Flaubert 191).⁸⁸ But Emma has read about them and incorporated just such boots in her dream of the perfect honeymoon (Flaubert 74). Because of such details, Rodolphe is a character of her novels come to life.

Similarly, Léon is the image of the timid romantic hero, and when he does not quite fit the bill, Emma just makes him into that image: “She wanted him to dress all in black and to grow a pointed goatee in order for him to resemble the portraits of Louis XIII” (Flaubert 313).⁸⁹

To Emma, such details prove that her lovers are like the fictional lovers: they guarantee love in her mind. All these signs share the referent love and she uses them “as if they were romantic passion.... It is as if someone expected to possess the object ‘chair’ by pronouncing the word which designates it.”⁹⁰ Unfortunately, that is impossible, and so Emma does not come to possess love just because her lovers resemble fictional characters.

Nevertheless, Emma finally reaches her goal of becoming a fictional character to the greatest extent possible. Not only does she see herself as a romantic heroine

of her novels, but she also appears as such to others. For Léon for example, she is

the lover in all the novels, the heroine of all the dramas, the vague ‘she’ in all the volumes of poetry. He found the same warm color on her shoulder as in the *Concubine at the Bath*; she wore dresses with long bodices like the feudal ladies of the manor; she also resembled the *Pale Lady of Barcelona*, but above all she was Angel. (Flaubert 301)⁹¹

More importantly, Emma is more and more like the heroines in her novels because she copies their actions and actively plays the role of a heroine—unlike Jo, however, she does not do so on a stage only. Instead, Emma acts like the heroines in real life. After Rodolphe has left her, Emma throws herself into religious reading and starts acting out her devotion: “she was fiercely proud of her devotion. Emma compared herself to the great ladies of old times, of whose glory she had dreamed while contemplating the portrait of La Vallière” (Flaubert 248).⁹² To resemble these ladies even more, she became obsessed with charitable acts, sewing for the poor, feeding them, and even bringing home her daughter who had been with a wet-nurse (Flaubert 248).

Apart from offering Emma opportunities for identification and for enacting fantasies, her novels also provide a framework “by which she judges life”⁹³ or a “model for interpreting experience.”⁹⁴ The men around her “do not fit—how could they?—the imagined world of her desire as mediated by the books she reads.”⁹⁵ Charles neither knows how to swim nor how to use guns, and Rodolphe does not bring his pistols to one of their secret *rendez-vous* (Flaubert 203), which Emma considers tactless (Flaubert 203). She judges Léon even more harshly, observing that “he was incapable of heroism, weak, banal and softer than a woman, what is more, greedy and faint-hearted” (Flaubert 317).⁹⁶ None of the men, indeed no one at all, measures up to Emma’s expectations born from her reading. The ball at La Vaubyessard and maybe the Vicomte appear as if they were taken out of her novels—but they also disappoint her, since she is not invited again, and the Vicomte never comes to take her away from the life she hates.

While Emma reads so many novels, she does not write a novel to channel her feelings as Jo did. When she writes, she produces “only” letters.⁹⁷ Naomi Schor sees Emma’s letter-writing as an attempt to become an author, to create a novel by letter.⁹⁸ But Emma writes these letters again to copy the heroines in her novels: “a woman always has to write to her lover” (Flaubert 325).⁹⁹

Almost in preparation for having a lover, Emma buys writing utensils early on in her marriage but does not write because “she had no one to whom to write” (Flaubert 93).¹⁰⁰ Emma writes letters “in order to receive a response . . . to revive a waning passion . . . [and] to remystify . . . [her lover Léon] in writing.”¹⁰¹ When she finally comes to be Rodolphe’s lover, they write to each other every day (Flaubert 197). The regularity of the letters already prefigures the boredom that even this love affair will yield. In her second love affair, Emma writes love

letters full of “flowers, verses, of the moon and the stars, naïve resources of a weakened passion” (Flaubert 318).¹⁰² Finally, when she has stopped loving Léon, she continues to write to him because otherwise it would just not be an affair, and because she manages to manipulate her perception in her writing. She creates a dream lover based on Léon, and she becomes more satisfied and exhausted by her writing than by her real sexual exploits:

While writing, she saw another man, a phantom conjured by her fervent memories, created by her most beautiful readings and by her strongest desires. Eventually, this conjured image became so real that her heart pounded in excitement whenever she was in this state. She could not however, imagine him clearly, because he lost himself like a demi-god.... She felt him next to her and she dreamt that he would come and would wrap her in a kiss. Eventually, she would snap out of her reverie, more tired by the waves of excited imagination than by great debauchery. (Flaubert 326)¹⁰³

Like Jo, whose writing takes on, vortex-like, overtones of erotic fulfillment, Emma finds temporary fulfillment in her writing.

Emma’s letter-writing is based entirely on her reading, because the phantom man lives in “that bluish region where silk ladders hung from balconies in the scent of flowers, lit up by the moonlight” (Flaubert 326).¹⁰⁴ Rather than creating something original like Jo, Emma only recreates in writing the dreams that she needs to make the fictional world of her novels come true.

Emma follows a cyclical pattern in her reading.¹⁰⁵ She reads, starts dreaming, tries to turn the dream into a reality, and ends up disillusioned. In a variant of this cycle, she experiences a situation, a memory of her reading comes to her and heightens the emotion, but she invariably ends up disillusioned again. Sometimes, Emma wants to abandon reading after disillusionment: “I have read everything” (Flaubert 96).¹⁰⁶ But Emma cannot exist without her reading, and she returns again and again to her fictional experiences.

Emma’s reading, then, provides her with the blueprint of characters with which to identify as well as with material to dream, to copy, and to interpret life. Emma remains on a quest throughout her life: she searches for her identity, and she wants to fill the “emotional and intellectual void” that surrounds her.¹⁰⁷ The identity she creates for herself is based on her readings, and she fills that void with something just as empty: clichés taken from her novels. Despite this seemingly futile process of reading, other characters perceive her reading as a grave threat, and Emma indeed manages to destabilize not only her own life but also the gender relations in her society. Ultimately, as with Jo, reading allows the “improper feminine” in Emma to surge to the surface.

How does Emma’s reading pose a threat to her environment? To the “*bons bourgeois* of Yonville, reading is dangerous and evil.”¹⁰⁸ They perceive Emma as different, and she in fact sees herself as different from the people around her. Like

Jo, she exhibits a profound dissatisfaction with her normal life, and just like Alcott's protagonist, Emma finds escape from her normal life in her reading.

But whereas Jo is in a world full of women, Emma is alone in a world of men, a society in which the women remain "powerless [and] subordinate."¹⁰⁹ Madame Homais is nothing but the housewife and mother of her children, and Madame Bovary *mère* is the representative of virtuous housewifery, abused by her own husband and disillusioned about her own aspirations. Both Félicité and *Mère* Rollet are servants. "Women are secondary, functions of husband and family, held within motherhood and servitude."¹¹⁰

To a large extent, Emma's reading is designed to escape this fixation on the role of motherhood and servitude to the husband. Charles's first wife, the widow Héloïse, diagnosed the cause for Emma's dissatisfaction with the role accorded her as her education (Flaubert 50). An education is a dangerous thing since it can be the cause for desire: "Madame Homais behaves herself, is entirely her role, there is no gap between the situation and consciousness; the educated Madame Bovary does not, aspiration runs beyond situation."¹¹¹ In fact, her education—shallow as it might have been—inspires Emma to wish for things that are above the means of the petite bourgeoisie to which she belongs.

Indeed, Emma's reading brings her in contact with the aristocracy. She dreams of the life of duchesses: "she envied them their wild life, she imagined masked balls, and all the other delightful pleasures which she did not know about but was sure would be part of that life" (Flaubert 99).¹¹² An education for a woman was both beneficial and threatening to a husband. It would be "valued for its indication of social status."¹¹³ "Charles ended up being very pleased to possess such a wife" (Flaubert 75).¹¹⁴ On the other hand, an education would be "feared for the disorder it may bring, breeding ideas above station."¹¹⁵

As Balzac had already warned, allowing a woman to read amounts to putting the spark into a powder keg; it means teaching a woman to live without her husband and to live in an imaginary world:¹¹⁶ "the errant wife is stepping out of bounds when she secretly indulges in the reading of scandalous novels and in a daydreaming identification with the women who slink about the Never-Never land of wishfulfillment."¹¹⁷ Emma does indeed "step out of bounds," she "breaks out"¹¹⁸ of her role and position in society. Like Frederick Douglass's departure from his position in society, Emma poses a threat to the stability of her own society.

Emma breaks out into adultery, because her reading affords her concrete images of erotic fulfillment. Her sexual awareness and romance reading promise "happiness ... passion and intoxication" (Flaubert 68)¹¹⁹ to be obtained through real love. Because she does not encounter these feelings in her role as wife and mother, she seeks them in a love affair. Her first love for Léon is not consummated because he does not act and she poses as virtuous. However, when the unscrupulous Rodolphe determines that she would be worth an affair, she gives herself to him readily (Flaubert 195).

As a woman filled with the ideas of romantic texts, adultery had to be Emma's mode of choice to rebel against her position in society:

To the entire generation reared on Romanticism . . . adultery, because of its officially immoral and asocial status, acquired a symbolic value: it was a sign of unconventionality, rebellion, and authenticity . . . [A]dultery holds out the promise of beauty precisely because it is the forbidden happiness, the inaccessible dream, that which always eludes: the Ideal.¹²⁰

When Emma begins her affair with Rodolphe, she is sure that she will encounter passion and ecstasy (Flaubert 196). She who had admired Rodolphe because he is free at least (Flaubert 173) does not see that she will become dependent on another man (Flaubert 311) despite her rebellious defiance of her social position.

In her affair with Rodolphe, Emma copies her sister adulteresses from her novels. From the many images of women available in her reading, she selects and accepts for herself that of "women as passive and languorous . . . women [who] wait, languish, look out of windows, and are pursued."¹²¹ Emma fails to realize at first that "she moved from the oppressions of housewife into the tyrannies of adultery."¹²² In fact, she becomes addicted to Rodolphe, and "her desire for Rodolphe's love gobbles up her own sense of self-worth. She is nothing; he is all."¹²³ she prepares herself for him as a prostitute would (Flaubert 221) and tells him that she is at his service (Flaubert 224). Rodolphe is brutal enough to abuse Emma's devotion, and his tyranny manifests itself in his treatment of her: "He sneered at all modesty and treated her coldly. She became his submissive plaything. She developed a kind of idiotic attachment, full of admiration, for him" (Flaubert 224).¹²⁴

This submission in the face of oppression, however, belies other situations—like in the convent—in which Emma has rebelled. Sure enough, although she at first chooses for herself the passive image of her women heroines, she does not remain forever passive in her adulterous relationship.¹²⁵ Soon, the "eternal monotony of passion" (Flaubert 224) and the "platitude of marriage" (Flaubert 325)¹²⁶ that Emma encounters in adultery lead her to manipulate her lover. In Rodolphe's eyes, she becomes tyrannical, and she even manages to push him toward running away with her. Rodolphe recovers his normal aplomb very fast and disengages himself after this lapse of strength that Emma seized to almost get her own wishes.

Adultery in itself poses a threat to society because it leads to a destabilization of the family, one of society's most stable institutions. Emma abandons her role as wife and mother, even willing to run away and leaving both husband and child.¹²⁷ As Balzac has warned, Emma's reading is "dangerous" because it could cause the destruction of the domestic haven.

More importantly, however, Emma's reading leads to a destabilization of gender relations. Like Jo, Emma's reading allows her to question patriarchal structures of domination. Emma is keenly aware of the position of women in a patriarchal society: "a woman is constantly marginalized. Inert and at the same time flexible, she is

held back by her feminine softness and by the demands of the law...there is always something to hold her back" (Flaubert 123).¹²⁸ Like Jo, she knows that women are not free to do what they want but are bound to their husbands and their domestic duty. Women have an "ambiguous situation [in society, they are] both ideologically central...as [they represent] virtue, purity, integrity of family and society and socially marginal [as they are represented] as powerless, subordinate in a male world."¹²⁹ Emma acknowledges her powerless status as a wife and knows how to fulfill the role of "angel in the house." She attempts to conform to this ideal in the beginning of her marriage: "She spent her first days contemplating changes in her house" (Flaubert 66) and she "knew how to run her household. She sent bills to the patients for their visits...on Sundays when they had a guest for dinner, she managed to present a dainty dish" (Flaubert 75).¹³⁰ Her housekeeping at this early stage in her marriage is so successful that her husband receives much goodwill and respect for it (Flaubert 75) and in Yonville, everyone admires her thriftiness, her politeness, and her charity (Flaubert 141). In short, Emma—like Jo after Beth's death—appears as the perfect angel. Alcott's protagonist also knows how to be the angel in the house because she takes over Beth's role when she dies. Unlike Emma, however, Jo always enjoys avoiding her duties by escaping to her attic or the apple tree in order to read.

Emma's reading also literally leads to escape and the neglect of her household duties. Instead of spreading her angelic presence in the household working for the good of the family, "she loves to remain in her room, reading" (Flaubert 116).¹³¹ When Emma's expectations of marital bliss do not materialize, she withdraws more and more, reading. She begins to abandon her household entirely, and in addition she neglects her own angelic appearance: "she spent entire days without getting dressed, only wearing gray cotton underwear" (Flaubert 98).¹³² But whereas Jo learns from Marmee that she cannot neglect her duties, Emma only seemingly accepts her mother-in-law's lessons about household management (Flaubert 76). She continues her neglect, and in a sense her downfall comes from financial mismanagement. Emma spends too much without keeping proper accounts, something a good housewife—a real angel—would never have done.

Reading also keeps Emma from another area of the angels duty: her care for her child. "[I]n a common-place woman the birth of her child would have killed all romantic dreams and aspirations, would, at any rate, have regulated and directed them into normal channels."¹³³ But Emma, who would have liked a son, faints when she hears that she has given birth to a girl (Flaubert 123). Her subsequent treatment of Berthe most clearly demonstrates her disappointment. The fact that a wet-nurse cares for the little girl is common practice, but in an unusual twist, Emma lacks tenderness for her daughter. When the little girl spits up on her collar, she feels embarrassed in front of Léon, and she immediately wants to get rid of Berthe (Flaubert 126). Moreover, when her daughter bothers her by demanding attention while Emma is lost in her dreams, she pushes and hurts the girl (Flaubert 149). Emma's disgust and unmotherly feelings are summed up in her thoughts about the

little girl after she has hurt her: “It is strange, thought Emma, how ugly this child is” (Flaubert 150).¹³⁴

Only briefly, when Emma copies the demeanor of the great ladies of her readings, does she behave positively toward Berthe. “She wanted to teach her how to read; Berthe could cry all she wanted, Emma did not get irritated any more” (Flaubert 248).¹³⁵ But this remains her only attempt at fulfilling her role as a mother whose duty consisted of teaching her children. She soon gives up the pose of these great ladies and goes back to her old ways. Emma’s neglect of her duty as a mother also shows itself in the fact that Berthe has not even learned to read and cries when her father tries to teach her (Flaubert 323).

Madame Bovary therefore depicts reading as a “dangerous” activity, since it leads Emma to neglect her duties. In addition, her reading gives her a venue for selfishness—a characteristic an angel should not have. While Jo shares this character trait with Emma, the authority figures in her life constantly teach her to combat it, and in the end she learns to live for others: first Beth, then her parents, and finally Professor Bhaer. Emma, on the other hand, never learns to be a self-sacrificing little woman: she remains interested only in herself. Her reading is a “process of self-discovery, [a] vehicle...for her journeys toward herself.”¹³⁶ Emma reads in a selfish fashion: she always needs to personally gain something from her reading (Flaubert 70). Therefore, she interprets her reading according to her own wishes. She is mainly interested in images of women: she reads about the great ladies (Flaubert 248), the English ladies (Flaubert 72), the duchesses (Flaubert 91), the many adulterous women (Flaubert 196), or well-known women (Flaubert 71). She sees in each one of these images a mirror of herself, and a model of comportment. Her reading almost amounts to “narcissistic indulgence”¹³⁷ and “ego-fulfillment.”¹³⁸

Her reading both causes and reinforces Emma’s selfishness. When she copies the charitable action of the great ladies she wishes to imitate, “one could no longer distinguish between egotism and charity” (Flaubert 249).¹³⁹ And when Emma at times does play the part of the angel of the house, she does so because she cannot stand the fact that ugliness might reflect badly on herself:

Sometimes Emma tucked the red edge of his sweater into his vest, adjusted his tie, or threw away a pair of faded gloves he was about to put on; and this was not as he thought done for his sake but rather for hers; she did it out of egotism. (Flaubert 95)¹⁴⁰

Self-indulgent reading only reinforces Emma’s inherent selfishness and egotism. Since she should wish to serve others and not to seek pleasure for herself in her reading according to nineteenth-century ideology, her reading helps destabilize the ideal of the angel in the house. Whereas Jo’s reading also emphasizes her selfishness, she does not resort to hypocrisy and deceit through acting.

Emma’s reading, however, poses a further threat to the image of the angel because it provides her with both means and inspiration for hypocrisy and deceit as well as

play-acting. She learns to dissemble: she expertly plays the role of the virtuous wife while she inwardly longs for Léon (Flaubert 140). After Rodolphe has left her, the appearance of a charitable lady masks her quite egotistical and corrupt nature (Flaubert 248). As early as during her time in the convent, she starts to lie for the prolongation of her pleasure during confession: "she invented small sins in order to remain there on her knees in the shadows longer" (Flaubert 70).¹⁴¹ Later, her lying becomes more and more prominent: "her existence was nothing but an assembly of lies, in which she wrapped her love as if with veils in order to hide it" (Flaubert 307).¹⁴² Lying as a creation of a fantasy becomes "a need, a mania, a pleasure, to the point that if she said that she had walked on the right side of the road yesterday, one had to believe that she had walked on the left side instead" (Flaubert 307).¹⁴³ Play-acting, hypocrisy, and deceit constitute most "un-angelic" behavior and heighten the destabilization evoked by Emma's reading.

Emma's conscious disregard for convention emphasizes how threatening she must seem to the bourgeois of Yonville. Like Jo, who wears a dress with a burned spot, and who would rather speak her mind than pander to Aunt March's ideas of decorum, Emma increasingly behaves as she pleases. Although she is "utterly conventional"¹⁴⁴ in the sense that she is incapable of understanding or believing in anything that is not expressed in conventional forms (Flaubert 77), she is also "insistently unconventional"¹⁴⁵ in her behavior.

Emma knows perfectly well what conventions she should follow when she tries to stop Rodolphe's advances by telling him that they should consider the opinions and moral standards of those around them (Flaubert 178). But Emma feels contempt for the "normative role"¹⁴⁶ ascribed to a middle-class woman. Very soon, she breaks rules of behavior. Even before she launches into her adulterous adventures, she takes a walk with Léon when she must have known that everyone in Yonville agreed that "Mme Bovary was compromising herself" (Flaubert 125).¹⁴⁷

Emma continues to break the conventional code—while in a sense engaging in very conventional love affairs—and the town is scandalized when she dares to go for a walk with her lover Rodolphe. Emma openly shows her adultery with Rodolphe as well as with Léon, walking publicly with her lovers without fear of compromising herself (Flaubert 311). With this flaunting of her love affairs, Emma "asserts her liberation from tradition and convention, particularly in the area of sexuality."¹⁴⁸

By far the most striking aberration from the conventional path for a bourgeois woman, however, is Emma's assumption of male characteristics and male behavior. She destabilizes the patriarchal structure of her society by disrupting established gender relations.¹⁴⁹ As we have seen, both Emma's and Jo's reading leads to such a disruption. But whereas Jo is a tomboy in adolescence who openly wishes she were a boy, Emma does not develop her "masculinity" until her marriage and especially in her affairs.

Like Jo's reading, Emma's consumption of literature reinforces her "masculinity." However, the process is quite different from Jo's reading. When Jo reads, she finds male role models that provide her with the wish to be powerful, and she finally

achieves the position of head of household when she makes money with her writing. Emma, on the other hand, finds predominantly female role models in her reading and imitates them. But whereas she at first imitates the models of passive women of her reading, she comes more and more to aspire to the images of more active heroines, such as Jeanne D'Arc, Héloïse, and Agnès Sorel for example (Flaubert 71). "Although Emma fails to achieve the stature of a...Joan of Arc she eventually displays a degree of activity and energy extraordinary for a woman in her time."¹⁵⁰ With Emma, the images provided by her reading do not lead directly to her assuming the male roles and supposed male characteristics of "activity and energy." But her reading does allow her to dream, and it shows her the existence of a gap between her dreams and reality. Because she as a woman does not have the power to bridge this gap, that is, to make her dreams come true, she tries to assume the one role that allows her to be most powerful, i.e., that most allows her to wield the power to change her world.

In the nineteenth-century bourgeois environment, Emma does not have a chance as a woman—who can, like Mme Homais, only be "the best wife of the Normandy"(Flaubert 129)¹⁵¹—but never an active member of society. Emma's reading and her dreams lead her to destabilize the gender relations of her society because the desires incited and expressed by reading lead her to assume an increasingly aggressive and supposedly "male" role in her environment.

Emma adopts the male role by outwardly assuming male clothing and accessories. Like Jo, who cuts her hair and looks like a boy, Emma styles her hair like a man (Flaubert 159). Likewise, while Jo wears the man's hat Laurie has given her, Mme Bovary wears a man's hat (Flaubert 193). Not only does Emma have a *lorignon* attached to her dress (Flaubert 49) like a man, but she also wears a waistcoat, something only men would do (Flaubert 225). For the people of Yonville, such comportment only shows Emma's lack of convention, and they no longer doubt that she is an adulteress.

Nevertheless, when Emma wants to fulfill her own dreams of the heroines in her books or when she just wants to manipulate her environment, she at times does use female dress and the "frills" Jo so abhors. For instance, she orders a blue cashmere dress (Flaubert 159) to be like one of the women in her novels. Emma knows how to show and use her female dresses for her own benefit.

The similarities between Jo and Emma go further than the wearing of male accouterments and dress. Neither Jo nor Emma accepts the feminine sensitivities they supposedly share due to their sex. Jo runs and climbs trees even as a sixteen-year-old, and Emma does not faint, as a lady would have done, at the sight of the blood that made both the patient and Homais's apprentice Justin (who is assisting Charles) lose consciousness (Flaubert 162). Instead, she can coolly remove the basin and bring smelling salts for Justin.

Nevertheless, Emma is different from Jo in that she sometimes feigns female sensitivities when such a course of action appears most convenient for her. When she manifests her boredom with Tostes, she becomes sick, which prompts Charles

to relocate to Yonville in order to grant her this wish for change. Similarly, when Léon leaves Yonville, she starts fainting again (Flaubert 159).

Only her mother-in-law, who suggests that some manual work would make her more hardy (Flaubert 160), expresses suspicion about Emma’s show of feminine suffering. In fact, housework at the time was considered a “cure for that mysterious female ailment, hysteria,”¹⁵² and symptoms that afflict Emma indicate a case of hysteria. Upon learning of Rodolphe’s desertion—an event that immensely upsets Emma—she “cried out and stiffly fell to the ground, . . . her whole body was moving convulsively” (Flaubert 240).¹⁵³ “Hysteria . . . [was] one way in which conventional women could express—in most cases unconsciously—dissatisfaction with one or several aspects of their lives.”¹⁵⁴ While hysteria was not thought to be a male affliction (it supposedly originated from the female organs) a hysteric woman “did not function as women were expected to function.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, Emma abandons the role of angel when she has hysterical attacks, and in these cases she uses something considered very feminine for her own purposes.

While Emma, unlike Jo, does not want to be a man (for being a man would rob her of her female powers of manipulation) she does want to possess freedom—the “real” power she perceives as invested in men. Both Emma and Jo long for this male characteristic that seems to be inaccessible for women: freedom. Emma’s “tragedy . . . is that she is not free.”¹⁵⁶ At the very least, she would have liked to bear a son rather than a daughter in order to live vicariously through him:

She wanted a son; he would be strong and dark, she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like a hope for revenge for all her past frustrations. A man at least is free. (Flaubert 122)¹⁵⁷

In a sense, then, Emma is not so different from her mother-in-law who “transferred all her shattered ambitions on this child [Charles]. She dreamt of high positions, and already saw him grown-up, handsome, witty and established” (Flaubert 39).¹⁵⁸ But Emma differs from Madame Bovary *mère* in that she does not give birth to a son. Emma “believes that the birth of a daughter will simply lead to a sterile repetition of the conventional patterns of restriction that patriarchal society has imposed on women.”¹⁵⁹ And Charles’s dream for Berthe proves her right: he sees Berthe growing up, looking like her mother; “she would embroider slippers; she would take care of the household . . . they would find some nice young man with a solid income for her” (Flaubert 228).¹⁶⁰ Emma is right to faint at the notice that she has borne a girl, for a girl indeed is bound to repeat Emma’s life with all the restrictions from which Emma wants to escape.

But even if Emma had borne a son, she would have been too rebellious to live vicariously through him. She longs for the activity and power that men in her view possess. Although Baudelaire’s misogynist attitude has to be taken into account in his interpretation of Emma, it is interesting that he cites her “excessive taste for

seduction, for domination”¹⁶¹ as one of the supposedly male characteristics of the heroine of *Madame Bovary*.

Indeed, Emma increasingly abandons the passive role of a woman. She rejects her inferior role and assumes “male functions.”¹⁶² One of these male functions is the handling of money. Like Jo, Emma becomes financially independent. She does not achieve this goal through her writing, but rather through deceit and play-acting. She obtains a *procuration* (power of attorney) from Charles that allows her to oversee all the family’s financial affairs. Even before that, it is she who reminds patients to pay, and at times she keeps that money.

More importantly, Emma assumes an aggressive (supposedly male) stance in sexual matters. Whereas Jo never comes close to sexuality except in her reading, Emma lives out the fantasies that her reading has created. In the beginning, she denigrates herself in front of Rodolphe and thus accepts his superiority. But soon, she becomes tyrannical. In her affair with Léon, Emma becomes more and more aggressive: in fact, Léon soon does whatever Emma wishes. “He did not argue with her ideas; he accepted all her tastes; he became her mistress rather than she his” (Flaubert 313).¹⁶³

Emma seems to have learned from Rodolphe how to be the superior brutal lover: “with docility and terror, [Léon] plays the pathetic games of an extravagant brutal sexuality.”¹⁶⁴ But precisely because Léon accepts this inferior position and the role reversal so easily, Emma feels cheated in the end. She cannot respect Léon as she would like to adore a lover, and she therefore has to return to her reading and writing to invent a phantom lover whose stature is much larger than that of Léon. In a sense, her “identification with the male mentality is complete,”¹⁶⁵ since she looks down on Léon for being feminine.

It is this aspect of her assumption of a male role that makes Emma fall short of being a feminist precursor who might have successfully overturned some of the patriarchal structures. Although she seems to have enough energy and will to do so, she does not really conceive of a different role for women. Rather, she comes to assume the male role, in turn degrading the feminine. Whereas Jo never puts down her sisters and mother while she takes on male responsibilities, Emma despises Léon for being weaker than a woman (Flaubert 317). Thus, she does not invent a viable alternative to the female position of inferiority.

Both Jo and Emma, then, accede to positions of male power: Jo through her writing and by becoming the head of the household, and Emma, first in the financial arena by deceit, and later in the sexual arena by aggressive behavior. Hence, both of these protagonists cause a destabilization of gender relations. They eschew their duties and read instead; their reading fosters their selfishness and unwomanly characteristics, so that they assume male roles.

What is more important, Emma, like Jo, threatens the society in which she lives because the improper feminine or demonic aspect erupts more and more in her. Even more so than Jo, Emma represents all that which was perceived as improperly feminine or demonic in a woman: like Jo, she is “a subversive threat to the family.”

Both women are "pervaded by feeling," "knowing," "self-assertive," "desiring and actively pleasure-seeking," "pursuing self- fulfillment and self-identity," and become financially "independent" from both husband or family for a while.¹⁶⁶ Emma, however, also fulfills the other two categories of the demonic woman: she is "threateningly sexual" and almost "a whore."¹⁶⁷ Although she does not prostitute herself in the end, she comes very close to doing so with Guillaumin when she asks him for the money to prevent the seizure of her belongings.

Demonism is connected to such emotions as violence, anger and passion. Whereas a proper "little" woman should repress such emotions, and, hence, any demonic tendencies, women such as Jo and Emma live through them. But while Marmee teaches Jo to repress her unacceptable feelings, Emma only rarely curbs her violence, anger, and passion. Reading helps express these emotions in the cases of both women. Jo often releases her feeling in her reading, and Emma prefers those books that scare her, that is, that provoke violent emotions. Reading becomes a good outlet in a society that forbids women to express violence, anger and passion openly. However, if one reads too much, one embarks on "studying and speculation" about one's own emotions.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, violence, anger, and passion play an increasing role in Emma's life.

Emma displays violence toward her child and her husband. When Berthe wants to come closer to her mother, Emma becomes irritated, shoos her away with her hand, and finally knocks her over with her elbow, causing injury to Berthe (Flaubert 149). In another instance, Emma directs her violence at Charles. In her disappointment and anger over his failure at the operating table, she is so disgusted by his request to be kissed that she slams the door so hard on her way out of the room that the barometer falls to the ground and breaks (Flaubert 219). When Charles addresses her about some of the mismanagement of the household, "she responds in a brutal manner" (Flaubert 323).¹⁶⁹ Emma's character is full of brutality. When she begins to love Léon, she "brutally undresses herself" (Flaubert 318).¹⁷⁰ Emma's "rage of sexual frenzy"¹⁷¹ carries overtones of brutality. Her violent emotions become most obvious in her wish to punish all men for the way they treat her: "She would have loved to beat the men, to spit in their faces, to crush them all" (Flaubert 338).¹⁷²

Emma's violence is linked to hate and anger. Like Jo, she feels these "improper" emotions. Unlike Jo, however, she does not suppress them very often. In fact, at times she turns red in her anger (Flaubert 219) or speaks with "a voice that trembles with rage" (Flaubert 95).¹⁷³ Instances in which Emma rants and raves against one of Charles's colleagues or against Félicité occur quite often (Flaubert 95).

Emma's hatred of her environment and Charles in particular constitutes an important source of her anger: "he alone was the recipient of her complex hatred which was born from her frustrations" (Flaubert 142).¹⁷⁴ In fact, Emma is almost always full of hatred (Flaubert 141). It seems that it is her hatred that keeps her going even in desperate moments: she is outraged when M. Guillaumin offers to buy her favors, and she walks away "pale, trembling, outraged looking with tearful

eyes at the empty horizon, almost finding pleasure in the hatred that suffocated her” (Flaubert 338).¹⁷⁵

Emma’s anger and hate let her dream of vengeance. First, she hopes for a son because through him she could find vicarious freedom and therefore revenge (Flaubert 122). Emma even wishes that Charles beat her. Then she would be able to hate him even more and she might be able to take revenge (Flaubert 142). When Emma begins her adulterous affair with Rodolphe, she finally seems to have found “the satisfaction of vengeance” (Flaubert 196).¹⁷⁶ It is Charles, however, who bears the force of her vengeance, for “her revenge against the situation is to undermine his way of life,”¹⁷⁷ even if her corruption of Charles only takes place from the grave. He succumbs to romantic notions, and he suddenly behaves as one of her novelistic heroes would have (Flaubert part III, chapter XI).

Emma’s reading only reinforces her violent emotions and her sexual passion. During her affairs, she starts to read “extravagant books” (Flaubert 324).¹⁷⁸ These are exactly the kind of books that most please Emma, since they evoke violent emotions: “Often terror gripped her, she cried out and Charles came running” (Flaubert 324).¹⁷⁹ Emma’s extravagance in reading parallels the extremes of her passion: “Something extreme radiated from the cold sweat on her forehead, from her stammering lips, from her dilated pupils and her embrace” (Flaubert 318).¹⁸⁰

Emma’s reading and her behavior mark her as an “improperly feminine” demon, and her behavior takes on almost satanic overtones.¹⁸¹ When she tears off her clothes during one of her love trysts, “she tore off her corset’s fine lace, which hissed around her legs like a gliding snake” (Flaubert 318).¹⁸² The evocation of the snake imparts some of the satanic to Emma herself. When Emma expects Léon to steal money from his office for her, she takes on even more aspects of the satanic: “a devilish boldness showed in her inflamed pupils, and her eyelids closed lasciviously and encouragingly” (Flaubert 332).¹⁸³

Emma is not an angel, but rather an incarnation of the “improper feminine” of the “demon.” It is her “reading habit...[that is] the principle of social disequilibrium.”¹⁸⁴ She presents a threat to the patriarchal structure of society, and particularly to the domestic sphere. Emma pollutes the domestic sphere: she does not do her duty of “angel in the house;” she behaves selfishly; and she seizes some of the power normally granted only to men. With her affairs, she breaks out of the restriction of the role of wife and mother. To sum up, as Paul Janet pointed out in 1855, “disorder in the family would mean disorder in society at large.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, Emma is perceived as an even greater threat than Jo.

Emma’s last act is diametrically opposed to Jo’s but in a sense very similar. Jo marries Professor Bhaer and therefore gives up her original self to become a good wife—the old Jo dies. While Emma also dies, her death is the ultimate act of aggression. She ends her life by choice¹⁸⁶ and thereby asserts her will. Her death is “peculiarly hers and not imitated from any book; it is unique in the annals of Yonville; it is accomplished despite men.”¹⁸⁷ Once before, she has considered suicide after Rodolphe has abandoned her. She is aware that nothing can stop her and that she is

free (Flaubert 238). So for Emma, suicide is escape and assertion of the freedom for which she so longs: for Emma, her death is a “paradoxical triumph.”¹⁸⁸

By the end, Emma manages to destroy the domestic circle entirely. Corrupted by her lifestyle, Charles dies shortly afterwards during a fight with his own mother, and the orphan Berthe is sent to live with a relative under whose care she ends up in a mill (Flaubert part III, chapter XI).

However, a number of different factors restabilize Emma’s threatening and destructive behavior. First, the bourgeois try to restabilize her by controlling her reading. Secondly, the act of suicide not only destroys the family but also herself—as a result, she does not have the possibility to threaten anymore. Lastly, Emma’s dreams are made up of conventions. Because they are never original, her reading restabilizes her at the same time that it allows her to rebel and threaten the established order.

Of all the people around Emma, it is her mother-in-law who most strongly perceives her reading as dangerous. Whereas in Jo’s case her mother and by extension her father oversaw her reading, it is Charles’s mother who believes the librarian to be someone who poisons others and advises Charles to stop his wife’s reading habits:

Oh! She is busy! With what? She reads these novels, bad books, works that are against religion and in which they make fun of priests with speeches taken from Voltaire. But all that goes quite far, my poor child, and someone who does not have religion will always turn out badly. (Flaubert 160)¹⁸⁹

Although it is not really the anti-religious slant of Emma’s reading that poses a threat, Madame Bovary *mère* has discovered the source of Emma’s potential of disruption. When the domestic machinery falls ever more into disrepair due to Emma’s adventures, her mother-in-law triumphs because Charles had not listened to her about forbidding novel reading (Flaubert 225). At first, however, Charles joins his mother in condemning Emma’s reading and he is determined to stop her from reading (Flaubert 160). But Emma cannot be restabilized by her mother-in-law’s authority alone.

Not even religion can restabilize Emma. At one point she goes of her own accord to see the priest, Bournisien, for help. But because of his concern for his charges at the church and the digestive troubles of cows, he fails to provide Emma with any assistance in her despair (Flaubert part II, chapter VI). Later, Bournisien who considers literature “dangerous” (Flaubert 250) provides suitable, that is, restabilizing reading materials for Emma:

since he was not very well versed in such matters when they surpassed certain levels, he wrote to Mr. Boulard, the bishops librarian, asking for something famous for a *female full of spirit* [emphasis original]. (Flaubert 247)¹⁹⁰

The librarian, however, does not seem to understand what is needed to restabilize Emma. He sends “small manuals with questions and answers, red pamphlets...

some sort of novels with pink cardboard binding and written in sickly sweet style” (Flaubert 247).¹⁹¹ Emma “became irritated with the rules of worship; with the arrogance of polemical writing... and the profane stories taken from religion seemed to her to be written in such ignorance of the world (Flaubert 247–48),¹⁹² that she gives up her religious reading very soon.

Apart from the priest, Homais, his counterpart who never doubts that he knows what is right, thinks himself an authority on good literature. He offers Emma the use of his own library, and has strong opinions on what books are suitable for his own children. He considers *L'amour conjugal* (*Married Life* the book that Justin reads secretly) very dangerous (Flaubert 285). Homais serves as the example of the successful reader,¹⁹³ the one who reads the right materials and achieves the best position of all the characters: he receives a medal of honor (Flaubert 382) at the end of the novel.

Flaubert's ironic depiction of Madame Bovary *mère* as well as of Bournisien and Homais makes it unlikely that he subscribed to their opinions of reading. They cannot be the spokespeople for his ideas. Finally, however, Flaubert “kills off” Emma as much as Alcott “marries off” Jo. Emma's death is her restabilization. There is no room in society for someone as destabilizing as Emma. Because she threatens society, there would be nowhere to go for her except perhaps prostitution.¹⁹⁴

Death can be seen as “an obvious defeat handed to her by a society in which men remain sexually and economically dominant.”¹⁹⁵ While dying, Emma for the first time treats Charles as a caring wife would: she tells him “Yes... , it is true... , you are good” and “she slowly stroked his hair” (Flaubert 351) (original ellipses).¹⁹⁶ As a result, her death brings Emma back to the domestic heaven. Emma shows Charles more love in these last few moments than ever before (Flaubert 351). A short while after this seeming reconciliation, Emma hears the beggar¹⁹⁷ sing his little song, and she dies seeing the face of the beggar as if he greeted her from a place after life: “And Emma began to laugh, a terrible, hectic, desperate laugh, because she thought she was seeing the miserable beggar's hideous face which seemed to loom in the shadows of eternity like the face of terror itself” (Flaubert 359).¹⁹⁸ In the end, Emma is “overpowered by a male-dominated society, whose primary texts are money and legal edicts,...[and] Emma finally succumbs to its pressures [and] goes mad.”¹⁹⁹ Although one can see her death as an assertive act that conveys dignity on Emma, madness and death end her disrupting potential. In a sense she is restabilized and no longer a threat.

But the strongest form of restabilization comes from a source least suspected by the inhabitants of Yonville. While they correctly perceive Emma's reading as dangerous since it allows her to dream and to act out fantasies created by her books, the same books that incite her to destabilize society contribute much to her restabilization.

In this fashion, reading socializes Emma. Although she reads in rebellion against her class and position in life, she can only counter mediocrity and “nonromance” with romances that merely repeat terms from that same class: the patriarchal

structure of domination and the subordination of women. When Emma dreams about the "white plumed knight riding on a black horse" (Flaubert 71),²⁰⁰ she only repeats the image of the strong man and the woman who constantly waits for him, i.e., defers to him. Therefore, Emma's fantasies are the "fantasies of her class, what she derives from its novels and pictures; its imagination of luxury and 'society,' romance and adventure."²⁰¹

Although reading represents a form of rebellion against her position in society, Emma is immediately restabilized. Not only are her thoughts and feelings always "written,"²⁰² that is, imitative rather than original, but "without controlling the source of her desire, Emma allows the emotion of created fiction to control her."²⁰³ Even if some of these emotions may seem rebellious against the mediocrity of society, they are ultimately just as banal and mediocre as that against which Emma rebels. Her "desires are hopeless," for they always "return to the confines of her class and sex."²⁰⁴ Her aspirations "cannot be made good, because the concrete forms they take [copied from her reading] are so trite that they coalesce confusingly with that to which they are presumably opposed."²⁰⁵

The images taken from her reading are those images created by the mediocrity of her society, they are "banal and bathetic...[and] as corrupt as the world... [Emma] confronts and which produced them in the first place."²⁰⁶

She is torn between two opposing kitsch images of femininity each exercising its pull: the sweet and virtuous mother, devoted to her accomplished husband [at times she wishes Charles would at least be famous] and the glamorous adulteress with dark and passionate secrets.²⁰⁷

But the adulteress is just as much a conventional image as the angel. The demon is therefore packaged in a conventional form, which means that the demonic forces are channeled. Emma's violent feelings, her anger, hatred and passion do not express themselves in truly original threatening forms, but rather in the shell of the "glamorous adulteress" in which only a limited amount of emotional energy can be realized.

The restabilizing nature of Emma's reading leads us to a fundamental question: is Emma's reading empowering, or does her living out the conventional fantasy only constitute a reinforcement of patriarchal power structures? There is no easy answer to this question. Whereas Jo's reading clearly gives her power in that it is a road to writing and artistic self-fulfillment and financial independence, Emma's case is not so clear-cut. Although Louisa May Alcott displayed an ambivalent attitude toward her heroine, her resolution of the plot denies the empowering nature of reading and gives importance to the restabilizing forces of society. But in Emma's case, not even her death can be read entirely as a defeat by society. Rather, one can even regard her suicide as a triumph for Emma, the rebel. Emma Bovary simply cannot be readily categorized; readers are left to puzzle over her by condemning and pitying her at the same time.

To be sure, Emma's dreams are foolish as well as an imitation of conventions rather than original, and they "are destined, at the touch of reality to wither into lies."²⁰⁸ However, "is that a critique of her or of reality?"²⁰⁹ It has to be seen as both. Emma at least represents a "spark of poetry" in a very prosaic environment.²¹⁰ And although she only seems to repeat the dreams and conventions of her class as she gleans them from her reading, her desire for things is excessive—more so than any of these readings could really provoke. Emma's extreme desires produce dissatisfaction when they clash with reality.

The fact alone that Emma has a "capacity for dissatisfaction"²¹¹ proves that reading is empowering. It provides Emma with a certain "critical distance"²¹² from which to perceive her own reality. Sadly, she is not able to use this "distance" to "evaluate her situation."²¹³ Otherwise, perhaps she could really have been empowered and actually changed something about her position or the position of women in general. She does not realize that by living her dreams, she only reinforces the patriarchal structure of society.

Nevertheless, even her literary and actual experiences with adultery are empowering for Emma. The novels that deal with adultery at least provide her with "a discourse—illusory yet strong—of freedom and revolt."²¹⁴ Compromised as these texts may be, they "can suggest some form of resistance"²¹⁵ against the existence she so abhors. And finally, Emma in her dissatisfaction "does say something true against this [*bourgeois*] world."²¹⁶

Reading is empowering for Emma in so far as it allows her to dream, to at least attempt to escape. The failure of her attempts does not detract from the fact that she tries. Emma is heroic in that she does not accept the mediocre reality of a bourgeois world in which someone like Homais is decorated with the cross of honor.

Emma is similar to another heroic protagonist who did not accept reality but tried to make reality conform to his dreams of chivalry. Quoting a statement made in 1843 by Soren Kierkegaard, Harry Levin affirms that it "is remarkable that the whole of European literature lacks a feminine counterpart to Don Quixote."²¹⁷ Is Emma a female Don Quixote?²¹⁸ Is she "a searching soul frustrated in her desire to surpass the meanness of her surrounding?"²¹⁹

In one sense, Emma shares Don Quixote's quest for love and a better life, in her eyes a life in a different class. However, she does not save anyone in her "adventures" as her heroic predecessor does. While he acts from "altruistic" motives, hers are always "egotistical."²²⁰ But this does not lessen her genuine emotions of love for Rodolphe, for example, and her true disgust for her environment. Foolish as she may be, Emma Bovary "transcends her own foolishness...[by] believing in the impossible:"²²¹ "Seen in this light, Emma's shortcoming is not that she has had illusions, but that she was unable to make her dream vision victorious over the "reality" represented by the Homais of this world."²²² One could accuse Emma, then, of being "incapable of sustaining her dreams to the end."²²³ But is Don Quixote, who is considered such a hero, really any different from Emma? Does he not also give up in the end, shedding his

supposed *locura* for a clear consciousness of who he is? In that sense, he also abandons his illusions and does not follow his ideals through.

The question of Emma Bovary cannot easily be answered. The novel remains a topic of much discussion and reveals that Gustave Flaubert did indeed express ambivalent feelings for his heroine, because it was possible for him to condemn and to pity her at the same time. Although, most of *Madame Bovary* is filled with irony undercutting all characters including Emma, the narrator, or Flaubert, while portraying her death in a very cruel manner, does show some sympathy and pity for Emma when he alludes, for example, to her "poor hands" on her death bed (Flaubert 357).²²⁴ In some instances, Gustave Flaubert even seems very similar to his heroine in his own romantic tendencies. On the other hand, he perceives her as ordinary as any Homais, ridiculous in her wish to transcend the world that has created her.

In his *Correspondance*, Flaubert admits that romanticism is an important aspect of his life and his character: "I am an old outraged or encrusted romantic."²²⁵ Flaubert's romanticism has received much critical attention. While some critics see it as a "myth" that *Madame Bovary* is an exorcism of his romantic tendencies, they also view him as much a victim²²⁶ "haunted"²²⁷ by romanticism as was Emma Bovary.²²⁸ Even Henry James posited that "Flaubert himself but narrowly escaped being...[like Emma] an embodiment [of helpless romanticism]."²²⁹

Most critics agree, however, that the ironic tone of *Madame Bovary*'s narrator constitutes a critique of Emma Bovary and her romantic reading. Therefore, they posit that Flaubert is criticizing romantic fiction. It is true that Flaubert hated some of the fiction he gives his heroine as reading materials. Eugène Sue, for example, made him vomit.²³⁰ But this explanation does not take into account that he also undermines the cliché that reading romantic fiction constitutes a dangerous activity. Since it is Madame Bovary *mère* who voices this cliché, we can assume that the author did not share it. He would not have chosen as his spokesperson a character depicted with so much irony.

Does Flaubert condemn romantic fiction? Again, a striking resemblance between Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and *Madame Bovary* helps us answer this question. Many critics read *Little Women* as a critique of bad literature, that is, sensation fiction. However, as subsequent research has shown, Alcott herself read and produced such sensation fiction and in fact shows that Jo's reading and writing of such fiction empowers her. Similarly, Flaubert once was immersed in the same fictions as his heroine. He read Walter Scott just as she did,²³¹ and some of his own works such as *Novembre* can be considered romantic themselves. While Flaubert may undercut romantic fiction, then, we cannot disregard his ambivalent attitude toward his heroine and, by extension, to her reading. Like Alcott, he restabilizes his heroine, and more so than Alcott, he reveals how much of what supposedly empowers Emma forms part of the dominant discourse taking power away from her.

Flaubert's ambiguity can be seen in his ironic critique of romantic language. While he admittedly criticizes "the language of romanticism itself: the abuse of diminutives and scale, exoticism and local color, cloying nature...[the language

of] these shopworn, deluded and hollowly sentimental motifs,”²³² he also lets his narrator defend Emma’s use of such language. When Rodolphe considers empty Emma’s use of romantic language, the narrator indignantly comments:

nobody ever can give the exact measure of their needs, nor their pain. Human speech is like a cracked pot on which we beat rhythms for bears to dance to when we are attempting to make the stars cry. (Flaubert 224)²³³

Flaubert therefore points to the inadequacy of human language. While romantic language may be empty, it remains very hard to express human emotions in this or any other way.

Flaubert exhibits ambivalence on the subject of romantic language as well as on romanticism itself. In a letter to Louise Colet, he explains that all his irony and attack on sentiment leave him uncertain of his own attitude: “Have you not seen that all the irony with which I attack sentiment in my work is a cry of the vanquished, if it is not rather a song of victory?”²³⁴ Flaubert feels both triumph and defeat in his attack on romanticism. While he does not entirely favor romanticism, he does not completely oppose it, either.

Flaubert is very similar to his heroine Emma Bovary in his own romantic tendencies. Writing about the love scene, Flaubert feels the emotions of his heroine, in the same fashion as Emma feels what her heroines experience. Flaubert sweats and feels choked as Emma and Rodolphe do.²³⁵ In fact, Flaubert identifies with his fictional characters to an even greater extent than Emma does with those about whom she reads. He writes to Louise Colet:

Today for example, I was a man and woman, a lover and a mistress at the same time. I rode on horseback in a forest on an afternoon in the fall, under yellow leaves: and I was the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words which they said to each other and the red sun which made them half close their eyes drunk with love.²³⁶

Despite this complete identification, Flaubert remains detached from his characters. And when, like Emma, Flaubert admits that he lives at times in a world of illusions: “Here is one of those rare days of my life which I spent in a world of illusions,”²³⁷ it is only “rare” that he lives in illusion.

Like Emma, Flaubert thinks that the grass just might be greener somewhere other than where he is in the France that he hates.²³⁸ He sounds like Emma when he exclaims: “Oh! I wish I could live in Spain, in Italy or even in the *Provence!*”²³⁹ And like Emma, who dreams of other magical countries, Flaubert imagines that he is really born somewhere else because he has “always...as if memories...of balmy shores, of blue seas.”²⁴⁰ The color blue, in *Madame Bovary* always denotes illusion and dream for Emma, but in this case also for her creator.²⁴¹

Flaubert’s letters show his pessimism and the same wonder about “this insufficiency of life, this instantaneous rottenness of things” that troubles Emma

(Flaubert 329).²⁴² Although he is a man whom Emma would have believed to be free, Flaubert does not consider himself free. He reasons that his fatalism and ultimately his pessimism come from constraint. He writes to Louise Colet: “Where the fatalism is concerned of which you accuse me, it is just anchored in me. I strongly believe it. I deny individual liberty because I do not feel free.”²⁴³

Only art can transcend the mediocrity of life for Gustave Flaubert.²⁴⁴ It is the only occupation that allows him to continue living. Like Alcott, who does not allow Jo to remain a spinster living as an artist, Flaubert does not ever let Emma understand that art might be a way out of her position. Whereas Jo does live out her artistic possibilities, albeit ultimately restabilized, Emma does not make the connection between reading and writing to a sufficient degree as to be meaningful for her.

Flaubert affirms the empowering potential of reading. Despite her foolishness, he shows Emma as transcending some of the mediocrity of her environment. Alcott, who is less pessimistic about the individual, does not provide a more optimistic outcome for her heroine than Flaubert. While she lets Jo live, this life consists in a “life-in-death” situation in her marriage. While neither Flaubert nor Alcott ultimately grants their protagonist the power that comes with reading, both of these authors understand and portray the power of the written word.

Conclusion

The book is the Devil. Reading is to be possessed.

Daniel Fabre, “Le livre et sa magie”¹

The topos of dangerous books reaches from as far back as *Don Quixote*. Frequently, the rhetoric of the dangerous book has focused on the danger to the reader—“reading is to be possessed.” The analysis of selected nineteenth-century narratives, however, shows that these works depict reading as an activity that empowers the reader and thus endangers social domination and patriarchy. In the nineteenth century, the fear of reading was particularly widespread because the defenders of the existing social structure perceived the “revolution”—i.e., the destabilization of the book market and readership brought on by a mass market and unprecedented access to literacy—as threatening to the established order. Those who feared reading were afraid that the lower classes’ and women’s access to literacy might lead to a disruption of the social order.

However, as the examples of Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick*, and Emile Zola’s *Germinal* have shown, this fear is only partially justified. It disregards the other aspect of reading—namely that it can also be a stabilizing factor.

Douglass’s narrative presents the acquisition of literacy and the ability to read as an empowering force in his life. Indeed, Douglass goes as far as to say that without literacy he would never have escaped to freedom. But his reading also restabilizes him in that he fashions a life in freedom acceptable to the dominant groups. He participates in the dominant discourse by choosing a name such as Douglass and by giving his speeches within the framework of a white-dominated society.

Similarly, *Ragged Dick* destabilizes the social order because the street boy transforms himself into the respectable Richard Hunter who lives in a boarding house and even manages to secure white-collar employment. *Ragged Dick*, then, manages to “escape” his life on the streets because he acquires literacy. Even more

so than Douglass, however, Ragged Dick-turned-Richard Hunter participates in the dominant discourse. Having achieved middle-class respectability, the former street boy ceases to be a threat. While he has indeed challenged the social order, his own rise immediately contributes to a further stabilization of class distinctions. As a respectable member of the middle class, he is now in a position to look down on his former life, on those who are lower than himself. His accession to the middle class only reinforces the distinction between the lower and middle classes. In *Ragged Dick*, reading proves to be even more stabilizing than in Douglass's *Narrative*.

Etienne, Zola's hero in *Germinal*, is literate like Douglass and Ragged Dick. Indeed, his reading consists of subversive literature from which he forms ideas of overthrowing the established order. Etienne receives a certain emotional strength from his reading, which allows him to incite his fellow miners. He most clearly poses a threat against the established order, because he leads the miners into a strike—an open act of rebellion against their masters. But Etienne's reading also functions as a restabilization in much the same way as Ragged Dick's and, to a lesser extent, as Douglass's reading. Etienne begins to participate in the dominant discourse by aspiring to become a bourgeois himself—that is, to leave the lower classes. Reading empowers Etienne only for a short time, and it yields a rather vain selfish power. While he enjoys being the miners' leader, the force of revolt that he has unleashed among the miners becomes too strong for him to control, and he ends up corrupted by that power: he no longer wants to be among those in the lower class.

These three examples have shown that the fear of the destabilization of the social order may have been justified to some extent. Indeed, reading allows Douglass to escape the system of slavery, to help others do so, and to make public the horrors of this system. Similarly, reading allows Ragged Dick to become respectable Richard Hunter, that is, to “invade” the middle class; and it allows Etienne to incite his fellow workers to revolt. But on the other hand, the narratives immediately restabilize each one of these protagonists. In this manner, Douglass's freedom proves to be but another version of “enslavement” to the life white people can lead. Similarly, Ragged Dick loses the independent ways of the street life and merely reinforces the distinction of the classes by becoming a member of the middle classes. In the same vein, the power Etienne has gained from his reading only corrupts him and restabilizes him in his wish to be a bourgeois. These restabilized protagonists do not pose a threat anymore.

But if the dangerous potential of reading can so easily be contained, why do such large segments of the dominant groups fear it so much? By joining in the dominant discourse, the reading protagonists negotiate more power for themselves than they would have had by remaining silent. In particular, Douglass's feat of escaping slavery constitutes a change for the better. Douglass achieves what he wanted most: to be free from the slave system and to agitate, i.e., to raise consciousness against it. Similarly, Ragged Dick attains better prospects of growing old in his own rooms rather than on the street, and he uses his vivacity and energy for a positive cause. And finally, Etienne at least raises the miners' consciousness

and leaves them with the hope that the seed of revolt will germinate again with greater strength at another time.

The three “subaltern” narratives therefore prove to be ambivalent as regards the potential of reading. On the one hand, reading empowers and poses a threat of destabilization to the social stratification. On the other hand, reading forms a potent means of restabilization that gives those in power a prominent tool of domination. While Douglass, Alger, and Zola each struggle with this ambivalence, Douglass is the most outspoken in favoring the empowering nature of reading. But as members of the middle class themselves, Alger and Zola can only portray their protagonists as restabilized in the end. Therefore, whereas the characters’ reading initially threatened the social order, the established order ultimately remains stable.

The fear of the destabilization of the social stratification parallels the fear of the disruption of gender relations—i.e., the patriarchal structure of society. When a woman read, men feared, she would be corrupted by her reading, abandoning her role as “angel in the house” and allowing the demonic and powerful aspects of her character to surge to the surface. This fear shows that dominant male society regarded female reading as similarly empowering as the consumption of reading materials by members of the subaltern groups.

The discussions of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* have shown that Jo and Emma are not too different from Frederick Douglass, Ragged Dick, and Etienne. Both women read and are empowered in the sense that they manage to rise to positions of relative power. However, their reading and their authors in turn restabilize them.

Jo’s reading leads to self-fulfillment, and it provides her with inspiration for her writing career, which in turn allows her to be financially independent, that is, to take over the male role of breadwinner of the family. Jo’s reading poses a threat to gender relations because she takes over that role, and because she can be “improperly feminine”—her demonic aspects, i.e., violent emotions such as anger come to the fore. When the protagonist becomes too “powerful,” however, Alcott restabilizes her heroine. As marriage endings abound in her reading materials, Jo too must marry someone who controls her reading and therefore takes away all power from her. Jo, the powerful woman who reads and writes, is transformed into the docile wife—the “angel of the house.”

Similarly, Emma’s reading empowers her in that it allows her to dream and to question the mediocrity of her environment. It also gives her the blueprint for rebellious behavior—that of adultery—and the discourse of escape. Nevertheless, Emma’s reading incorporates that which she opposes. Her dreams gleaned from her reading are just as conventional as the society she so abhors. Even if Emma manages to dominate her lovers in her affairs, the role of adulteress is only a variation of traditional patriarchal patterns of power. Like Ragged Dick’s and Etienne s, Emma’s reading, though empowering, already contains her restabilization.

Therefore, Ragged Dick, Etienne, and Emma—three characters invented by middle-class males—appear more inevitably set on the path to restabilization than

Frederick Douglass and Jo—two protagonists representing the aspirations of a former slave and a middle-class woman, respectively. Whereas Jo's power is literally taken away from her, Dick's, Etienne's, and Emma's reading itself socializes them and leads them to reify the social structure to which their reading could have been a threat. Jo could have lived as a spinster, never accepting the role of "angel in the house;" in other words, she really could have destabilized the gender relations of society. Dick, Etienne, and Emma, on the other hand, remain programmed to participate in the established order. Dick's way directly leads to middle class respectability, Etienne is bound to be corrupted by the power that he possesses briefly, and Emma can merely repeat the pattern that she finds in her fictions. The only one who manages to gain and to retain some power from his reading is Frederick Douglass. His freedom may not be paradisaical, but it allows him to work for his main objective: the abolition of slavery.

However, participating in the dominant discourse does not imply corruption or abandonment of principles any more for Ragged Dick, Etienne, and Emma than it does for Douglass. Rather, it is better to have a voice than no voice at all. As it is better to be a "mad," yet honorable Don Quixote than to be sane and corrupt, it is better to read and to participate in the dominant discourse (that is, to be ultimately restabilized) than never to have said or done anything at all. It benefits Douglass that he has escaped slavery and can give speeches; Ragged Dick's reading has given him the possibility of becoming something other than what he was; Etienne at least raised his voice against the plight of the miners; Jo remained independent and powerfully demonic at least for a while; and Emma at least dreamed and recognized the mediocrity of her environment.

Reading, then, is always empowering. Even if restabilization either follows closely or indeed remains inherent in the reading, it is an activity that allows the reader to use his or her mind; thus, it allows for growth, change, and questioning. Without this process, society would stagnate—that is, it would be stable. In this manner, even a temporary destabilization serves as a necessary catalyst to an evolving society. Ultimately, reading helps individuals contest existing arrangements of power.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

¹ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, trans. J.M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books, 1950) 32–33.

² The two critical works most directly related to this study are Carla Peterson, *The Determined Reader: Gender and Culture in the Novel from Napoleon to Victoria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) and Joëlle Gleize, *Le double miroir: Le livre dans les livres de Stendhal à Proust* (Paris: Hachette, 1992). In addition, Jann Matlock's chapter, "Dangerous Reading: The Trials of the Nineteenth-century Novel," addresses similar questions as I do. Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). Other works that are directly related are Sandrine Aragon, *Des liseuses en péril: images de lectrices dans les textes de fiction (1656–1856)* (Paris: Honoré de Champion, 2003); Dawn-Leslie Hayward, "'Intimate Reverberations: Representations of the Woman Reading in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Texts,'" diss., U of Kansas, 1999; Simon Eliot, "Books and Their Readers I-II," *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities*, ed. Dennis Walder (New York: Routledge, 2001) 157–95, 331–57. Peterson analyzes nine British and French texts in which the protagonists read, but she does not approach them from the angle of empowerment I employ in this study. Gleize does not share the perspective presented here, either. Instead, her study provides structured categories of what kind of readers, what kind of reading, which books etc., are presented in the French novel. Matlock also only deals with the French novel. Aragon examines a much larger time period and only looks at French women readers in fiction, while Hayward describes female reading protagonists in texts written by women in nineteenth-century America. Each of these works examines the issues of reading protagonists in nineteenth-century fiction from the perspective of nationality. Eliot's work is more comparative in scope.

³ Several studies treat the topic of the protagonist reader or the book in the book extensively in other centuries. See, for example, Edgar Bracht, *Der Leser im Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987); Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, *Im Buch die Bücher oder Der Held als Leser* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1980); and Liselotte E. Kurth, *Die Zweite Wirklichkeit: Studien zum Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1969).

⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1998).

⁵ For a detailed bibliography on *Don Quixote*, see Margot Kruse, “Gelebte Literatur im *Don Quixote*” *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur: Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, ed. Theodor Wolpers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 30–72; and Walter Pabst, “‘Victimes du Livre’: Versuch über eine literarische Konstante,” *Filologia y Didáctica Hispánica: Homenaje al Profesor Hans-Karl Schneider*, ed. José María Navarro et. al. (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1975) 497–525.

⁶ Jean-Maurice Gautier, “Lectures d’Emma,” *Actes du Colloque International de Clermont-Ferrand: Le Lecteur et la Lecture dans l’oeuvre*, ed. Alain Montandon (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, 1982) 59–68.

⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow and Other Stories* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 11.

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¹ Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow* 77.

² Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow* 11.

³ For a discussion of the relationship between literature and history see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973); Lilian R. Furst, *All Is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995); Michael Carrigan, “Fiction as History or History as Fiction? George Eliot, Hayden White, and Nineteenth-Century Historicism,” *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 29.4 (Summer 2000): 395–415; Roland Barthes, “Histoire ou Littérature?” *Torre: Revista de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* 2.4–5 (Apr.–Sept. 1997): 159–77; and Peter Barry, “Hew Historicism and Cultural Materialism,” *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Barry (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 172–90. Furst’s work explains that history in fiction is not necessarily important as factual knowledge for the reader but rather as a code for authenticating the realist endeavor—or rather the reality effect as Roland Barthes calls it. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (England: Routledge in association with Open University, 1995) 258–61.

⁴ For more in-depth studies on the history of reading, the history of literacy, and the history of the book and book market, see in France: James S. Allen, *In the Public Eye—A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800–1940* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991); François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Lire et écrire: l’alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules*

Ferry, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977); Martyn Lyons, *Le triomphe du livre: une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Promodis/ Editions du cercle de la librairie, 1987); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman quotidien. Lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Chemin vert, 1984); Dean DelaMotte, "Making News, Making Readers: The Creation of the Modern Newspaper Public in Nineteenth-Century France," *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. Laurel Brake et. al. (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2000) 339–49. In Great Britain: John Jordan and Robert Patten, eds., *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); and the very detailed study by Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957); and in the United States: James Machor, "Fiction and Informed Reading in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47.3 (Dec. 1992): 320–48; Lydia Cushman Schurman, "The Effect of Nineteenth-Century 'Libraries' on the American Book Trade," *Scorned Literature: Essays on the History and Criticism of Popular Mass-Produced Fiction in America*, ed. Lydia Cushman Schurman et. al. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002) 97–121; Cathy Davidson, ed., *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989); James L. Machor, ed., *Readers in History: Nineteenth Century Reading and the Contexts of Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993); Daniel H. Borus, *Writing Realism: Howells, James, and Norris in the Mass Market* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1989); Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993); Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981); Charles Alan Johannigsmeier, *Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates in America, 1860–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).

⁵ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 3.

⁶ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 5.

⁷ See Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 340–41.

⁸ Klaus Heitmann, "Der französische Roman im Zeitalter des Realismus 1930–1880," *Europäischer Realismus*, ed. Klaus von See (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1980) 31.

⁹ For the term "interpretive communities," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980).

¹⁰ Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23.1 (Jan.-Apr. 1986): 12.

¹¹ This term as well as the term "extensive" reading has been adopted from Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1974).

¹² Borus, *Writing Realism* 39. Borus also uses the terms “extensive” and “intensive” reading.

¹³ Similar changes to those in America, France and England take place in Germany, for example, as Engelsing in *Der Bürger als Leser* describes.

¹⁴ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 29.

¹⁵ This term is also used by Cathy N. Davidson, “Introduction: Towards a History of Books and Readers,” *American Quarterly* 40.1 (March 1988): 7–17.

¹⁶ Harvey J. Graff points out, however, that this “conceptualization misses developments in popular literature and the distribution of cheaper print materials during the preceding two centuries.” Nevertheless, Graff admits that the technological innovations and its results were unprecedented. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 279.

¹⁷ Roger Chartier, “Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading,” *American Antiquarian Society* 97.2 (1988): 316.

¹⁸ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 8.

¹⁹ Cloth binding was substituted for leather and to avoid the slow sowing in the binding process a new casing was invented into which the folded sheets were glued. Altick, *The English Common Reader* 278.

²⁰ Altick, *The English Common Reader* 308.

²¹ Borus, *Writing Realism* 38.

²² Zboray, *A Fictive People* 37–54, and Allen, *In the Public Eye* 30.

²³ Zboray, *A Fictive People* 55–82, and Armin Paul Frank, “Die amerikanische Literatur 1850–1900,” *Jahrhundertende—Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Helmut Kreuzer, vol. 18 (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1976) 1–34, and Borus, *Writing Realism* 38.

²⁴ Borus, *Writing Realism* 39, Allen, *In the Public Eye* 31.

²⁵ Christopher P. Wilson, “The Rhetoric of Consumption: Mass Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880–1920,” *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980*, ed. Richard Wightman et. al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 39–65.

²⁶ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 31.

²⁷ Although Wilson uses this phrase only for the period between 1880 and 1920, it applies metaphorically to the change that took place throughout the nineteenth century in the book market in France and England, as well as in America. Wilson, “The Rhetoric of Consumption.”

²⁸ R.K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790–1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955) 23.

²⁹ Altick, *The English Common Reader* 213–39.

³⁰ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 280.

³¹ It is important to remember that these changes took place over a whole century and at different pace in different countries. As Harvey Graff points out, for the first half of the century in France “the poorer inhabitants of urban centers, assuming that they could read, lacked the privacy in which to read a book, the light by which to read it, and most probably the time and energy to attempt it.” Only the second half of the century sees the developments mentioned above. Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 279.

³² Borus, *Writing Realism* 102–16, and Allen, *In the Public Eye* 7.

³³ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 8.

³⁴ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 280.

³⁵ For this terminology, see again Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*.

³⁶ Darnton, “First Steps toward a History of Reading” 12. Darnton points out that Engelsing’s terms are attractive but maybe too simplistic. Reading habits do not only change in extensiveness, but rather in many different directions. Nevertheless, they are useful terms to describe one particular change. However, to contradict his own argument, Darnton cites David Hall’s work which states the same findings as Engelsing’s work do in the description of the transformation of the reading habits of New Englanders between 1600 and 1850. See David Hall, “Introduction: The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600–1850,” *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William Leonard Joyce (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983) 1–47.

³⁷ Borus, *Writing Realism*, and Allen, *In the Public Eye*.

³⁸ A few exceptions show that members of the lower social classes had access to reading material as early as the eighteenth century. For example, Robert Darnton’s research in the Wolfenbüttel ducal library demonstrates that a significant “democratization” of reading took place in Germany around 1760. Darnton’s records show that many of the borrowers came from lower social classes (porters, lackeys, and lower officers in the army). Darnton, “First Steps toward a History of Reading” 11. However, these are not the working class readers who are part of the mass readership in the nineteenth century.

³⁹ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 8.

⁴⁰ In France, for example, the 1833 Guizot law complemented by the 1880 Jules Ferry law guaranteed compulsory secular elementary education for all French people. By the end of the century the French were practically fully literate. Allen, *In the Public Eye* 10, and Furet and Ozouf, *Lire et écrire* 349–69.

⁴¹ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 8.

⁴² The scope of this work is not large enough to include a sociological account of the various groups taking part in the debate about the virtues or vices of education, literacy and reading. For more on these issues see Martyn Lyons, *Le triomphe du livre: une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Promodis/Éditions du cercle de la librairie, 1987); Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981); Susan Ann Spencer, “Culture in Anarchy: Classical Education as a Counterrevolutionary Force in Nineteenth-Century England,” diss., U of California, Santa Barbara, 1993; and Martyn Lyons, *Readers in Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

⁴³ Lawrence Stone, “Literacy and Education in England 1640–1900,” *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 74.

⁴⁴ Stone, “Literacy and Education” 84.

⁴⁵ Stone, “Literacy and Education” 89.

⁴⁶ Levi Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Wightman (New York: Atheneum, 1977) 337; and Shirley Brice Heath, "The Functions and Uses of Literacy," *Literacy, Society, and Schooling: A Reader*, ed. Suzanne de Castell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 16–17.

⁴⁷ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 263.

⁴⁸ Stone, "Literacy and Education" 86 and 88.

⁴⁹ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 262.

⁵⁰ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 64.

⁵¹ Webb, *The British Working Class Reader* 63.

⁵² Douglas Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French History, 1787–1874* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1963) 111–12.

⁵³ Stone, "Literacy and Education" 91.

⁵⁴ Raymond Birn, "Deconstructing Popular Culture: The *Bibliothèque bleue* and Its Historians," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23.1 (Jan.-Apr. 1986): 32.

⁵⁵ Of course, censorship had existed for centuries, but it is noteworthy that in this new century (in which many agencies worked for literacy and for the enfranchisement of the lower classes) censorship was again used widely to control the reading habits of the lower classes. Nevertheless, censorship was not very successful, and the very cheap reading material sold on the streets reached the intended lower-class reading public.

⁵⁶ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 92.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; Written by Himself*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) 78.

² Frances E. W. Harper, "Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted," *The African-American Novel in the Age of Reaction*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Penguin, 1992) 14.

³ For the acquisition of literacy in slavery see Janet Cornelius, "We Slipped and Learned to Read: Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1800–1865," *Phylon* 44.3 (1983): 171–86; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1956).

⁴ David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) 31.

⁵ Winifred Morgan, "Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass," *American Studies* 35.2 (Fall 1994): 77.

⁶ All subsequent quotes from Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; Written by Himself*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

⁷ Ann Kibbey, "Language in Slavery: Frederick Douglass's Narrative," *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies* 8 (1983): 167.

⁸ For further discussion of literacy, writing, and language in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, see Lisa Sisco, "'Writing in the Spaces Left': Literacy as a Process of Becoming in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 9.3 (Sept. 1995): 195–227; Edward Dupuy, "Linguistic Mastery and the Garden of the Chattel in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*," *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture*

44.1 (Winter 1991): 23–33; Teresa Goddu and Craig Smith, “Scenes of Writing in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*: Autobiography and the Creation of Self,” *The Southern Review* 25.4 (Autumn 1989): 822–40; Lisa Yun Lee, “The Politics of Language in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*” *MELUS: The journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 17.2 (Summer 1991–92): 51–59; Samantha Manchester Early, “Dismantling Master Thought: Discourse and Race in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*,” *Atenea* 21.1–2 (2001): 179–92; María Del Mar Gallego-Durán, “Writing as Self-Creation: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*,” *Atlantis: Revista de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos* 16.1–2 (May–Nov. 1994): 119–323; Robert Stepto, “Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of 1845*,” *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William Andrews (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993) 26–35.

⁹ Daniel J. Royer, “The Process of Literacy as Communal Involvement in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass,” *African American Review* 28.3 (Fall 1994): 368.

¹⁰ The description of these songs has caused much critical debate. Some critics see the songs as the original oral culture of the African American which Douglass never understood and did not share. They criticize Douglass for having left his roots entirely and for not participating in an African American community. See, for example, Houston A. Baker, *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980). Ann Kibbey sees the songs as an instance of linguistic enslavement since they do not have any meaning. However, she credits the slaves with the “capacity and intent to create meaning that could not be eradicated.” Kibbey, “Language in Slavery” 167.

¹¹ Houston A. Baker, *The Journey Back* 33.

¹² Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987) 34.

¹³ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 41.

¹⁴ The full title is *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces; Together with Rules, Calculated to Improve Youth and Others in Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence* by Caleb Bingham (1810).

¹⁵ For a discussion of violence and slavery see Jeannine DeLombard, “‘Eye-Witness to the Cruelty’: Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*,” *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 73.2 (June 2001): 245–75.

¹⁶ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 42.

¹⁷ For a discussion of this feeling see Terry Martin, “A Slave in Form... [but Not] in Fact’: Frederick Douglass and the Paradox of Transcendence,” *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 12.1 (Spring 1995): 1–4.

¹⁸ The fact that Douglass uses speech contradicts any accusation that might be leveled against him of abandoning the oral culture of the slaves.

¹⁹ For details on his life see William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Norton, 1991); and James W. Tuttleton, "The Many Lives of Frederick Douglass," *The New Criterion* 12.6 (Feb. 1994): 16–26.

²⁰ For a discussion of this issue see Jon Olson, "Frederick Douglass and a Process of Cultural Literacy Empowerment," diss., U of Southern California, 1989.

²¹ Robert Pattison, *On Literacy: The Politics of the Word from Homer to the Age of Rock* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 136.

²² Donald Wesling, "Writing as Power in the Slave Narrative of the Early Republic," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26.3 (Sum. 1987): 459–72.

²³ Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* 8.

²⁴ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 37.

²⁵ Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* 362.

²⁶ Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* 363.

²⁷ In a footnote, Douglass adds "I am told that colored persons can now get employment at calking in New Bedford—a result of anti-slavery effort," (Douglass 150).

²⁸ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 363.

²⁹ Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 363.

³⁰ Baker, *The journey Back* 36.

³¹ Lucinda H. MacKethan, "From Fugitive Slave to Man of Letters: The Conversion of Frederick Douglass," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16 (Winter 1986): 67.

³² John Burt, "Learning to Write: The Narrative of Frederick Douglass," *Western Humanities Review* 42.4 (Winter 1988): 331.

³³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Binary Oppositions in Chapter One of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself*," *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston, Mass.: G. K Hall, 1991) 81.

³⁴ Baker, *The journey Back* 39.

³⁵ Burt, "Learning to Write" 332.

³⁶ Donald B. Gibson, "Christianity and Individualism: (RE-) Creation and Reality in Frederick Douglass's Representation of Self," *African American Review* 26.4 (Winter 1992): 602.

³⁷ Maggie Sale, "Critiques from Within: Antebellum Projects of Resistance," *American Literature* 64.4 (Dec. 1992): 711. This is not surprising since other examples have shown that creating new discourses may not work very well. For example, German feminists in the early 1970s decided to create a new language by spelling all letters in uncapitalized versions and changing the spelling of some words that were particularly feminine. Their approach was neither heard nor did it persuade anyone. Another example of a successful participation in dominant discourse is *On Our Own Ground* (1831–1836) by William Apess, a Native American. He writes his autobiography in the dominant discourse of a Christian conversion story. His story is heard and respected because he uses a language and imagery to which the Christian audience could relate.

³⁸ Sale, "Critiques from Within" 711.

³⁹ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002).

⁴⁰ Royer, "The Process of Literacy" 369.

⁴¹ Royer, "The Process of Literacy" 366.

⁴² Baker, *The journey Back* 38.

⁴³ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 38.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 40.

⁴⁵ MacKethan, "From Fugitive Slave to Man of Letters" 55.

⁴⁶ Gates, "Binary Oppositions" 81.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Self-Discovery* 43, and William L. Sundquist, "Literacy and Paternalism," *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1991) 132.

⁴⁸ Sundquist, "Literacy and Paternalism" 132.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹ William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (New York: Penguin, 1980) 86.

² Howells, *Rise of Silas Lapham* 110

³ Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1975) 20.

⁴ John G. Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1965) 101.

⁵ It has to be noted, however, that this comparison is anachronistic since Alger wrote almost a quarter century later.

⁶ George Jean Nathan and H.L. Mencken, *The American Credo: A Contribution Toward the Interpretation of the National Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1920) 29.

⁷ John Ernest, "American Profits; Moral Capitalism in Horatio Alger, Jr.'s *Ragged Dick*," *Dime Novel Roundup* 60.4 (Aug. 1991): 60.

⁸ Many critics have pointed out that Alger's fiction does not really correspond to the myth: see Michael Moon, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes: Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger," *Representation* 19 (Sum. 1987): 89; German Beauchamp, "Ragged Dick and the Fate of Respectability," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 31.3 (Sum. 1992): 327; Michael Zuckerman, "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger," *American Quarterly* 24.2 (May 1972): 199; and Richard M. Huber, *The American Idea of Success* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971) 43.

⁹ All quotes are taken from Horatio Alger, Jr., *Ragged Dick; or Street Life in New York*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin 1986).

¹⁰ It must have been easier to flee bondage when there was no family to consider. Leaving behind no one, Douglass could focus on his own escape.

¹¹ Beauchamp, "Ragged Dick and the Fate of Respectability" 328.

¹² Beauchamp, "Ragged Dick and the Fate of Respectability" 329.

¹³ See Moon, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes" 90.

¹⁴ Beauchamp, "Ragged Dick and the Fate of Respectability" 331.

¹⁵ This is not to say that his position is exceptionally good because he has a white father. Rather, as he points out in the narrative, this would constitute a more difficult, but definitely distinct, position.

¹⁶ Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* 110.

¹⁷ Madonne Miner, "Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick: Projection, Denial, and Double Dealing," *American Imago* 47.3-4 (Fall-Win. 1990): 237.

¹⁸ For an interesting discussion of respectability and Alger's perception of his reputation see Nancy Koppelman, "The Construction of 'Respectability': Horatio Alger, Jr.'s *Ragged Dick* and Alger's Reputation," *Nationalism and Sexuality: Crises of Identity*, ed. Yiorgos Kalogeras et. al. (Thessaloniki, Greece: Hellenic Association of American Studies, Aristotle University, 1996) 125-33.

¹⁹ Zuckermann, "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger" 200.

²⁰ Beauchamp, "Ragged Dick and the Fate of Respectability" 331.

²¹ Thomas H. Pauly, "Ragged Dick and Little Women: Idealized Homes and Unwanted Marriages," *Journal of Popular Culture* 9.3 (Winter 1975): 588.

²² Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* 118.

²³ Miner, "Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick" 238.

²⁴ Moon, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes" 89.

²⁵ Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* 112 and 117.

²⁶ Moon, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes" 89.

²⁷ The sequels are *Fame and Fortune* and *Mark the Match Boy*.

²⁸ Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970) 63.

²⁹ Horatio Alger, *Fame and Fortune; or the Progress of Richard Hunter* (Boston: Loring, 1868) viii.

³⁰ Miner, "Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick" 234.

³¹ Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* 120.

³² Zuckermann, "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger" 196.

³³ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of American Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 79.

³⁴ There are quite a few predecessors of Alger's writing who used the myth in a similar manner. For a detailed discussion, see Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* 101-24.

³⁵ Richard Weiss, *The American Myth of Success: From Horatio Alger to Norman Vincent Peale* (New York: Basic Books, 1969) 7.

³⁶ Moon, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes" 91. Other examples of similar attempts are Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842) and G.W. Th. Reynolds's *Mysterries of London* (1845-48).

³⁷ M.A. Goldberg, "Zola and Social Revolution: A Study of *Germinal*?" *The Antioch Review* 27.4 (Winter 1967-68): 491-514; Henry Mitterand, *Le Discours du Roman* (Paris: PUF, 1980); Auguste Dezalay, "Lecture du Génie, Génie de la lecture: *Germinal* et les *Misérables*," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 85.3 (May-June 1985): 435-46.

³⁸ Paule Lejeune's *Germinal: Un Roman Antipeuple* (Paris: Nizet, 1978) is probably most scathing in its criticism of Zola's middle-class ideology and of his contempt of the miners and workers in general. "sous-race parmi les travailleurs." Lejeune, *Un Roman Antipeuple* 157.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹“et de cette lecture...il [Etienne] se faisait une idée révolutionnaire du combat pour l’existence.” All translations are mine. All French quotes are taken from Emile Zola, *Germinal*, ed. Auguste Dezalay (Paris: Fasquelle, 1983).

² For a discussion of Etienne as hero, see Philippe Hamon, *Texte et idéologie: Valeurs, hiérarchies et évaluations dans l’oeuvre littéraire* (Paris: PUF, 1984). Zola was told that he should only have let the masses be his “protagonist,” but he chose to have Etienne as hero. Hamon argues however, that he is a “desacralized” hero.

³ Paule Lejeune points out that the beating of the boss is not politically motivated but rather stems from the influence of alcohol. Paule Lejeune, *Germinal: Un Roman Antipeuple* (Paris: Nizet, 1978) 150.

⁴ For Gervaise’s story, see Emile Zola, *L’Assommoir* (1877; Paris: Falmarion, 1969).

⁵“Un personnage extérieur a un groupe social vient lui rendre visite, contribue à révéler ou à exacerber l’antagonisme entre deux partis, provoque un conflit dont la conséquence est souvent la ruine du parti le plus faible, avant de repartir.” Yves Chevrel, “De *Germinal* aux ‘Tisserands’: Histoire, mythe, littérature,” *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* 85.3 (May-June 1985): 456.

⁶“les grands-pères n’auraient pu signer leur nom, les pères le signaient déjà.”

⁷ For a discussion of Alzire see Lewis Kamm, “Children of the Rougon-Macquart: The Lessons of Alzire in *Germinal*,” *Excavatio: Emile Zola and Naturalism* 3 (Winter 1993): 32–37.

⁸“L’école, eh bien, ce sera pour un autre jour... J’ai besoin de toi.”

⁹“Des brutes sans doute, mais des brutes qui ne savaient pas lire et qui crevaient de faim.”

¹⁰ Carol Mossman, “Etchings in the Earth: Speech and Writing in *Germinal*,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 25.4 (Winter 1985): 33.

¹¹ Mossman, “Etchings in the Earth” 39.

¹² “il sentait que ce garçon avait une instruction supérieure à la sienne: il le voyait lire, écrire, dessiner des bouts de plan, il l’entendait causer de choses dont, lui, ignorait jusqu’à l’existence.”

¹³ “les houilleux sont de rudes hommes qui ont la tête plus dure que les machiniers.”

¹⁴ William J. Beck and Edward Erickson, “The Emergence of Class Consciousness in *Germinal* and *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *The Comparatist* 12 (May 1988): 45.

¹⁵ “virginité politique.” Lejeune, *Un Roman Antipeuple* 153.

¹⁶ “Encore si l’on avait du pain!”

¹⁷ “maintenant l’endoctrinait, frappé de la propagande qu’il pouvait faire au milieu des mineurs.”

¹⁸ For a discussion of Souvarine see Robert Ponterio, “Souvarine and His Rabbit: Using Images to Define Character in *Germinal*,” *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 35 (1989): 37–45.

¹⁹ “Un fonds d’idées obscures, endormies en lui, s’agitait, s’élargissait. Dévoré surtout du besoin de savoir, il avait hésité longtemps à emprunter des livres à son voisin, qui

malheureusement ne possédait guère que des ouvrages allemands et russes. Enfin, il s'était fait prêter un livre français sur les Sociétés coopératives, encore...il lisait aussi régulièrement un journal que [...Souvarine] recevait, *Le Combat*, feuille anarchiste publiée à Genève."

²⁰ "Toutes sortes de questions confuses se posaient à lui: pourquoi la misère des uns? pourquoi la richesse des autres? pourquoi ceux-ci sous le talon de ceux-là, sans l'espoir de jamais prendre leur place?"

²¹ "Une honte secrète, un chagrin caché le rongèrent...il ne savait rien, il n'osait causer de ces choses qui le passionnaient."

²² "Il se fit envoyer des livres, dont la lecture mal digérée acheva de l'exalter: un livre de médecine surtout *l'Hygiène du mineur*, où un docteur belge avait résumé les maux dont se meurt le peuple des houillères; sans compter des traités d'économie politique d'une aridité technique incompréhensible, des brochures anarchistes qui le bouleversaient, d'anciens numéros de journaux qu'il gardait ensuite comme des arguments irréfutables dans des discussions possibles."

²³ "L'honte de son ignorance s'en allait, il lui venait un orgueil, depuis qu'il se sentait penser."

²⁴ "Le coeur débordant d'indignations généreuses contre les oppresseurs."

²⁵ Beck and Erickson, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness" 48.

²⁶ "Etienne s'enflammait. Toute une prédisposition de révolte le jetait à la lutte du travail contre le capital."

²⁷ "La vieille société craquait, ça ne pouvait durer au-delà de quelques mois, affirmait-il carrément."

²⁸ "Et les Maheu avaient l'air de comprendre, approuvaient, acceptaient les solutions miraculeuses, avec la foi aveugle des nouveaux croyants, pareils à des chrétiens des premiers temps de l'église, qui attendaient la venue d'une société parfaite, sur le fumier du monde antique."

²⁹ "Une société nouvelle poussait en un jour, ainsi, que dans les songes, une ville immense, d'une splendeur de mirage où chaque citoyen vivait de sa tâche et prenait sa part des joies communes. Le vieux monde pourri était tombé en poudre, une humanité jeune, purgée des crimes, ne formait plus qu'un seul peuple de travailleurs...Et continuellement, ce rêve s'élargissait, s'embellissait, d'autant plus séducteur, qu'il montait plus haut dans l'impossible."

³⁰ "Il était si doux d'oublier pendant une heure la réalité triste!...Et ce qui la passionnait, ce qui la mettait d'accord avec le jeune homme, c'était l'idée de la justice."

³¹ Mossman, "Etchings in the Earth" 35 and 39.

³² "L'influence d'Etienne s'élargissait, il révolutionnait peu à peu le coron."

³³ "Ce furent des satisfactions d'amour-propre délicieuses, il se grisa de ces premières jouissances de la popularité: être à la tête des autres, commander, lui si jeune et qui la veille encore était un manoeuvre, l'emplissait d'orgueil, agrandissait son rêve d'une révolution prochaine, où il jouerait un rôle. Son visage changea, il devint grave, il s'écouta parler; tandis que son ambition naissante enfiévrerait ses théories et le poussait aux idées de bataille."

³⁴ Pierre Morel, "A Propos de *Germinal* d'Emile Zola: le personnage d'Etienne Lantier et la représentation du leader," *Les Lettres Romanes* 43.3 (August 1989): 189.

³⁵ "Sur les moyens d'exécution, il se montrait plus vague, mêlant ses lectures, ne craignant pas, devant des ignorants, de se lancer dans des explications où il se perdait lui-même. Tous les systèmes y passaient, adoucis d'une certitude de triomphe facile, d'un baiser universel qui terminerait le malentendu des classes."

³⁶ Lejeune, *Un Roman Antipeuple* 159.

³⁷ R. Butler, "The Realist Novel as 'Roman d'Education': Ideological Debate and Social Action in *Le Père Goriot* and *Germinal*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 12.1-2 (Fall-Winter 1983-84): 72.

³⁸ "tout pèterait un jour, grâce à l'instruction."

³⁹ "Etienne gouta l'ivresse de sa popularité. C'était son pouvoir qu'il tenait, comme matérialisé, dans ces trois mille poitrines dont il faisait d'un mot battre les coeurs. Souvarine, s'il avait daigné venir, aurait applaudi ses idées, à mesure qu'il les aurait reconnues, content des progrès anarchiques de son élève."

⁴⁰ Dezalay, "Lecture du Génie, Génie de la Lecture" 441.

⁴¹ Sylvie L. F Richards, "The Communist Manifesto and Idealistic Mystification in Emile Zola's *Germinal*," *French Literature Series* 7 (1980): 51.

⁴² M.A. Goldberg, "Zola and Social Revolution: A Study of *Germinal*," *The Antioch Review* 27.4 (Winter 1967-68): 504. Goldberg does not consider the fact that Etienne really becomes very individualistic and only cares for his own position.

⁴³ "Sa popularité croissante le surexcitait chaque jour davantage... devenir un centre, sentir le monde rouler autour de soi, c'était un continuel gonflement de vanité, pour lui, l'ancien mécanicien, le haveur aux mains grasses et noires."

⁴⁴ "entraît dans cette bourgeoisie exécrée, avec des satisfactions d'intelligence et de bien-être."

⁴⁵ "Quelle nausée, ces misérables en tas, vivant au banquet commun!"

⁴⁶ "Lentement, sa vanité d'être leur chef, sa préoccupation constante de penser à leur place, le déégageaient, lui soufflaient l'âme d'un de ces bourgeois qu'il exécrait."

⁴⁷ "Il avait peur d'eux, de cette masse énorme, aveugle et irrésistible du peuple, passant comme une force de la nature, balayant tout, en dehors des règles et des théories. Une répugnance l'en avait détaché peu à peu, le malaise de ses goûts affinés, la montée lente de tout son être vers une classe supérieure."

⁴⁸ Richards, "The Communist Manifesto" 46, and N.R. Cirillo, "Marxism as Myth in Zola's *Germinal*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 14.3 (Sept. 1977): 250.

⁴⁹ "Son éducation était finie, il s'en allait armé, en soldat raisonneur de la révolution, ayant déclaré la guerre à la société, telle qu'il la voyait et telle qu'il la condamnait"

⁵⁰ "La joie de rejoindre Pluchart, d'être comme Pluchart un chef écouté, lui soufflait des discours, dont il arrangeait les phrases... l'affinement bourgeois qui l'avait haussé au-dessus de sa classe le jetait à une haine plus grande de la bourgeoisie."

⁵¹ Emile Zola, *Le Débauché* (Paris: Gallimard, Gallimard, 1984).

⁵² Even as Etienne cannot control the strike, Zola cannot control his work: the miners interpret it as they wish.

⁵³ Colette Becker, *Émile Zola; Germinal* (Paris: PUF, 1984) 5.

⁵⁴ “Des hommes poussaient, une armée noire, vengeresse, qui germaient lentement dans les sillons, grandissant pour les récoltes du siècle futur, et dont la germination allait faire bientôt éclater la terre.”

⁵⁵ Mitterand, *Le Discours du Roman* 139.

⁵⁶ Lejeune, *Un Roman Antipeuple* 153. See also Robert Lethbridge, “Exemplary Mutilations: *Germinal* and the French Revolution,” *French Studies Bulletin: A Quarterly Supplement* 38 (Spring 1991): 5–7; David Schalk, “Zola and History: The Historian and Zola,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions-Historiques* 20.1 (Winter 1994): 77–93.

⁵⁷ Lejeune, *Un Roman Antipeuple* 157.

⁵⁸ Beck and Erickson, “The Emergence of Class Consciousness” 45.

⁵⁹ “*Germinal* est une oeuvre de pitié, et non une oeuvre de révolution. Ce que j’ai voulu, c’est crier aux heureux de ce monde, à ceux qui sont les maîtres: Prenez garde, regardez sous terre, voyez ces misérables qui travaillent et qui souffrent. Il est peut-être temps encore d’éviter les catastrophes finales. Mais hâtez-vous d’être justes, autrement voilà le péril: la terre s’ouvrira et les nations s’engloutiront dans un des plus effroyables bouleversements de l’Histoire.” Quoted in Becker, *Émile Zola; “Germinal”*. See also for a discussion of Zola’s comments about *Germinal* in his correspondence Rita Schober, “*Germinal* im Spiegel von Zolas Correspondance” *Lendemains: Etudes Comparées sur la France/Vergleichende Frankreichforschung* 16.61 (1991): 38–45.

⁶⁰ “En ouvrant aux mineurs les portes de la cité idéale de Justice et de Fraternité, Etienne leur ouvre l’avenir; il brise les murs qui les enferment, il leur fait croire que ‘ça peut changer’, il les fait entrer dans le monde merveilleux de l’espoir.” Quoted in Becker, *Émile Zola; Germinal* 127.

⁶¹ Jeanlin, her son, is still alive, working like her in the mine. As Etienne leaves the mine for a better bourgeois future, he sees the child and compares his head to that of a monkey. His last view of the miners dehumanizes them completely. For a discussion of Jeanlin see Anne Belgrand, “Le Personnage de Jeanlin dans *Germinal*: Naissance d’un monstre,” *Les Cahiers Naturalistes* 41.69 (1995): 139–48.

⁶² “dans cette poignée de main dernière, il retrouvait encore celle de ses camarades, une étreinte longue, muette, qui lui donnait rendez-vous pour le jour où l’on recommencerait. Il comprit parfaitement, elle avait au fond des yeux sa croyance tranquille. A bientôt, et cette fois, ce serait le grand coup.”

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

¹ Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984) 54.

² T.C., “Novel Reading: A Letter to a Young Lady,” *The Christian’s Penny Magazine and Friend of the People* 14 (1859): 155, cited in Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1993) 149.

³ For a discussion of Eve as reader see Susan Noakes, *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 172.

⁴ Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 27.

⁵ George Gissing, *The Odd Woman* (1893; London: Virago, 1980) 58.

⁶ Other reading materials were available to women as well, but the large amount of novels received so much attention because they were perceived as dangerous.

⁷ Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 39.

⁸ James L. Machor, "Historical Hermeneutics and Antebellum Fiction: Gender, Response Theory, and Interpretive Contexts," *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James L. Machor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 66. See also for a discussion of a later time period Michael Nelson, "Writing during Wartime: Gender and Literacy in the American Civil War," *Journal of American Studies* 31.1 (Apr. 1997): 43–68.

⁹ Machor, "Historical Hermeneutics" 56.

¹⁰ Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and The New Woman Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1992) X.

¹¹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 22.

¹² Flint, *The Woman Reader* 12.

¹³ Machor "Historical Hermeneutics" 57.

¹⁴ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 23.

¹⁵ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 24.

¹⁶ James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford UP, 1950)86.

¹⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; New York: New American Library, 1953) 230.

¹⁸ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 16.

¹⁹ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 12.

²⁰ Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982) 43.

²¹ James Smith Allen, *In the Public Eye: A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991) 215; see also Margaret Shaw, "Constructing the 'Literate Woman': Nineteenth-Century Reviews and Emerging Literacies," *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction* 21 (1992): 195–212.

²² George Sand, *Oeuvres autobiographiques*, ed. Georges Lubin (1970–71) 1:801, cited in Allen, *In the Public Eye* 215.

²³ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 216.

²⁴ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 216.

²⁵ For this term, see Coventry K. Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: J.W. Parker 1854–56).

²⁶ For a description of the proper feminine see Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 16.

²⁷ Hart, *The Popular Book* 87.

²⁸ Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1833–1880* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1981) XI.

²⁹ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 16.

³⁰ Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel* XI.

³¹ Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel* XII.

³² Allen, *In the Public Eye* 216.

³³ Machor, "Historical Hermeneutics" 67.

³⁴ Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 185.

³⁵ Cited in Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 186.

³⁶ Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 186.

³⁷ Francis Bacon, "On Studies," *The Essayes or Counsels Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985) 153.

³⁸ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 50. See also Steven Mailloux, "Cultural Theoretical Studies: Eating Books in Nineteenth-Century America," *Reconceptualizing American Literary/Cultural Studies: Rhetoric, History, and Politics in the Humanities*, ed. William E. Cain (New York: Garland, 1996) 21–33.

³⁹ Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 50.

⁴⁰ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 13. Pykett also points out that Foucault has argued along these lines in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979) 104.

⁴¹ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 43.

⁴² Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 12.

⁴³ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 43.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of hysteria in the nineteenth century see Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1997). Although he discusses hysteria in British prose it also illuminates the phenomenon in other cultures of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁵ See Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth-Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1976) 71–82.

⁴⁶ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 169.

⁴⁷ W.R. Grey "False Morality of Lady Novelists," *National Review* (1859) cited in Kate Flint, "The Woman Reader and the Opiate of Fiction, 1855–1870," *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorne (Baltimore: Edward Arnold, 1986) 47.

⁴⁸ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 56.

⁴⁹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 73.

⁵⁰ "Je deviens le personnage dont je lisais la vie." Cited in Robert Darnton, "La Lecture rousseauiste et un lecteur 'ordinaire' au XVIII^e siècle," *Pratiques de La lecture*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris: Editions Rivages, 1985) 135.

⁵¹ "pousse la lecture identificatrice jusqu'au suicide." Alain Montandon, "Le Lecteur Sentimental de Jean Paul," *Actes du Colloque International de Clermont-Ferrand: Le Lecteur et la Lecture dans l'Oeuvre*, ed. Alain Montandon (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, 1982) 27.

⁵² John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lillies* (1865), *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (New York: Langmans, Green and Co., 1903–12) 18:129.

⁵³ Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 50.

⁵⁴ Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* 39.

⁵⁵ In her research on the modern romance novel, Janice Radway finds a similar phenomenon. In her study, the women who read romance novels are housewives who do not run away from their duties or family responsibilities. But they read to escape their duties for a while. The husbands of these women, they report, were not happy with their wives' reading habit, partly because the women were "gone" in another world, happy with themselves and their books and did not need the men anymore for entertainment. While watching a football game—a typical male activity—involves communal actions such as discussing the game or getting a drink for each other, reading excludes these husbands completely. This proves that similar structures pervade the home in some cases even today. The same resentment which used to be fear expresses itself over women's self-gratification while reading. See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991) 92 and 103.

⁵⁶ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 217. Again Radway's study proves an astonishing similarity. She points out that although there are attempts at creating romance novel associations the woman reader is alone in her home with her books. However, the knowledge of this shared experience with millions of other female readers legitimizes her reading and her self-gratification. Radway, *Reading and the Romance* 96–7.

⁵⁷ For the use of this term see Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 16.

⁵⁸ This term is used by Pykett in *The 'Improper' Feminine* but is more extensively examined by Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*.

⁵⁹ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 16.

⁶⁰ See also Machor, "Historical Hermeneutics" 66.

⁶¹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 163.

⁶² Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 186.

⁶³ Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 177.

⁶⁴ Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 58.

⁶⁵ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 215.

⁶⁶ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 14.

⁶⁷ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 211.

⁶⁸ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 209.

⁶⁹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 199.

⁷⁰ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 216.

⁷¹ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 216.

⁷² "Et voici dans ma poche un écrit important / Qui vous enseignera l'office de la femme. / J'en ignore l'auteur, mais c'est quelque bonne âme / Et je veux que ce soit votre unique entretien / Tenez. Voyons un peu si vous le lirez bien." Molière, *L'École des Femmes: comédie* (Paris: Larousse, 1970) 70–71.

⁷³ Jane Rose, "Conduct Books for Women, 1830–1860: A Rationale for Women's Conduct and Domestic Role in America," *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, ed. Catherine Hobbs et. al. (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995) 37–58.

⁷⁴ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 74.

⁷⁵ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 81.

⁷⁶ James Mason, "How to Form a Small Library," *Girl's Own Paper* 2 (1881): 7, cited in Flint, *The Woman Reader* 81.

⁷⁷ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 116.

⁷⁸ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 85.

⁷⁹ Beth Kowalski-Wallace, "Home Economics: Domestic Ideology in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*" *Eighteenth Century* 29 (1988): 242–62.

⁸⁰ Kowalski-Wallace, "Home Economics" 242–46.

⁸¹ Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 169.

⁸² Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 173.

⁸³ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) 183.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickhardt, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1986) 170.

⁸⁵ Gaye Tuchman with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out, Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 13.

⁸⁶ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) 97.

⁸⁷ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977) 101.

⁸⁸ This discussion of a new form of discipline relies on Richard Brodhead's article "Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America," *Representations* 21 (Winter 1988): 67–95.

⁸⁹ Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod" 71.

⁹⁰ Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod" 87.

⁹¹ Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod" 71. See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) for a discussion of this new form of discipline.

⁹² See Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel* 3.

⁹³ R.L. Archer, ed., *Jean Jacques Rousseau, his educational theories selected from Émile, Julie, and other writings* (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1964).

⁹⁴ David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1978) 25. "As early as 1642 Massachusetts passed a law requiring that parents teach their children to read in order that their religious welfare not be overlooked." Joy A. Marsella, *The Promise of Destiny: Children and Women in the Short Stories of Louisa May Alcott* (Westport, CT; Greenwood P, 1983) 3.

⁹⁵ Grylls, *Guardians and Angels* 75.

⁹⁶ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 7.

⁹⁷ See Elizabeth Segel, "'As the Twig Is Bent...': Gender and Childhood Reading," *Gender and Reading*, eds. Flynn and Schweickhardt 177.

⁹⁸ "Female Influence on Reading," *Library Journal* 3 (1878): 380–81, cited in Flint, *The Woman Reader* 41.

⁹⁹ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 169.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of this debate, see chapter one. In particular, for a discussion of female education in nineteenth-century America see P. Joy Rouse, "Cultural Models of Womanhood and Female Education: Practices of Colonization and Resistance," *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, ed. Catherine Hobbs (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995) 230–47; Susan K. Harris, "Responding to the Text(s): Women Readers and the Quest for Higher Education," *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James Machor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 259–82.

¹⁰¹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 11.

¹⁰² Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 14.

¹⁰³ See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 166–67.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 204.

¹⁰⁵ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 64.

¹⁰⁶ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 137.

¹⁰⁷ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 137.

¹⁰⁸ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 137.

¹⁰⁹ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 219.

¹¹⁰ Susan K. Harris, "But Is It Any Good? Evaluating Nineteenth-Century American Women's Fiction," *American Literature* 63.1 (March 1991): 50.

¹¹¹ Susan K. Harris, "Responding to the Text(s): Women Readers and the Quest for Higher Education," *Readers in History*, ed. Machor 272.

¹¹² Harris, "Responding to the Text(s)" 273.

¹¹³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965).

¹¹⁴ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 257.

¹¹⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Penguin, 1972) 39.

¹¹⁶ Lydia Maria Child, *The Girls Own Book* (1869): 507, cited in Flint, *The Woman Reader* 23.

¹¹⁷ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 215.

¹¹⁸ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 7.

¹¹⁹ Christiane Rochefort, "Are Women Writers Still Monsters?," *New French Feminism: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1981) 187.

¹²⁰ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 74.

¹²¹ Tuchman, *Edging Women Out* 203.

¹²² Quoted in Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine* 36.

¹²³ Tuchman, *Edging Women Out* 204.

¹²⁴ Tuchman, *Edging Women Out* 204.

¹²⁵ Tuchman, *Edging Women Out* 204.

¹²⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 46.

¹²⁷ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 31.

¹²⁸ Allen, *In the Public Eye* 219.

¹²⁹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 81.

¹³⁰ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 262.

¹³¹ “fungiert als Multiplikator einer...Moral.” Friedrich A. Kittler, “Über die Sozialisation Wilhelm Meisters,” *Dichtung als Sozialisationsspiel: ‘Studien zu Goethe und Gottfried Keller* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978) 108.

¹³² This is not necessarily only true for women, however. Boys or men could easily receive a certain form of “socialization,” through the reading of a Bildungsroman. However, we are concerned here with female readers and should keep in mind the disproportionately large female readership in the nineteenth century.

¹³³ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 263.

¹³⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 121–128.

¹³⁵ Tania Modelski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982) 22.

¹³⁶ Sally Mitchell, “Sentiment and Suffering: Women’s Recreational Reading in the 1860s,” *Victorian Studies* 21.1 (Autumn 1977): 43.

¹³⁷ Modelski, *Loving with a Vengeance* 25.

¹³⁸ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 189.

¹³⁹ Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine* 80.

¹⁴⁰ Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine* 79.

¹⁴¹ See for example the study by Norman Holland, *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975).

¹⁴² William Blake, “The Everlasting Gospel,” *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, NY: Anchor P, 1982) 524.

¹⁴³ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrief and Frederick A. Blossom, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1927–1932) 2:1024.

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “*The Yellow Wall-Paper*” and *Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994). It is the husband however, who shows the greatest weakness at the end of the story when he faints.

¹⁴⁵ Susan Glaspell, “Jury of Her Peers,” *Images of Women in Literature*, ed. Mary Ann Ferguson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

¹⁴⁶ Noakes, *Timely Reading* 33.

¹⁴⁷ Noakes, *Timely Reading* 33.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Kelly, “Vindicating the Equality of Female Intellectuals: Women and Authority in the Early Republic,” *Prospects* 17 (1991): 4.

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of de Beauvoir’s attitudes see Allen, *In the Public Eye* 221.

¹⁵⁰ Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine* 49.

¹⁵¹ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 202.

¹⁵² Flint, *The Woman Reader* 203.

¹⁵³ Flint, *The Woman Reader* 203.

¹⁵⁴ “réassurance culturelle.” Jean Hébard, “L’autodidaxie exemplaire; Comment Valentin Janorey-Duval apprit-il à lire?,” *Pratiques de la Lecture*, ed. Chartier 61.

¹⁵⁵ The terms “challenge” and “concession” in this context come from Allen, *In the Public Eye* 219.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

¹ Bronson Alcott, *Bronson Alcott Journals*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938) 16 March 1844.

² Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (New York: Dell, 1987) 96.

³ Alcott, *Little Women* 289.

⁴ Edna D. Cheney, ed., *Louisa May Alcott; Life, Letters, Journals (1889)* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995) 3.

⁵ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 3.

⁶ Louisa May Alcott, *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Madeleine B. Stern (New York: Morrow, 1976) 7–8.

⁷ For biographical material on Louisa May Alcott, see Martha Saxton, *Louisa May; A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977); Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott* (New York: Random House, 1995); Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott*; Abigail Ann Hamblen, “The Divided World of Louisa May Alcott,” *Webs and Wardrobes: Humanist and Religious World Views in Children’s Literature*, eds. Joseph O’Brine Milner and Lucy Floyd Morcock Milner (New York: UP of America, 1987) 57–64; Karen Halttunen, “The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott,” *Feminist Studies* 10.2 (Summer 1984): 233–54; Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant, “Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*” *Children’s Literature* 17 (1989): 98–123; Beverly Lyon Clark, “A Portrait of the Artist as a Little Woman,” *Children’s Literature* 17 (1989): 81–97; Sharon O’Brien, “Tomboyism and Adolescent Conflict: Three Nineteenth-Century Case Studies,” *Woman’s Being, Woman’s Place: Female Identity and Vocation in American History*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1977) 351–72; Ann B. Murphy, “The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*,” *Signs* 15.3 (Spring 1990): 562–85; Jesse Crissler, “Alcott’s Reading in *Little Women*: Shaping the Autobiographical Self,” *Resources for American Literary Studies* 20.1 (1994): 27–36.

⁸ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 30.

⁹ Martha Saxton, “The Secret Imaginings of Louisa Alcott,” *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Madeleine B. Stern (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1984) 257.

¹⁰ Halttunen, “Domestic Drama” 235.

¹¹ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 21.

¹² Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 21.

¹³ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 24.

¹⁴ Kelley, *Women’s Being* 363.

¹⁵ Saxton, “Secret Imaginings” 256–57.

¹⁶ Martha Saxton quoted in Kelley, *Women’s Being* 363.

¹⁷ Thomas H. Pauly, “*Ragged Dick* and *Little Women*: Idealized Homes and Unwanted Marriages,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 9.3 (Winter 1975): 585.

¹⁸ Pauly, “*Ragged Dick* and *Little Women*” 585.

¹⁹ Halttunen, “Domestic Drama” 233.

²⁰ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 41.

²¹ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 24.

²² For a discussion of the subversive qualities of writing see Susan Naomi Bernstein, "Writing and Little Women: Alcott's Rhetoric of Subversion," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 7.1 (Mar. 1993): 25–43.

²³ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (Summer 1966): 157–74.

²⁴ Clark, "A Portrait of the Artist" 93.

²⁵ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 114.

²⁶ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 139.

²⁷ Louisa May Alcott's closeness to her protagonist Jo shows itself in such experiences which author and heroine seem to share. Alcott wrote in her journal: "One of my earliest recollections is of playing with books in my father's study—building houses and bridges of the big dictionaries and diaries." Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 12.

²⁸ Steven Mailloux, "Cultural Rhetoric Studies: Eating Books in Nineteenth-Century America," *Reconceptualizing American Literary/Cultural Studies: Rhetoric, History, and Politics in the Humanities*, ed. William E. Cain (New York: Garland, 1996) 29.

²⁹ This work is not listed in the *National Union Catalogue*. The only work listed that might be a reference for *Undine and Sintram* is George Soane's *Undine or the Spirit of the Waters; a melo dramatic romance in two acts* (1823). *Undine* is a tale first published in 1811 by Fridrich von Fouqué and later made into a libretto set to music by E.T. A. Hoffmann (1816).

³⁰ She does however combat her "bosom enemy" (Alcott 12)—in this case her selfishness—and agrees to spend her money on a Christmas present for Marmee rather than for herself (Alcott 8).

³¹ Pauly, "Ragged Dick and Little Women" 586.

³² Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1975) 100.

³³ Pauly, "Ragged Dick and Little Women" 586.

³⁴ "Tant que la lecture est pour nous l'incitatrice dont les clefs magiques nous ouvrent au fond de nous-mêmes la porte des demeures où nous n'aurions pas su pénétrer, son rôle dans notre vie est salutaire." Marcel Proust, *Contre Saint Beuve* (Paris: Pléiade, 1971) 180.

³⁵ Rosemary Lloyd, "Reading as if for Life," *European Studies* 12 (1992): 260.

³⁶ Lloyd, "Reading as if for Life" 262.

³⁷ For a discussion of *The Heir of Redclyffe* in this context see Karen Sands O'Connor, "Why Jo Didn't Marry Laurie: Louisa May Alcott and *The Heir of Redclyffe*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15.1 (March 2001): 23–41.

³⁸ For a discussion of *The Wide, Wide World* in this context see Donna Campbell, "Sentimental Conventions and Self-Protection: *Little Women* and *The Wide, Wide World*," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 11.2 (1994): 118–29.

³⁹ Abigail Ann Hamblen, "Louisa May Alcott and the 'Revolution' in Education," *Journal of General Education* 12.2 (July 1970): 88.

⁴⁰ See for example Judith Fetterly, "Little Women: Alcott's Civil War," *Feminist Studies* 5.2 (Sum. 1979): 369–83; Susan K. Harris, "'But Is It Any Good?' Evaluating Nineteenth-Century

American Women's Fiction," *American Literature* 63.1 (March 1991): 43–61, and Estes and Lant "Dismembering the Text."

⁴¹ Susan K. Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 30.

⁴² Rosemary Lloyd, "Reading as if for Life" 262.

⁴³ Catherine R. Stimpson, "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March," *New Literary History* 21.4 (Autumn 1990): 958.

⁴⁴ Stimpson, "Reading for Love" 961.

⁴⁵ Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 100.

⁴⁶ Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 100.

⁴⁷ *The journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine B. Stern (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989) 132.

⁴⁸ Susan Naomi Bernstein, "Writing and *Little Women*: Alcott's Rhetoric of Subversion," *American Transcendental Quarterly* New Series 7.1 (March 1993): 32.

⁴⁹ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lillies* (1865) *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (New York: Langmans, Green and Co., 1903–12) 18:129.

⁵⁰ She takes in a "little quadrone" (Alcott 586), which was unacceptable.

⁵¹ Richard H. Brodhead, *Culture of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 90.

⁵² Clark, "A Portrait of the Artist" 84.

⁵³ Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 97.

⁵⁴ Frances Armstrong, "'Here Little and Hereafter Bliss:' *Little Women* and the Deferral of Greatness," *American Literature* 64.3 (Sept. 1992): 454.

⁵⁵ Jo's statement refers to the "practice [...of] repeating sequences of words beginning with the letter p—prunes, peas, potatoes, papa, prisms—in order to effect the small puckered mouth that was so popular" for a woman. Jo admits that she is limited to such inane occupations of a woman. Nancy Baker, *The Beauty Trap: Exploring Woman's Greatest Obsession* (New York: F. Watts, 1984) 21.

⁵⁶ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Norton, 1979) 212.

⁵⁷ Joy A. Marsella, *The Promise of Destiny: Children and Women in the Short Stories of Louisa May Alcott* (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1983) 27.

⁵⁸ Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 104.

⁵⁹ Eve Kornfeld and Susan Jackson, "The Female Bildungsroman in Nineteenth-Century America: Parameters of a Vision," *Journal of American Culture* 10.4 (Winter 1987): 74.

⁶⁰ Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* 92.

⁶¹ Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 105.

⁶² Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 96.

⁶³ James D. Wallace, "Where the Absent Father Went; Alcott's *Work*," *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*, eds. Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowalski-Wallace (Carbondale, 111.: Southern Illinois UP, 1989) 259.

⁶⁴ Madelon Bedell, *Louisa May Alcott; Little Women* (New York: Random House, 1983) 40.

⁶⁵ Greta Gaard, "'Self-Denial Was All the Fashion': Repressing Anger in Little Women," *Papers on Language and Literature* 27.1 (Winter 1991): 16.

⁶⁶ Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* 101.

⁶⁷ Sarah Elbert, introduction, *Work: A Story of Experience, by Louisa May Alcott, Critical Essays*, ed. Stern 196.

⁶⁸ Spacks, *Female Imagination* 101.

⁶⁹ Frances Armstrong, "'Here Little, and Hereafter Bliss,'" 463.

⁷⁰ Halttunen, "Domestic Drama" 233.

⁷¹ Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 380.

⁷² Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 380.

⁷³ Bernstein, "Writing and *Little Women*" 29.

⁷⁴ Murphy, "The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities" 582.

⁷⁵ This term comes from Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

⁷⁶ Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 111.

⁷⁷ Veronica Bassil, "The Artist at Home: The Domestication of Louisa May Alcott," *Studies in American Fiction* 15.2 (Autumn 1987): 193.

⁷⁸ Madeleine B. Stern, introduction, *Critical Essays* 3.

⁷⁹ Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 376.

⁸⁰ Bronson Alcott, *Bronson Alcott Journals* 16 March 1844.

⁸¹ See chapter five of this book for the complete quote of what follows in this paragraph.

⁸² All quotes (exceptions indicated) in this paragraph are from Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and The New Woman Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 16.

⁸³ Murphy, "The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities" 582.

⁸⁴ She is not, however, a whore as the discourse about the demonic woman also indicates.

⁸⁵ Gaard, "'Self-Denial Was All the Fashion'" 16.

⁸⁶ Gaard, "'Self-Denial Was All the Fashion'" 7.

⁸⁷ Murphy, "The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities" 566.

⁸⁸ Mailloux, "Cultural Rhetoric Studies" 27; See also Brodhead, *Culture of Letters* for an explanation of discipline in the nineteenth century.

⁸⁹ Glenn Hendler, "The Limits of Sympathy; Louisa May Alcott and the Sentimental Novel," *American Literary History* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 702.

⁹⁰ Mailloux, "Cultural Rhetoric Studies" 29.

⁹¹ Linda K. Kerber, "Can a Woman Be an Individual? The Limits of Puritan Tradition in the Early Republic," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25.1 (Spring 1983): 165.

⁹² Mailloux, "Cultural Rhetoric Studies" 29.

⁹³ Harris, "'But Is It Any Good?'" 54.

⁹⁴ Mailloux, "Cultural Rhetoric Studies" 28.

⁹⁵ Murphy, "The Border of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities" 574.

⁹⁶ Murphy, "The Border of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities" 574.

⁹⁷ Ellen Butler Donovan, "Reading for Profit and Pleasure: *Little Women* and *The Story of a Bad Boy*" *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 18.2 (1994): 146.

⁹⁸ Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978) 62.

⁹⁹ Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* 92.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, "Alcott's Portraits of the Artist as Little Woman," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5.5 (Nov. Dec. 1982): 450.

¹⁰¹ Keyser, "Alcott's Portraits of the Artist" 454.

¹⁰² As Keyser points out, Meg also plays a role in transforming Jo into a little woman: "Like the benign witch in the play, Meg opposes what to her seems villainous or shocking in Jo, but, like don Pedro, she also opposes what is heroic or creative. She does not realize that to subdue the one is to stifle the other...As the model lady, wife and finally, mother, Meg represents the patriarchal pattern imposed on women that Jo would escape" but finally has to accept. Keyser, "Alcott's Portraits of the Artist" 449.

¹⁰³ Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* 90.

¹⁰⁴ Bernstein, "Alcott's Rhetoric of Subversion" 35.

¹⁰⁵ Armstrong, "'Here Little and Hereafter Bliss'" 459.

¹⁰⁶ Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 120.

¹⁰⁷ I wonder whether all the millions of readers who have shed tears over Beth's demise do not unconsciously grieve for the burial of the tomboy Jo with whom they all identified. Is it for this reason that Beth's death is so traumatic?

¹⁰⁸ Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 115.

¹⁰⁹ Discussion of de Beauvoir's attitude in Allen, *In the Public Eye* 221.

¹¹⁰ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 141.

¹¹¹ Cheney, *Louisa May Alcott* 141.

¹¹² *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott* 125.

¹¹³ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott* 125. Readers then and now seem to be more upset about the fact that Jo does not "get" Laurie, whereas many of today's critics are particularly unhappy that Jo has to marry someone as stifling as Professor Bhaer.

¹¹⁴ Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 101.

¹¹⁵ Bedell, *Louisa May Alcott* 41.

¹¹⁶ Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 382.

¹¹⁷ Stephanie Harrington, "Does *Little Women* Belittle Women?," *Critical Essays*, ed Stern 111.

¹¹⁸ Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 382.

¹¹⁹ Wallace, "Where the Absent Father Went" 260.

¹²⁰ Bedell, *Louisa May Alcott* 42.

¹²¹ Fetterly, "Alcott's Civil War" 382.

¹²² Estes and Lant, "Dismembering the Text" 117.

¹²³ Clark, "A Portrait of the Artist" 91.

¹²⁴ Madeleine B. Stern, *The Feminist Alcott; Stories of a Woman's Power* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1996) xxi.

¹²⁵ Harris, "'But Is It Any Good?'" 50.

¹²⁶ Quoted in David A. Randall and John T. Winterich, "One Hundred Good Novels," *Critical Essays* 87.

¹²⁷ Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* 71.

¹²⁸ Beverly Lyon Clark, "Domesticating the School Story, Regendering a Genre: Alcott's *Little Men*," *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 332.

¹²⁹ LaSalle Corbell Picket, "Louisa May Alcott," *Across My Path: Memories of People I Have Known* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1970) 107–8.

¹³⁰ Picket, "Louisa May Alcott" 107–8.

¹³¹ Brodhead, *Culture of Letters* 89.

¹³² Halttunen, "Domestic Drama" 243.

¹³³ Louisa May Alcott in a letter to Maria S. Porter (1892). Maria S. Porter, "Recollections of Louisa May Alcott," *New England Quarterly* 6 (1892): 13–14.

¹³⁴ See Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood."

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

¹"Laisser une femme libre de lire les livres que la nature de son esprit la porte à choisir!... Mais c'est introduire l'étincelle dans une sainte barbe, c'est pis que cela, c'est d'apprendre à votre femme à se passer de vous, à vivre dans un monde imaginaire, dans un paradis." All translations are mine. Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du Mariage* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968) 143.

²"en lisant des drames et des romans, la femme, créature encore plus susceptible que nous de s'exalter, doit-elle éprouver d'enivrantes extases. Elle se crée une existence idéale auprès de laquelle tout pâlit; elle ne tarde pas à tenter de réaliser cette vie voluptueuse, à essayer d'en transporter la magie en elle."

³For a discussion of Emma's problems see Roland A. Champagne, "Emma's Incompetence as Madame Bovary," *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 57.2 (2002): 103–19.

⁴Carla L. Peterson, *The Determined Reader: Gender and Culture in the Novel from Napoleon to Victoria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 164.

⁵Carla L. Peterson, "The Heroine as Reader in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Emma Bovary and Maggie Tulliver," *Comparative Literature Studies* 27.2 (June 1980): 169.

⁶Peterson, "Heroine as Reader" 169.

⁷Peterson, *Determined Reader* 164.

⁸"Les bonnes religieuses...s'aperçurent avec des grands étonnements que Mlle Rouault semblait échapper à leur soin. Elles lui avaient...tant prodigué les offices, les retraites, les neuvaines et les sermons, si bien prêché le respect que l'on doit aux saints...qu'elle fit comme les chevaux que l'on tire par la bride: elle s'arrêta court et le mors lui sortit des dents...[elle] s'irritait davantage contre la discipline, qui était quelque chose d'antipathique à sa constitution."

⁹ Many critics have studied Emma's reading habits. See, for example, José Migraine, "Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*. Les Lectures d'Emma: Genèse et fonctionnement narrative," *diss.*, U of Montreal, 1994; James Winchell, "Reading (in) *Madame Bovary*" *Approaches to Teaching Flaubert's Madame Bovary*, ed. Laurence Porter et. al. (New York: MLA, 1995) 98–105; Evelyne Ender, "Les Lectures d'Emma Bovary: Premiers éléments d'une critique féministe," *Études de Lettres* 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1995): 91–104.

¹⁰ R.J. Sherrington, *Three Novels By Flaubert: A Study of Techniques* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970) 148.

¹¹ Carla L. Peterson, "Reading and Imagining in *Madame Bovary*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 27.2 (1980): 163.

¹² Ulrich Mölk, "Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary: Moeurs de province*," *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur; Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, ed. Theodor Wolpers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 222.

¹³ "à table même elle apportait son livre, et elle tournait les feuillets, pendant que Charles mangeait en lui parlant." For a discussion of the importance of eating, see Lilian R. Furst, "The Role of Food in *Madame Bovary*," *Orbis Litterarum* 34 (1979): 53–65; Elissa Marder, "Trauma, Addiction, and Temporal Bulimia in *Madame Bovary*," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 27.3 (Fall 1997): 49–64; Patricia A. McEachern, "Ture Lies: Fasting for Force or Fashion in *Madame Bovary*?" *Romance Notes* 37.3 (Spring 1997): 289–98.

¹⁴ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1987) 16.

¹⁵ Rosemary Lloyd, *Madame Bovary* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 96.

¹⁶ "Histoire saintes."

¹⁷ "Conférences de l'abbé Frayssinous." Roger Bismut points out that this famous priest Frayssinous (1765–1841) became head of the University, then minister of church affairs in the two cabinets under Villèle. He also stresses that these *conférences* are not strictly speaking literature. Roger Bismut, "L'appareil littéraire dans *Madame Bovary*," *Les Lettres Romanes* 39.1-2 (Feb.-May 1985): 29.

¹⁸ *Génie du Christianisme*

¹⁹ "elle se tournait... vers les accidentés, elle n'aimait la mer qu'à cause de ses tempêtes, et la verdure seulement lorsqu'elle était clairsemée parmi les ruines."

²⁰ "elle aimait la brebis malade, le Sacré Coeur percé de flèches aiguës, ou le pauvre Jésus, qui tombe en marchant sous sa croix."

²¹ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 163.

²² For a discussion of the keepsakes see Carol Rifelj, "'Ces tableaux du monde: 'Keepsakes in *Madame Bovary*,'" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 25.3–4 (Spring-Summer 1997): 360–85.

²³ "amours, amants, amantes, dames persécutées s'évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires, postillons qu'on tue à tous les relais, chevaux qu'on crève à tous les pages, forêts sombres, troubles du coeur... messieurs braves comme des lions..."

²⁴ "elle s'éprit des choses historiques."

²⁵ "cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir."

²⁶ "châtelaines au long corsage"

²⁷ For a discussion of romance see Paul Andrew Tipper, “*Madame Bovary* and the Bitter-Sweet Taste of Romance,” *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 50.4 (1995): 207–13.

²⁸ “la balustrade d’un balcon, un jeune homme en court manteau qui serrait dans ses bras une jeune fille en robe blanche,” “des ladies anglaises à boucles blondes,” “rêvant sur des sofas près d’un billet décacheté, contempl[ant] la lune.”

²⁹ “sultans à longues pipes, pâmés sous des tonnelles, aux bras des bayadères.”

³⁰ “un des moyens les plus dangereux pour ébranler les sentiments de réserve et de moralité.” P. Casselle, “Le régime législatif,” *Histoire de l’Édition Française*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin et. al. (Paris: Promodis, 1982) III:53.

³¹ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 164.

³² Harry Levin, *Gates of Horn* (New York: Oxford UP, 1963) 257.

³³ Lloyd, *Madame Bovary* 95.

³⁴ Lloyd, *Madame Bovary* 95.

³⁵ Peterson, “Reading and Imagining” 164.

³⁶ “Il fallait qu’elle pût retirer des choses [des livres] une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son Coeur.”

³⁷ Jean-Maurice Gautier, “Lectures d’Emma,” *Actes du Colloque International de Clermont-Ferrand: Le Lecteur et la Lecture dans l’oeuvre*, ed. Alain Montandon (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, 1982)61.

³⁸ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 171.

³⁹ “la littérature pour ses excitations passionnelles.”

⁴⁰ “elle lut Balzac et George Sand, y cherchant des assouvissements imaginaires pour ses convoitises personnelles.”

⁴¹ Sarah Webster Goodwin, “Libraries, Kitsch and Gender in *Madame Bovary*,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 28.1 (Spring 1988): 62.

⁴² Peterson, *Determined Reader* 165.

⁴³ “elle avait rêvé la maisonette de bambous, le nègre Domingo, le chien Fidèle, mais surtout l’amitié douce de quelque bon petit frère.” For a discussion of the sweet little brother see Brigitte LeJuez, “Le ‘Bon Petit Frère’ et le rêve d’Emma Bovary,” *French Studies Bulletin: A Quarterly Supplement* 69 (Winter 1998): 17–19.

⁴⁴ Lloyd, *Madame Bovary* 95.

⁴⁵ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 165.

⁴⁶ “Les comparaisons de fiancé, d’époux, d’amant céleste et de mariage éternel qui reviennent dans les sermons lui soulevaient au fond de l’âme des douceurs inattendues.”

⁴⁷ “les mêmes paroles qu’elle murmurait jadis à son amant, dans les épanchements de l’adultère.”

⁴⁸ “un autre amour au-dessus de tous les amours, sans intermittence ni fin, et qui s’accroîtrait éternellement.”

⁴⁹ “le plus grand baiser d’amour qu’elle eût jamais donné.”

⁵⁰ “qui se suivent tout d’une haleine, où l’on a peur.”

⁵¹ Barbara Smalley, “*Madame Bovary*: Illusion, Counterpoint, and the Darkened Universe,” *Emma Bovary*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1994) 76.

⁵² “dans un livre une idée vague que l’on a eue, quelque image obscurcie qui revient de loin, et comme l’exposition entière de votre sentiment le plus délié.”

⁵³ Ion K. Collas, *Madame Bovary: A Psychoanalytic Reading* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1985) 13.

⁵⁴ William VanderWolk, “Memory and the Transformative Act in *Madame Bovary*,” *Emma Bovary*, ed. Bloom 176.

⁵⁵ “Tu es mon roi, mon idole! tu es bon! tu es beau! tu es intelligent! tu es fort!”

⁵⁶ “des lèvres libertines ou vénales...ne croyait que faiblement à la candeur de celles-là.”

⁵⁷ “comme si la plénitude de l’âme ne débordait pas quelquefois par les métaphores les plus vides.”

⁵⁸ See Naomi Schor, “For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in *Madame Bovary*,” *Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 67–68.

⁵⁹ “d’après ses théories qu’elle croyait bonnes, elle voulut se donner de l’amour. Au clair de lune, dans le jardin, elle récitait tout ce qu’elle savait par coeur de rimes passionnées.”

⁶⁰ “déclarait adorer les enfants; c’était sa consolation, sa joie, sa folie, et elle accompagnait ses caresses d’expansions lyriques, qui à d’autres qu’à des Yonvillais, eussent rappelé la Sachette de Notre Dame de Paris.”

⁶¹ “les sentiments tempérés, comme il y en a dans la nature.”

⁶² Mölk, “Gustave Flaubert” 223.

⁶³ “Elle se laissa donc glisser dans les méandres lamartiniens, écouta les harpes sur les lacs, tous les chants de cygne mourant, toutes les chutes de feuilles, les vierges pures qui montent au ciel, et la voix de l’Eternel discourant dans les vallons.”

⁶⁴ Mölk, “Gustave Flaubert” 223.

⁶⁵ “tout ce qui l’entourait immédiatement, campagne ennuyeuse, petits bourgeois imbéciles, médiocrité de l’existence.”

⁶⁶ “elle nie le monde chaque fois qu’elle lit.” Joëlle Gleize, *Le double miroir: le livre dans les livres de Stendhal à Proust* (Paris: Hachette Supérieur, 1992) 155.

⁶⁷ “plus vague que l’Océan, miroitait donc aux yeux d’Emma dans une atmosphère vermeille.”

⁶⁸ “On se promène immobile dans des pays que l’on croit voir, et votre pensée, s’enlaçant à la fiction, se joue dans les détails où poursuit le contour des aventures.”

⁶⁹ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 170.

⁷⁰ “Entre les lignes.”

⁷¹ “tableaux.” Leo Bersani, “Flaubert and Emma Bovary: The Hazards of Literary Fusion,” *Novel* 8.1 (Fall 1974): 20.

⁷² Bersani, “Flaubert and Emma Bovary” 20.

⁷³ “Au galop de quatre chevaux, elle était emportée depuis huit jours vers un pays nouveau, d’où ils ne reviendraient plus.”

⁷⁴ Peterson, "Reading and Imagining" 169.

⁷⁵ "souvent, du haut d'une montagne, ils apercevaient tout à coup quelque cité splendide avec des dômes, des ponts, des navires, des forêts de citronniers et des cathédrales de marbre blanc, dont les clochers aigus portaient des nids de cigogne. On marchait au pas, à cause des grandes dalles, et il y avait par terre des bouquets de fleurs que vous offraient des femmes habillées en corset rouge. On entendait sonner des cloches, hennir les mulets, avec le murmure des guitares et le bruit des fontaines, dont la vapeur s'envolant rafraîchissait des tas de fruits, disposés en pyramide au pied des statues pâles, qui souriaient sous les jets d'eau."

⁷⁶ Peterson, "Reading and Imagining" 170.

⁷⁷ Peterson, "Reading and Imagining" 170.

⁷⁸ Ullmann says that the "dreamlike and hallucinatory visions may acquire a spurious air of reality by being related in free indirect style." Stephen Ullman, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957) 113.

⁷⁹ Stephen Heath, *Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992) 60.

⁸⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1982) 170.

⁸¹ "fut intérieurement satisfaite de se sentir arrivée du premier coup à ce rare idéal des existences pâles, où ne parviennent jamais les coeurs médiocres."

⁸² "il semble que c'est vous qui palpitez sous leurs costumes."

⁸³ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 76.

⁸⁴ "J'ai un amant! un amant!"

⁸⁵ VanderWolk, "Memory" 179.

⁸⁶ "Elle devenait elle-même comme une partie véritable de ces imaginations et réalisait la longue rêverie de sa jeunesse, en se considérant dans ce type d'amoureuse qu'elle avait tant envié."

⁸⁷ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 165.

⁸⁸ "longues bottes molles, se disant que sans doute elle n'en avait jamais vu de pareilles."

⁸⁹ "Elle voulut qu'il se vêtît tout en noir et se laissât pousser une pointe au menton, pour ressembler aux portraits de Louis XIII."

⁹⁰ Bersani, "Flaubert and Emma Bovary" 21.

⁹¹ "l'amoureuse de tous les romans, l'héroïne de tous les drames, le vague *elle de* tous les volumes de vers. Il retrouvait sur ses épaules la couleur ambrée de l'*odalisque au bain*; elle avait le corsage long des côtelaines féodales; elle ressemblait aussi à la *femme pâle de Barcelone*, mais elle était par dessus tout Ange!"

⁹² "et dans l'orgueil de sa devotion, Emma se comparait à ces grandes dames d'autrefois, dont elle avait rêvé la gloire sur un portrait de La Vallière."

⁹³ VanderWolk, "Memory" 178.

⁹⁴ LaCapra, *Madam Bovary on Trial* 243.

⁹⁵ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 62–63.

⁹⁶ “il était incapable d’héroïsme, faible, banal, plus mou qu’une femme, avare d’ailleurs et pusillanime.”

⁹⁷ VanderWolk, “Memory” 179.

⁹⁸ Schor, “Writing, Speech, and Difference” 72.

⁹⁹ “une femme doit toujours écrire à son amant.”

¹⁰⁰ “elle n’eût personne a qui écrire.”

¹⁰¹ William C. VanderWolk, “Writing the Masculine: Gender and Creativity in Madame Bovary,” *Romance Quarterly* 37.2 (May 1990): 151.

¹⁰² “fleurs, de vers, de la lune et des étoiles, ressources naïves d’une passion affaiblie.”

¹⁰³ “en écrivant, elle percevait un autre homme, un fantôme fait de ses plus ardents souvenirs, de ses lectures les plus belles, des ses convoitises les plus fortes; et il devenait à la fin si véritable, et accessible, qu’elle en palpait émerveillée, sans pouvoir néanmoins le nettement imaginer, tant il se perdait, comme un dieu...elle le sentait près d’elle, il allait venir et l’enlèverait tout entière dans un baiser. Ensuite elle retombait à plat, brisée; car ces élans d’amour vague la fatiguaient plus que des grandes debauches.”

¹⁰⁴ “la contrée bleuâtre où les échelles de soie se balancent à des balcons, sous le souffle des fleurs, dans la clarté de la lune.”

¹⁰⁵ For the theme of the circle and the cycle, see Marc Gérard, *La Passion de Charles Bovary* (Paris: Imago, 1995).

¹⁰⁶ “J’ai tout lu.”

¹⁰⁷ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 169.

¹⁰⁸ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 170.

¹⁰⁹ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 70.

¹¹⁰ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 69.

¹¹¹ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 70.

¹¹² “elle enviait les existences tumultueuses, les nuits masquées, les insolents plaisirs avec tous les éperdements qu’elle ne connaissait pas et qu’ils devaient donner.”

¹¹³ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 70.

¹¹⁴ “Charles finissait par s’estimer davantage de ce qu’il possédait une pareille femme.”

¹¹⁵ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 70.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage* 143.

¹¹⁷ Michael Riffaterre, “Flaubert’s Presuppositions,” *Critical Essays on Gustave Flaubert*, ed. Laurence M. Porter (Boston, G.K. Hall & Co. 1986) 80.

¹¹⁸ Annemarie Kleinert, “Ein Modejournal des 19. Jahrhunderts und seine Leserin: *La Corbeille* und *Madame Bovary*,” *Romanische Forschung* 90.4 (1978): 472.

¹¹⁹ “félicité...passion et...ivresse.”

¹²⁰ Victor Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 83.

¹²¹ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 170.

¹²² Louise J. Kaplan, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 208.

¹²³ Paul Schmidt, "Addiction and Emma Bovary," *The Midwest Quarterly* 31.2 (Winter 1990): 163.

¹²⁴ "Il jugea toute pudeur incommode. Il la traita sans façon. Il en fit quelque chose de souple et de corrompu. C'était une sorte d'attachement idiot plein d'admiration pour lui."

¹²⁵ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 171.

¹²⁶ "l'éternelle monotonie de la passion," "platitudes du mariage."

¹²⁷ Although she and Rodolphe decide to take Berthe in the beginning, they never mention her again in their plans for escape.

¹²⁸ "une femme est empêchéé continuellement. Inerte et flexible à la fois, elle a contre elle les molleses de la chair avec les dépendances de la loi...il y a toujours quelque convenance qui reticent."

¹²⁹ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 69.

¹³⁰ "Elle s'occupa les premiers jours, à méditer des changements dans sa maison," "savait conduire sa maison. Elle envoyait aux malades le compte des visites...Quand ils avaient, le dimanche, quelque voisin à dîner, elle trouvait moyen d'offrir un plat coquet."

¹³¹ "elle aime...toujours rester dans sa chambre, à lire."

¹³² "elle restait...des journées entières sans s'habiller, portait des bas de coton gris."

¹³³ Mrs. Harold Sandwith, "Becky Sharp and Emma Bovary," *Emma Bovary*, ed. Bloom 21.

¹³⁴ "C'est une chose étrange, pensait Emma, comme cette enfant est laide!"

¹³⁵ "Elle voulut lui apprendre à lire; Berthe avait beau pleurer, elle ne s'irritait plus."

¹³⁶ Lawrence Thornton, "The Fairest of Them All: Modes of Vision in Madame Bovary," *PMLA* 93.5 (October 1978): 989.

¹³⁷ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 248.

¹³⁸ VanderWolk, "Memory" 178.

¹³⁹ "l'on ne distinguait plus l'égoïsme de la charité."

¹⁴⁰ "quelquefois [elle] lui [à Charles] rentrait dans son gilet la bordure rouge de ses tricots, rajustait sa cravate, ou jetait à l'écart les gants déteints qu'il se disposait à passer; et ce n'était pas comme il croyait pour lui; c'était pour elle même, par expansion d'égoïsme."

¹⁴¹ "elle inventait de petits péchés afin de rester là plus longtemps, à genoux dans l'ombre."

¹⁴² "son existence ne fut plus qu'un assemblage de mensonges, où elle enveloppait son amour comme dans des voiles, pour le cacher."

¹⁴³ "un besoin, une manie, un plaisir, au point que, si elle disait avoir passé, hier, par le côté droit d'une rue, il fallait croire qu'elle avait pris par le côté gauche."

¹⁴⁴ LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* 182.

¹⁴⁵ LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* 182.

¹⁴⁶ Furst, "Angel Gone Astray" 21.

¹⁴⁷ "Mme Bovary se compromettait"

¹⁴⁸ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 173.

¹⁴⁹ For discussions of the disruption of gender roles see Mary Orr, “Reversible Roles: Gender Trouble in *Madame Bovary*,” *New Approaches in Flaubert Studies*, eds. Tony Williams and Mary Orr (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1999) 49–64; Mary Orr, *Madame Bovary; Representations of the Masculine* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 1999); Roger Huss, “Masculinité et fémininité dans *Madame Bovary* et *Ulysse*,” *La Revue des Lettres Modernes: Histoire des Idées et des Littératures* 953–58:102–22. See also Charles Baudelaire’s comments as discussed further down.

¹⁵⁰ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 172.

¹⁵¹ “la meilleure épouse de Normandie.”

¹⁵² Furst, “Angel Gone Astray” 24.

¹⁵³ “poussa un cri et tomba roide par terre, à la renverse... [elle] avait le long du corps des mouvements convulsifs.”

¹⁵⁴ Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Social Research* 39:4 (Winter 1972): 672.

¹⁵⁵ Rosenberg, “Hysterical Woman” 663.

¹⁵⁶ “tragédie... est de n’être pas libre.” Mario Vargas Llosa, *L’orgie perpétuelle (Flaubert et Madame Bovary)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 137.

¹⁵⁷ “elle souhaitait un fils; il serait fort et brun, elle l’appellerait Georges; et cette idée d’avoir pour enfant un mâle était comme la revanche en espoir de toutes ses impuissances passées. Un homme, au moins, est libre.”

¹⁵⁸ “reportait sur cette tête d’enfant [Charles] toutes ses vanités éparses, brisées. Elle rêvait hautes positions, elle le voyait déjà grand, beau, spirituel, établi.”

¹⁵⁹ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 173.

¹⁶⁰ “elle.. broderait des pantoufles; elle s’occuperait du ménage... on lui trouverait quelque brave garçon ayant un état solide.”

¹⁶¹ Charles Baudelaire, “*Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert,” *Emma Bovary*, ed. Bloom 6.

¹⁶² “des fonctions viriles.” Llosa, *L’orgie perpétuelle* 140.

¹⁶³ “Il ne discutait pas ses idées; il acceptait tous ses goûts; il devenait sa maîtresse plutôt qu’elle n’était la sienne.”

¹⁶⁴ Leo Bersani, “The Anxious Imagination,” *Emma Bovary*, ed. Bloom 43. See also Lawrence Birken, “*Madame Bovary* and the Dissolution of Bourgeois Sexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2.4 (Apr. 1992): 609–20.

¹⁶⁵ “identification avec la mentalité du mâle est totale.” Llosa, *L’orgie perpétuelle* 140.

¹⁶⁶ These passages are part of a longer quote presented in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁷ All quotes in this paragraph: Lyn Pykett, *The ‘Improper Feminine’: The Women’s Sensation Novel and The New Woman Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 16.

¹⁶⁸ Alcott, *Little Women* 422.

¹⁶⁹ “elle répondait avec brutalité.”

¹⁷⁰ “se déshabillait brutalement.”

¹⁷¹ Riffaterre, “Flaubert’s Presuppositions” 81.

¹⁷² “Elle aurait voulu battre les hommes, leur cracher au visage, les broyer tous.”

¹⁷³ “d’une voix tremblante de colère.”

¹⁷⁴ “elle reporta sur lui seul la haine nombreuse qui résultait de ses ennuis.”

¹⁷⁵ “pâle, frémissante, enragée, furetant d’un oeil en pleurs l’horizon vide, et comme se délectant à la haine qui l’étouffait.”

¹⁷⁶ “une satisfaction de vengeance.”

¹⁷⁷ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 269.

¹⁷⁸ “des livres extravagants.”

¹⁷⁹ “Souvent une terreur la prenait, elle poussa un cri, Charles accourait.”

¹⁸⁰ “il y avait sur ce front couvert de gouttes froides, sur ces lèvres balbutiantes, dans ces prunelles égarées, dans l’étreinte de ces bras quelque chose d’extrême.”

¹⁸¹ Smalley, “Illusion, Counterpoint and the Darkened Universe” 72; See also Phillip A. Duncan, “Symbolic Green and Satanic Presence in *Madame Bovary*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 13.2–3 (Winter-Spring 1985): 99–104.

¹⁸² “[elle] arrach[ait] le lacet mince de son corset, qui sifflait autour de ses hanches comme une couleuvre qui glisse.”

¹⁸³ “une hardiesse infernale s’échappait de ses prunelles enflammées, et les paupières se rapprochaient d’une façon lascive et encourageante.”

¹⁸⁴ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 247.

¹⁸⁵ Cited in Furst, “Angel Gone Astray” 24.

¹⁸⁶ Lilian R. Furst, “The Power of the Powerless: A Trio of Nineteenth-Century French Disorderly Eaters,” *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, eds. Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992) 160.

¹⁸⁷ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 178.

¹⁸⁸ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 178.

¹⁸⁹ “Ah! Elle s’occupe! A quoi donc? A lire des romans, des mauvais livres, des ouvrages qui sont contre la religion et dans lesquels on se moque des prêtres par des discours tirés de Voltaire. Mais tout cela va loin, mon pauvre enfant, et quelqu’un qui n’a pas de religion finit toujours par tourner mal.”

¹⁹⁰ “étant pas très versé dans ces matières sitôt qu’elles dépassaient une certaine mesure, il écrivit à M. Boulard, libraire de Monseigneur, de lui envoyer quelque chose de fameux pour une personne du sexe, qui était pleine d’esprit.”

¹⁹¹ “C’étaient de petits manuels par demandes et par réponses, des pamphlets d’un ton rogue...des espèces de romans à cartonnage rose et style douceâtre.”

¹⁹² “s’irrita contre les prescriptions du culte; l’arrogance des écrits polémiques...et les contes profanes relevés de religion lui parurent écrits dans une telle ignorance du monde.”

¹⁹³ Mölk, “Gustave Flaubert” 219.

¹⁹⁴ Riffaterre, “Flaubert’s Presuppositions” 82.

¹⁹⁵ Peterson, “Heroine as Reader” 178.

¹⁹⁶ “Oui..., c’est vrai..., tu es bon toi” and “elle lui passait la main dans les cheveux, lentement.”

¹⁹⁷ For a discussion of the beggar see Sheila Bell, “‘Un Pauvre Diable’: The Blind Beggar in *Madame Bovary*,” *Studies in French Fiction in Honour of Vivienne Milne*, ed. Robert Gibson (London: Grant & Cutler, 1988) 25–41.

¹⁹⁸ “Et Emma se mit à rire, d’un rire atroce, frénétique, désespéré, croyant voir la face hideuse du misérable, qui se dressait dans les ténèbres éternelles comme un épouvantement.” See Roy Chandler Caldwell, “Madame Bovary’s Last Laugh,” *French Forum* 25:1 (Jan. 2000): 55–74.

¹⁹⁹ Peterson, *Determined Reader* 175.

²⁰⁰ “cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir.”

²⁰¹ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 62.

²⁰² Goodwin, “Libraries, Kitsch, and Gender” 64.

²⁰³ VanderWolk, “Memory” 177.

²⁰⁴ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 68.

²⁰⁵ LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* 183.

²⁰⁶ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 75.

²⁰⁷ Goodwin, “Libraries, Kitsch, and Gender” 60.

²⁰⁸ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 263.

²⁰⁹ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 263.

²¹⁰ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 263.

²¹¹ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 268.

²¹² “distance critique.” Gleize, *Le double miroir* 156.

²¹³ Lilian R. Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984) 78.

²¹⁴ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 86.

²¹⁵ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 79.

²¹⁶ Heath, *Madame Bovary* 64.

²¹⁷ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 246.

²¹⁸ Don Quixote remains important for Gustave Flaubert throughout his life: “I am taking notes about don quichotte [*sic*] and Mr. mignot [*sic*] says they are very good,” “Je prends des notes sur don quichotte et mr mignot dit qu’ils sont très bien” (15 January 1832) in Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* v.1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) 5–6; “I am rereading at the moment the new Damas-Hinard translation of *Don Quichotte*. I am stunned, I am longing for Spain. What a book! What a book! How his poetics is happily melancholic,” “Je relis maintenant *Don Quichotte* dans la nouvelle traduction de Damas-Hinard. J’en suis ébloui, j’en ai la maladie de l’Espagne. Quel livre! quel livre! comme cette poésie-là est gaiement mélancolique! (November 1847) *Correspondance* v. 1 487; “I am finding all my origins in this book which I had memorized before knowing how to read—*Don Quichotte*,” “Je retrouve toutes mes origines dans le livre que je savais par coeur avant de savoir lire, *Don Quichotte*” (1852) *Correspondance* v. 2111. For a discussion of Flaubert and Cervantes see Soledad Carmen Fox, “Cervantes, Flaubert, and the Quixotic Counter Genre,” *diss.*, City U of New York, 2001.

²¹⁹ Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony* 90.

²²⁰ Levin, *Gates of Horn* 250.

²²¹ Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert* 85.

²²² Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert* 85.

²²³ “incapable de soutenir jusqu’au bout ses illusions.” Jean-Pierre Richard, “La Création de la forme chez Flaubert,” *Littérature et sensation* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954) 202.

²²⁴ “pauvres mains.”

²²⁵ “Je suis un vieux romantique enragé, ou encrouté.” (5 May 1857) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v.2 710.

²²⁶ Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert* 83.

²²⁷ Peterson, “Reading and Imagining” 163.

²²⁸ Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert* 37 and 83.

²²⁹ Henry James, “Gustave Flaubert,” *Emma Bovary*, ed. Bloom 11.

²³⁰ (14 November 1850) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 709.

²³¹ (14 August 1835) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 20.

²³² James Winchell, “Reading (in) *Madame Bovary*,” *Teaching Flaubert’s Madame Bovary*, eds. Porter and Gray 101.

²³³ “comme si la plénitude de l’âme ne débordait pas quelquefois par les métaphores les plus vides, puisque personne, jamais, ne peut donner l’exacte mesure de ses besoins, ni de ses conceptions, ni de ses douleurs, et que la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles.”

²³⁴ “N’ as tu pas vu que toute l’ironie, dont j’assaille le sentiment dans mes oeuvres n’était qu’un cri de vaincu, à moins que ce ne soit un chant de victoire?” (25 February 1854) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 2 526.

²³⁵ (23 December 1853) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 2 483.

²³⁶ “Aujourd’hui par exemple, homme et femme tout ensemble, amant et maîtresse à la fois, je me suis promené à cheval dans une forêt, par un après-midi d’automne, sous des feuilles jaunes, et j’étais les chevaux, les feuilles, le vent, les paroles qu’ils se disaient et le soleil rouge qui faisait s’entre-fermer leurs paupières noyées d’amour.” (23 December 1853) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 2 483–84.

²³⁷ “Voilà une des rares journées de ma vie que j’ai passée dans l’Illusion.” (23 December 1953) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 2 483.

²³⁸ (14 November 1840) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 76.

²³⁹ “Ah! que je voudrais vivre en Espagne, en Italie, ou même en Provence!” (14 November 1840) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 75.

²⁴⁰ “toujours...comme des souvenirs...de rivages embaumés, de mers bleues.” (14 November 1840) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 76.

²⁴¹ For a discussion of the significance of the color blue in *Madame Bovary*, see Stirling Haig, *The Madame Bovary Blues* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987) 79–93; and D.L. Demorest, *L’Expression Figurée et Symbolique dans L’Oeuvre de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: Presses Modernes, 1931; reprinted Geneva: Slatkine, 1967).

²⁴² “cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses.”

²⁴³ “Quant à mon fatalisme que tu me reproches, il est ancré en moi. J’y crois fermement. Je nie la liberté individuelle parce que je ne me sens pas libre.” (18 September 1846) Flaubert, *Correspondance* v. 1 94.

²⁴⁴ For an explanation, see Ana-Isabel Aliaga Weber, “Ecrire la vie ordinaire: Country Life

in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*," M.A. thesis, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1991, 15.

NOTE TO THE CONCLUSION

¹"Le démon c'est le livre. Lire c'est être possédé." All translations are mine. Daniel Fabre, "Le livre et sa magie. Les lecteurs dans les sociétés pyrénéennes aux XIX^e et XX^e siècle," *Pratiques de la Lecture*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris: Editions Rivages, 1985) 191.

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