

Scientific Novels and ‘Lady Novelists’: Nature and Nurture  
In Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving and patient family. I could not have succeeded without my husband, Joshua, who has supported me financially and emotionally, and my daughters Hazel and Evelyn who cheered me on the entire time. Thank you Lord, for making all things possible and being ever faithful.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the Darwinian concept of nature and nurture as found in 19<sup>th</sup> century British Fiction, specifically Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. Austen identifies and explores the traits of her characters that are innate and learned, and considers the connection between those traits and indicators of class difference known as gentility. Gaskell uses the concept of natural and natured behaviors to explore the social construction of masculinity and femininity, and how those constructions evolve. Analyzing these novels for early scientific thought helps modern day readers understand how evolutionary science, primarily considered a masculine pursuit, was understood by Austen and Gaskell and speaks to our own modern curiosity about human nature. This study shows how Austen and Gaskell anticipated and understood the currents of emerging scientific thought and used these evolutionary themes to analyze their own cultures.

## INTRODUCTION

George Eliot quips that “silly novels by Lady Novelists are a genus with many species” in her 1856 collection of essays and book reviews, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” (1). There are many lady novelists who must remain safe from Eliot’s censure, among whom are Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell. They cannot be accused of the “feminine fatuity” that earns Eliot’s scorn; Austen and Gaskell’s novels are of another nature, and should be relegated to a genus of their own (1). This thesis identifies this genus and explores the important empirical insights that run quietly—and sometimes quite obviously—through *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Wives and Daughters* (1864–6). Among these insights is the debate over whether certain human characteristics are innate or learned, an argument otherwise known as nature versus nurture. In his 1874 study “On Men of Science, Their Nature and Their Nurture,” Sir Frances Galton, Charles Darwin’s cousin and fellow scientist, calls the phrase “nature and nurture” a “convenient jingle of words” because “it separates under two distinct heads the innumerable elements of which personality is composed.” He posits that “nature is all that a man brings with himself into the world; nurture is every influence without that affects him after his birth” (227). Consequently, Galton’s definition of nature and nurture is the one to which I refer throughout my thesis when discussing “nature and nurture.”

To varying degrees Austen and Gaskell use the concept of nature and nurture to make empirical—or sense-based—observations about important contemporary social issues. Austen

employs the estates of Pemberley, Longbourn, and surrounding environs to consider whether character traits of a person are natured or nurtured; in this way, she explores the qualities born and learned that make up the “genteel” behavior of the upper classes of Regency England. Over fifty years later, Gaskell examines the roles of nature and nurture in the development of her characters to consider whether feminine and masculine behaviors are innate or learned, making important observations about the social constructions of gender. Both novelists make observations at the domestic level that inform a broader narrative; Austen explores the nature of gentility, and Gaskell considers the evolution of femininity and masculinity for English men and women.

I examine the works of Austen and Gaskell specifically because they are both pioneers of their genres, the novels of manners and domestic realism, which work as mirrors of human nature in their respective timeframes. Both focus on behavior in the home and how that behavior speaks to larger society, thus acting as ideal reflections of the Regency and Victorian eras. These eras nearly bookend the industrial revolution and all the radical changes in thought and culture that characterize it. Austen writes early in the revolution, before scientific terminology was made more common by writings such as Darwin’s. She anticipates his work and the paradigm shift in its wake. Gaskell, a distant cousin of Darwin, writes from an England in the midst of this shift, where Darwin’s controversial claims are beginning to bring about change not only in science, but also in what people believe about themselves and others. I chose these authors and novels specifically because they each put forward a snapshot of their unique vantage points before and during these changes and offer contrasting uses of empirical observation to discuss emerging social issues.

The novel of manners and the domestic novel are ideal genres for a study of the effects of nature and nurture on the individual. Austen's novels of manners focus on small controlled environments and emphasize socialized interactions between individuals. In a letter to her niece and aspiring novelist Anna Austen, Austen advises setting stories in small "Country Village[s]" that she prefers for her own novels, perhaps because they create ideal environments in which to explore the manners, values, and mores of her time (qtd. in Le Faye 274-5). Inherently, manners and mores are social phenomena; they are meant to be observed or to be performed with others. The domestic novel, a Victorian adaptation of the novel of manners, deals with these interactions but also narrates the daily nuances of domestic life. Gaskell expertly creates this domestic narrative, complete with the little trivialities that slowly influence the character and expose naturally transmitted traits. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how Austen and Gaskell use these observations of social mores and character interactions, along with little intricacies such as daily meals and habits of dress, to examine the subtle differences that point to an individual's nature and nurture.

By using the novel of manners and domestic novel to build my argument, I situate the works in historical contexts. The differences in the times of Austen and Gaskell manifest in the very details that make their novels so realistic. The different ways their novels impress readers can also be attributed to these historical divergences. While *Wives and Daughters* has been noted as proto-feminist in nature, Gaskell's meaning is often cloaked in symbolism and, like Austen's, her message is intertwined in a love story. Austen's careful observations, while poignant, are even subtler than Gaskell's delicate Victorian prose. Gaskell offers a new model of evolved gender roles with her novel, but to read *Pride and Prejudice* as an egalitarian manifesto would be to project our modern sensibilities onto Austen's moment. Her novel doesn't argue for equality



of the classes, but it does question the connection between wealth and gentility. Like the empirical study I claim it to be, it observes, displays, and suggests connections between nature, nurture, and social issues. The forceful motive I claim for Gaskell is missing from Austen's much earlier work, and in this way *Pride and Prejudice* can be seen as a stepping-stone towards Gaskell's use of similar empirical concepts towards a progressive goal.

Viewing *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wives and Daughters* as evidence of the evolution of novels themselves towards progressive instruments is one way of exhibiting the momentous significance of the interdisciplinary study of literature and science. What seems like a new trend in scholarship, however, is really a return to the grassroots of science. Gillian Beer explains that nineteenth-century scientists had to work with the present language and so "seamed their sentences with literary allusion and incorporated literature into the argumentative structures of their work" (174). Poetry alongside progress could be found in scientific journals until the two disciplines diverged into the poles in which they now exist. By studying literature and science together, scholars can understand evolutionary science as it might have been comprehended by Austen or Gaskell, and mining the texts of either author for streams of scientific thought seems more common-sense than esoteric.

Peter Graham is the leading voice in the discussion of Darwinian science in *Pride and Prejudice*; his book *Jane Austen and Charles Darwin: Naturalists and Novelists* fully considers Austen's novels in the light of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, but only touches briefly on the concept of nature and nurture. This is likely because it was not Darwin who coined the term, but his cousin Galton. In the chapter entitled "*Mansfield Park*: Observation Rewarded" from his book *Darwin and the Novelists*, George Levine performs a pre-Darwinian reading of *Mansfield Park*, and as the title suggests, discusses Austen's keen observational skills. Levine actually

argues that “Austen is not talking about science,” which is technically true, for she never utters the word, but I argue that the spirit of her work is empirical. Nevertheless, there is an active interest in and space for discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* through the theory of nature and nurture; I propose to fill that niche with my discussion of nature and nurture in the novel.

Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* has been studied extensively in the Darwinian light because evolutionary science is an obvious theme that runs throughout the novel. Most critics, many of whom are cited in subsequent chapters, have used this approach to discuss class, gender, or even colonialism. Beer, the foremost name in interdisciplinary scholarship of science in literature, has extensively discussed Victorian authors George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, but has paid little attention to Gaskell or *Wives and Daughters*. In my thesis, I hope to begin filling that void. There are many critics addressing gender in the novel, and even some using evolutionary science to do so; my examination of nature and nurture on masculinity and femininity in the novel will add to an already rich discussion.

My thesis is organized by place because observations at the domestic level are so integral to an understanding of the nature and nurture of Austen and Gaskell’s characters. The chapters entitled “Nature and Nurture at Longbourn” and “Nature and Nurture at Pemberley” are focused on Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and examine the families at their homes. This novel is not normally seen as her most evolutionary—that title is given by Graham to *Emma*—but the novel is rich in the type of gene pools that beg exploration. The chapters entitled “Nature and Nurture at Hollingford” and “Nature and Nurture at Hamley Hall” explore the families of *Wives and Daughters*. Like *Pride and Prejudice*, the separate families of Gaskell’s novel offer unique insights into mixed as well as homogenous family units and all the tricks of nature and nurture to be found within.

## **Jane Austen, Lady Empiricist**

Readers of Jane Austen might be surprised to hear that she was an evolutionary scientist. What is science, after all, besides observation of the world around oneself and the occasional experiment to understand it more fully? Those familiar with her works know her as a master of the empirical arts; her knowledge of the human condition has breathed life into the volumes that her devotees read and reread, always finding new truth. That Charles Darwin, the scientific genius of the Victorian age, turned to Austen in his leisure hours attests to the pull of truth in her works. He must have recognized a fellow empiricist in her; perhaps he was drawn to the social experiments conducted within her pages, delightfully dressed with romance, humor, and wit.

The relationship between Austen and Darwin, as far as there can be one with such disparate lives and times, is one upon which scholars love to speculate. The two authors are brought together by more than Darwin's predilection for her "happy endings"; the two unite in the imaginations of so many because of their shared penetration into the world around them (Elizabeth Bankes n.pag.). In "'read & reread until they could be read no more': Charles Darwin and the Novels of Jane Austen," Bankes sees a similarity in their methods; they both focus on the smaller parts of an environment or object to make judgments on the whole. Darwin focused on the miniscule in nature to make discoveries about the world; Austen focused on people and their smallest thoughts and actions to make discoveries about mankind. Most of her readers

believe that Austen's social commentary was advanced, but fewer understand that her fictional empiricism is ahead of its time as well.

Over sixty years before Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, Austen was making observations of her own involving the traits people are born with, and the characteristics they develop from external influences like family, environment, community, and birth order. Many scholars have insightfully explored the similarities between these two “great empiricists of the nineteenth century” or have viewed Austen's work through a “Darwinian lens” (Peter Graham ii). I look specifically at Austen's pre-Darwinist consideration of what Galton later coined “nature and nurture” (Galton 227). Darwin's work led to Galton's coining the name of what is actually an older concept. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen uses the dynamics of the families at Longbourn and Pemberley to examine the nuances of gentility through an exploration of the forces we now call “nature” and “nurture.”

Although Austen could not have read Darwin or Galton, it is possible that she came across the terms “nature and nurture” used together. In “Two Gentlemen of Derbyshire,” Laurie Kaplan assumes it fairly likely that Mr. Austen owned William Shakespeare's works and that his daughter had ready access to them. We can not know for sure if she read *The Tempest*, but it is intriguing to imagine what she would have thought when she came across the line, “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature Nurture can never stick” (Shakespeare 4.1.188-89). How or if Prospero's words influenced her is pure speculation, and the terms don't appear together in any of her works. We find nature and nurture in *Pride and Prejudice* by looking for the words Austen chose to refer to these concepts. She refers to innate conditions as “essentials,” “temper,” and even “nature,” but she calls the learned characteristics with which she grapples “education,” “manners,” or “address” among other terms. She uses these terms in *Pride and Prejudice* when

she introduces readers to her characters or explains their actions. In this way, Austen gives the reader clues to how her characters are formed or directed by the forces we know as nature and nurture.

## Nature and Nurture at Longbourn

An understanding of the concept of nature and nurture must be gained before discussing Austen's subtle use of it to explore gentility. At the root of her study is the family at Longbourn. Mr. Bennet, his wife, and their five daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia are members of the landed gentry and create a typical picture of upper class Englishmen and women as well as a humorous case study in family dynamics. Austen demonstrates her understanding of these dynamics and their influence on character with the Bennet sisters' range of personalities. According to Peter Graham, the Bennets are typical in their dispersion of personalities; he calls them "the most striking example of Darwinian divergence" from Austen's novels (75). Graham refers to Frank Sulloway's cast of birth order-identified character traits in his analysis of the Bennet sisters. True to form among the Bennet girls are the typically perfect eldest daughter, the attention seeking middle child, and the free thinking, irreverent youngest. The Bennet sisters' typical differences are not so remarkable; they are so appropriate that they are easily overlooked, but the existence of this divergence and how the sisters' unique personality traits work into the plot of the novel is. Austen gives the readers clues to the origin of the sisters' natured or nurtured traits by describing their unique parentage.

As any *Pride and Prejudice* fan knows, Mr. Bennet is an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice," traits we later find he has passed on to Austen's heroine, Elizabeth (Austen 4). Whether sarcasm and caprice are passed by nature or nurture is one of the

novel's mysteries, but the origin of Mrs. Bennet's shortcomings are easier to place; "She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (4). Mrs. Bennet has the unfortunate role in the novel of someone who is deprived by nature—"mean understanding" and "uncertain temper"—as well as nurture—"little information." Mrs. Bennet is put into relief by contrast not only her with daughters, but also with her own sibling. When we meet her brother, Mr. Gardiner, we learn that he is "a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister as well by *nature* as *education*" (emphasis mine 93). Throughout the novel, Austen uses the terms "nature" and "education" heavily to delineate amongst traits characters are born with and those they gain, or fail to gain, by nurture.

Austen very clearly displays some of these parental traits in the daughters, but it is not always clear which characteristics are natural and which are nurtured. We learn early on that "Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters," and it can be surmised that this "quickness" is inherited from Mr. Bennet considering the description of the mother (4). However, Elizabeth is also often pictured with book in hand, suggesting that education has something to do with her cleverness as well. Elizabeth's character is not described outright as many other characters from the novel are. Aside from her dialogue, Elizabeth's character is made known through other characters' descriptions of her. The narrator tells us that she is "not formed for ill-humour" (61), and that it is her "temper to be happy" (151), but the nature of Elizabeth is left hazy. Is her character "formed" by nature, or "formed" by the circumstances of her home and community? William Derestewicz sees *Pride and Prejudice* as a "story of how a community thinks, talks, exerts influence...that produces [Elizabeth]," but that goes against her actions that bring about the story's happy ending as well as the fate of her younger sisters who experienced the same environment (504). Elizabeth survives, and even thrives, despite the "impropriety"

(Austen 155) of her father and “neglect” (110) of her mother that proves disastrous to the much weaker-minded Lydia. Elizabeth was not merely a creation of her environment; her nature was much too strong. It seems that the more complex the character is in *Pride and Prejudice*, the blurrier the line between nature and nurture.

The line between innate and learned behavior blurs particularly around the origin of Elizabeth’s strong nature. At first glance she seems to favor her father; she exhibits his characteristics of cleverness, wit, even sarcasm, but there is strength of will—perhaps even obstinacy—that comes from another quarter. Mrs. Bennet and Elizabeth butt heads in the typical manner of mothers and daughters, but the friction between them reveals a few similarities. Elizabeth cringes at her mother’s intense focus on matchmaking for her daughters according to class and wealth, but she shows a bitter dislike similar to her mother’s after Mr. Darcy snubs her at the Meryton ball. At the Jane Austen Society of North America’s (JASNA) 2013 Annual General Meeting (AGM), speaker Joan Ray pointed out how paying close attention to chronological time in *Pride and Prejudice* sheds new light on Elizabeth’s character. When Elizabeth meets Darcy again at the Lucas’ assembly and she has the satisfaction of returning Darcy’s snub from the Meryton ball, months have passed (18). Despite the passage of so much time and Elizabeth’s declaration of its ridiculousness, Darcy’s insulting comment that she is “not handsome enough to tempt me” still bothers her (9). Darcy has taken the time since then to reassess Elizabeth upon better acquaintance, but Elizabeth is still “entrenched in the insult” (Ray). Ray points out what most readers are happy to miss; Elizabeth is her “stubborn mother’s stubborn daughter” (Ray 38) as much as “her clever father’s clever daughter” (34). Elizabeth’s character, whether an attribute of nature or nurture, is influenced by her mother as much as her father.



The eldest sister Jane falls into typical sibling divergence, not as an “emulator,” as Graham summarizes Sulloway, but more as a supporter of “the established family order” (Austen 49). Her efforts to always see good in people, thus avoiding conflict, fall in the way of Sulloway’s description of a typical eldest child. With this behavior, Austen points to a strong sense of nurture or adaption. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bennet does much to promote harmony in the Bennet home; Jane is not a peacekeeper because she inherited these traits from her parents, but because her environment requires it and has constructed her this way. In Elizabeth’s admittedly biased description of Jane, “her understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating”; her natural gifts as well as her nurtured wiles are praiseworthy, and more to the point, we find a list of attributes almost completely opposite to that of her mother’s (Austen 124). Jane’s natural characteristics are as good as the nurtured ones. What is “mean” (4) in the mother is “excellent” (124) in the daughter; instead of “little information” (4), we have a mind “improved” (124), and in place of an “uncertain temper” (4), we find “captivating” manners (124). Jane, like Elizabeth, is fortunate in nature and nurture. She has inherited her father’s intelligence, and been nurtured into sweetness by her position in her family. These characteristics make her the most genteel of all the Bennet sisters, paying close attention to propriety and her own status.

In the younger daughters, Austen displays the shallower end of the Bennet gene pool. Mary, Catherine, and Lydia fall into the typical birth order decided behavior, but unlike Jane or Elizabeth, they have inherited some of their mother’s weak mind. It is no surprise that Lydia, “stout...and good-humoured,” was a “favorite with her mother”; she has inherited little of that vexing Bennet intelligence (31). As a youngest sibling, she is more “flexible, more open to new things and experiences, more rebellious against the domestic status quo,” but Austen also

delineates the differences between the traits that she has adapted to survive in a large family and the traits with which she was born (Graham 49). The narrator describes her as having “high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence” that are only amplified by her environment (Austen 31). It is this natural animal spirit that drives Lydia to behave in a most un-genteel like manner throughout the novel. Her bad manners and flirtatiousness seem embarrassing but harmless until her affair with George Wickham almost ruins the family.

Austen contrasts Lydia to the middle child, Mary, who has the same self-consequence without the essentials to pull it off. She forms perfectly to the Darwinian model of a middle child, “in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display” (17). Because she was born with little natural attributes, she has to nurture a few despite having neither “genius nor taste,” both gifts of nature (17). In contrast to Kitty and Lydia, Mary’s lack of natural gifts is supplemented by hard work and book learning, but she comes across as pedantic, and her achievements are contrived, earning little respect from friends or family.

Lastly, we see only glimpses of Kitty, almost a non-entity in the novel who is “weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia’s guidance” (140). Again, there is an emphasis on “guidance,” or nurturing influences. When Lydia is finally removed from her influential post in Kitty’s life, Elizabeth sees reason to hope that she “might in time regain her natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of her brain were removed, her other sister, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all her folly and assurance” (155). Here, Kitty is assumed to actually be the superior to Lydia in natural “disposition.” Elizabeth hopes that she can develop Kitty’s better innate characteristics once the influence of Lydia has ceased. Again, Austen discusses her characters in terms of nature and nurture,

differentiating between what they were born with, and how they have adapted to or been changed by their environments.

As what Graham calls a “closed community,” Longbourn and its secondary families act as another force of nurture on the Bennet family (74). While I see community as a lesser influence than family in the novel, it is still an important factor. Its importance lies in its value as a microcosm that allows the individuals within it to be formed by nature and nurture. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin asks, “How have all those exquisite adaptations of one part of the organization to another part, and to the conditions of life, and of one distinct organic being to another being, been perfected?” (ch. 3). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen anticipates his question with her own curiosity about how the residents of Longbourn influence and adapt to one another. Thus the community of Longbourn is important in its role as a close-knit gathering of these “distinct organic being[s]” and how they nurture each other.

The closed community also gives the reader a glimpse of the lower classes through the Bennet’s interactions with their community. In a few cases, characters more concerned with the rules of gentility are wary of servants and their loose tongues, such as when Elizabeth dismissed the waiter before Lydia dished the latest gossip at the town inn (Austen 144). John Mullan notes that lower class laborers such as this waiter and servants alike are “self-interested monitors, who will not necessarily protect those whom they watch” (118). It is not only the lower classes that behave badly, though; Lydia acts much worse, and even the aristocracy fails in gentility on many occasions. The ornery Lady Catherine shows herself to be very low on more than one occasion, and her sickly daughter Anne represents a physically bad nature (233). The community of Longbourn invites comparison of the behaviors of all class members.

As models of nature and nurture, the Bennet family at Longbourn is an ideal case study. Five sisters with the same parents, home, social class, and books on the shelves make a remarkably controlled environment for observation and empirical judgment. There is clearly something in the makeup of Austen's characters that drives them, something beyond community, culture, or any other nurturing influence. At Longbourn, Austen considers the pull of nurture on what is essentially the same nature, or gene pool. As we can see in real life, those pools can show extreme disparities, and Austen has shown that truth in the Bennet family. At Pemberley, she looks at the affects of similar nurture on separate natures. Fitzwilliam Darcy and George Wickham are not related by blood, but are united by living together as brothers.

## **Nature and Nurture at Pemberley**

One of the few main characters who is not born into the gentry or higher hails from Pemberley. As the son of Pemberley's steward, George Wickham grew up alongside the heir of the estate. This adopted brotherhood creates an interesting dichotomy to study the nature or nurture of gentility. Will a genteel childhood be enough to raise Wickham across class boundaries? It certainly seems that the senior Darcy's wish was along these lines.

When Elizabeth meets Wickham, he tells her just how similar he and Darcy's backgrounds are, "we were born in the same parish, within the same park, the greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care" (Austen 55). Austen takes particular care to make certain the reader understands just how similar the worlds are from whence the gentlemen sprung. Regardless, as Wickham truthfully asserts, "we are very different sort of men"; we are to understand that despite their similar upbringings, something is "very different" at the core of Darcy and Wickham. That something is their nature.

In the manner of introducing Darcy and Wickham, Austen plays on the readers' and town folks' misunderstanding of their natures. The first impressions are of what each man has been nurtured to be, which in both cases is very different from their true natures. When Darcy and his party first enter the Meryton assembly, he attracts every eye until he is found to be "proud... above his company, and above being pleased," all superficially nurtured traits of character (8).

He seals his fate in the minds of Meryton by his bad behavior. Darcy seems aware of his reputation, almost proud of it, in fact. While he “dare not vouch” for his temper, he suffers no doubts about his “understanding,” that important innate sense with which Austen heroes are born (40). Darcy admits to his unyielding temper, another innate characteristic, but does not seem ashamed of it, nor of his “feeling’s” resistance to being “puffed about with every attempt to move them” (40). He sees these traits as part of his nature; he has the sound of a Darwinist himself when he asserts to Elizabeth that “there is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a *natural* defect, which not even the best *education* can overcome” (Emphasis mine 40). With the language she employs throughout the novel to discuss nature and nurture, Austen hints that these facets of a man may be deceiving, and Wickham shortly carries the point home.

Jane Bennet is at her most perceptive when she sums up Wickham and Darcy: “one has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it (147). Wickham’s appearance of goodness has fooled most of Meryton, the Bennet family included. After hearing the extent of Wickham’s wrongdoings, Jane still marvels that “there is such an expression of goodness in his countenance! Such an openness and gentleness in his manner” (147). His manners make him pleasing, but Austen demonstrates that manners alone are insufficient, and Wickham’s baser character is exposed by the end of the novel. Darcy’s letter to Elizabeth acquaints her with Wickham’s true nature, his “vicious propensities” and “want of principle,” but it also exposes a possible source of Wickham’s “bad” nature (132). Darcy explains to Elizabeth that the older Darcy maintained Wickham financially at college because “his own father, always poor from the extravagance of his wife, would have been unable to give him a gentleman’s education”(132). Darcy Senior paid for Wickham’s “gentleman’s education,” but the nurturing could not stick.

Perhaps his “extravagant” mother’s nature was too strong in him (132). For Darcy’s “brother” a similar education could not produce a similar man.

Elizabeth begins to get a clearer idea of Darcy’s character just as the revelations of his letter have her questioning it. The answer for Darcy is circular—to find the nature of the man, we need to look to the man’s nature—in this case, his natural property. In “One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it,” Jennifer Preston Wilson points out that we get to know Elizabeth so easily through “the novel's early bias toward Elizabeth's point-of-view...her *tête-à-tête* conversations with her confidantes, Jane, Charlotte, and Mrs. Gardiner” (n.pag.). She argues that to help us understand Darcy, Austen must resort to more internal devices such as “pairing Darcy with the foil of Wickham” (n.pag.). I agree, but I contend that Austen also employs a much grander and more metonymical device to allow the reader to glimpse Darcy’s true nature.

Elizabeth’s impression of Pemberley is very important to her changing regard for Darcy. She jokes to Jane about her love for him beginning upon “first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley,” but the connection between Darcy and Pemberley is real and integral (244). Alistair Duckworth sees Pemberley as a representation for Darcy, and Elizabeth’s view of it as “a spatial recapitulation of her association with Darcy from her first prejudiced impressions of his external appearance, through a recognition of other (and seemingly contradictory) views, to a final arrival at the central core of his character” (312). I agree that Elizabeth’s tour of Pemberley does indeed give Elizabeth, and the reader, a glimpse of Darcy’s “central core,” but for my purposes his core is synonymous with his nature. Duckworth advances my point with his claim, “at Darcy’s estate Elizabeth comes to an awareness of Darcy’s intrinsically worthy character” (310). Not only does she realize at Pemberley that characteristics can change based on point of view, she also sees the

place as a symbol of Darcy's innate goodness. Pemberley is described by Elizabeth as being "...without any artificial appearance...nor falsely adorned" (Austen 159). Through her view of Pemberley, Elizabeth is beginning to understand that Darcy's nature is good and not overly nurtured by false manners such as Wickham's. If we follow Duckworth's reasoning that Pemberley is a symbol for Darcy himself, then Elizabeth's thought that "she had never seen a place for which *nature* had done more, or where *natural* beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste," signals that she is beginning to see Darcy's natural worth. Her realization at Pemberley echoes her earlier comment to a confused Wickham, "in *essentials*, I believe, he is very much what he ever was;" that is, his nature has not changed (emphasis mine 153).

The words Elizabeth speaks to Wickham, together with the constant nature of Pemberley, play on the notion of "essentials" or nature as being static, and manners like Wickham's as flexible or easily influenced. Darcy's "implacable temper" is meant to cast a "shade" on his character in one way, but in another proves his solid nature (40). His "bad" manners can be accounted for, after all. Darcy has a sympathetic listener in Elizabeth as he remembers his childhood and the lack of proper nurturing then, for "as a child I was taught what was *right*, but not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit...my father...allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing..." (241). Darcy accounts for his better nature being nearly obscured by faulty education, a theme Austen returns to over and over again in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Elizabeth receives another account of Darcy's childhood through his housekeeper, an unlikely source of keen insight into the argument of nature versus nurture. Mrs. Reynolds's wisdom that "they who are good-*natured* when children, are good-*natured* when they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world," shocks



Elizabeth, and makes her aunt doubtful, but asserts the importance and stasis of nature in *Pride and Prejudice* (161). Through Mrs. Reynolds's account of Darcy, Elizabeth also learns that he performs his duties as gentry well; she boasts "there is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name" (161). The characters in the novel are born with a good nature or a bad nature, but nurture plays a powerful part as well. Nurture can improve an already pleasant nature like Jane's, or ruin a weak one altogether, like Wickham's. Through Mrs. Reynolds's friendly chatter, we also learn about Pemberley's other inmate.

Apparently, Wickham's nature got the better of his nurture. That Wickham has "turned out very wild" is known to only a few characters by time the Gardiners and Elizabeth reach Pemberley (160). There, Elizabeth experiences the environment that fostered the two men in her life with very different outcomes. The same doting that gave Darcy an air of conceit turned Wickham into a reprobate. When Elizabeth shares Wickham's misdeeds with her sister, Jane replies, "There certainly was some great mismanagement in the *education* of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it" (Emphasis mine 147). Understanding Austen's term "education" to mean nurture, she uses Jane's contrast of Darcy and Wickham to highlight the effect of similar nurturing of different natures. We are to understand that Darcy's good nature was certainly not improved by his family's nurturing, but Wickham's faulty nature was made worse. Furthermore, Darcy is one of the few characters of the gentry to earn the title "gentleman."

There is a sense that Wickham's susceptibility to the nurturing influences of his environment is a negative thing; his weak nature cannot stand up to it. Wickham is gifted with the ability to adapt and conform to his environment, but his penchant for assimilation only causes harm. Wilson notes, "Wickham's ability to read people and adapt himself in a chameleon-like

manner marks him as a superficial figure who never stops to consider the appropriateness of an entirely self-serving philosophy of life” (n.pag.). Austen purposefully contrasts Wickham, who is skillful in adaption, against Darcy, who is not, to show the deep difference in their natures.

Through this examination of the two men, Austen reveals that the core of the person, the nature of the man, is far more important than the traits developed to please or survive. These learned traits also construct the class-defined behavior known as gentility.

## **The Nature and Nurture of Gentility**

It is worthwhile to consider how notions of innate quality and value entwine with Austen's beliefs about gentility and noble blood. About Darcy and Wickham Kaplan claims, "The action of the novel illustrates how each man evolves, how each man fits the concept of 'gentleman'—particularly in terms of appearance vs. behavior, and how the radically different natures of two men are finally manifested when moral choices are made" (Kaplan n.pag.). Both men have been nurtured to be gentlemen, but the individual's nature is the stronger force in the end. Austen explores the concept of gentleman-like behavior or gentility as both a natured and nurtured characteristic.

Austen uses the word "gentleman" itself in meaningful ways throughout the novel. There is a distinction between the landed gentleman and gentleman-like or genteel behavior. Technically, Mr. Bennet is a member of the gentry: he owns land and needs not toil for a living, but his behavior is far from genteel. Ray calls Mr. Bennet "just plain grumpy" and "readily irritable" (34). Elizabeth herself senses the "impropriety of her father's behavior as a husband" and regrets his "breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which...was so highly reprehensible" (155). Mr. Gardiner, who is called "gentleman-like," but not a "gentleman," is not an actual member of the gentry but better behaved than his genteel relations nonetheless (Austen 93). When uncouth Mrs. Bennet wishes to sling an insult at Mr. Darcy, she calls him "that gentleman" with a sneer bordering on insult; she acknowledges his status, but also what she

perceives as unbecoming behavior. Mr. Wickham is neither a gentleman nor gentleman-like, but likes to pretend to be genteel. Of course, the most famous use of the title is in Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy's proposal, "the mode of your declaration . . . spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner" (127). Austen's reversals—that real gentlemen are often not very gentleman-like, and that the most gentleman-like are not always gentlemen—question the connection between the behavior and the title.

Austen also questions the connection between wealth and gentility. Near the end of the novel, Lady Catherine De Bourgh descends upon Longbourn to confront Elizabeth with the rumor of her impending marriage to Darcy. Elizabeth summons up her trademark courage and defies Lady Catherine's interrogation, but Lady Catherine is not satisfied. She tries convincing Elizabeth of the inappropriateness of *ever* accepting Darcy, "If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere, in which you have been brought up" (Austen 232). Elizabeth replies, "In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (232). The exchange between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine suggest the nuanced meanings of gentility. Lady Catherine gives the title more weight than simple land ownership, something Elizabeth understands and uses in her retort; as a landowner, Mr. Bennet is indeed a gentleman, although not a titled or very wealthy one. Austen does not argue against the validity of being born into gentility, but she contests the idea that titles and wealth nurture a better sort of gentleman. In fact, none of the characters in the novel marry above their spheres, just their fortunes. As I've stated above, Austen does not argue for equality among the classes; she explores the nature and nurture of gentility.

### **Elizabeth Gaskell, Science Writer**

I claim above that Jane Austen was a scientist who set out to prove how she employed empirical methods to search for the nature and nurture of her characters. As much as I believe it, I am aware that seeing Austen as an evolutionary scientist takes a little vision, but my claim that Elizabeth Gaskell was a scientist requires very little imagination. Her world was steeped in revolutionary scientific thought, and *Wives and Daughters* clearly engages scientific themes in Gaskell's search for the truth of human nature, much like *Pride and Prejudice*. Her passion for science has been noted (Jenny Uglow 59), and she was actually Darwin's distant cousin and acquaintance; she admired his work enough to fashion her naturalist hero Roger Hamley after him (Boiko 88). Besides her familial connection with Darwin and her fashioning of Roger after him, Darwin's influence can be seen in her study of nature and nurture. Darwin studied the minute to make discoveries about the world, and I argue that Austen anticipated him in her study of the individual to make discoveries about mankind. Much in the same way, Gaskell's insular narratives make grander observations about the larger issues in her culture. Her domestic realism can be seen as both an evolved form of the novel of manners and a form of fictional scientific exploration.

Gaskell's domestic realism is an ideal medium in which to study the effects of nature and nurture on the individual. Much in the way that Austen's novels of manners allow observation of individuals' interactions, the domestic novel highlights all the little particulars of the home

sphere. There is perhaps no other medium with which a novelist can dedicate so much space to narrating the daily nuances of domestic life that slowly influence the character and expose naturally transmitted traits. Gaskell is an expert at creating this narrative home environment. For instance, we learn many singularities of Mr. Gibson's character through little discoveries, such as his preference for "bread-and-cheese" over fancier fare for dinner. In turn, his new wife Clare's quirks are also articulated through her seemingly trivial menu concerns, "I shouldn't like to think of your father eating cheese; it's such a strong-smelling, coarse kind of thing. We must get him a cook who can toss him up...something elegant (127-8). Through dialogue like this about what to order for dinner, we learn a lot about Mr. and Mrs. Gibson and their incompatibility. Gaskell uses these little intricacies about daily meals, furniture, reading habits, and private gossip to examine the subtle differences that point to an individual's nature and nurture.

Gaskell's fiction diverges from Austen's in its scientific self-awareness. This difference is rooted in the author's cultural moment. Gaskell's England, fifty years removed from Austen's, was becoming what Beer calls "naturalized" to Darwin's ideas (*Plots* 2). Concepts and language that would never have occurred to Austen might not yet have been commonplace to Gaskell, but were becoming part of scientific rhetoric at least (2). Gaskell's acquaintance with this rhetoric is evidenced by her easy use of scientific terms such as "inherit" in the evolutionary sense, and her clear familiarity with current scientific thought as seen in *Wives and Daughters* (Gaskell 491). For instance, heroine Molly Gibson's familiarity with real scientific publications such as *Le Règne Animal* which she discusses with Lord Hollingford at the charity ball attests to Gaskell's own ready knowledge (297). Further evidence that Gaskell was aware of her own scientific efforts can be found in Leon Litvack's essay "Outposts of Empire: Scientific Discovery and Colonial Displacement in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*." He dedicates nearly three pages to a

“brief survey of periodical pronouncements” to document Gaskell’s reading and her scientific opinions as found in the novel (738-41). Not only was Gaskell well read in the science of the day, but she was also so engaged in it that she was fluent in both sides of contemporary debates. Litvack notes that the novel’s hero and naturalist Roger Hamley “is depicted by Gaskell as concurring with the views of ‘Geoffroi St. H—,’” the main voice on one side of a debate over the controversial issue of evolution. Gaskell’s inclusion of these debates into the novel attests to her interest in science and in being involved in the scientific community. Her study of nature, nurture, and gender roles in Hollingford and Hamley Hall mark one of her contributions to the scientific discourses of her day.

## Nature and Nurture at Hollingford

We first meet the budding heroine of Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, little Molly Gibson, on the eve of her first garden party that is to be held at the home of the local aristocracy. At the Towers, the Cumnors' country residence, Gaskell introduces her reader to the ladies of Hollingford, dressed in their Sunday best and in display of their most mannered selves. The Miss Brownings and Mrs. Goodenough, the local spinsters and town gossip, are appropriately awed by the grandeur of the Towers and its park, but straightaway young Molly appears to be different. To the beautifully groomed grounds she is indifferent; she "did not see them; and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her" (Gaskell 14). During the greenhouse tour, Molly cannot escape its exotic "precious flowers" and the stifling atmosphere quickly enough, and she runs off to find respite in the "open air" under a sprawling cedar and falls asleep (15).

Molly's story begins again when she is seventeen and about to face her adult adventures and love story, but Gaskell's tale of the Towers anticipates her heroine's part in the novel's theme of duality. At the Towers, Gaskell uses Molly's crisis in the greenhouse to posit "The inexplicable charm" of the wilderness against the cultivated but stifling beauty of the greenhouses. This juxtaposition of the wild and cultivated foreshadows her focus on the theme of nature and nurture in *Wives and Daughters*. The novel's title itself declares not only a focus on women and their roles, but also on the inheritance and nurturing implied in the relationships



between wives and daughters. I argue that Gaskell examines the roles of nature, nurture and adaptation in the development of her characters to consider whether feminine behaviors are innate or learned, making important observations at the domestic level that inform a broader narrative on the evolution of femininity for English women.

In order to discuss the roles of nature and nurture in the evolving perception of femininity, it is important to understand gender roles in the unique timeframe of *Wives and Daughters*. Nancy Henry points to Gaskell's chosen setting, the decades before the Reform Bill of 1832, as a way of demonstrating past progress that can be observed to speculate upon the future (161). One element of progress that Gaskell demonstrates is the subtle change in gender roles. Aşkın Haluk Yildirim describes Victorian Britain "with its rigid gender roles," as a "strictly patriarchal society where discrimination against women was a dogmatic practice" (46). In the relationships of the novel, we can see Gaskell's portrayal of a Victorian ideology of gender that "rested on the belief that women were both physically and intellectually the inferior sex" (Yildirim 46). Of course, "dogmatic practices" are most effective when applied to the young, and Gaskell's preoccupation with socialization of children is observed in the noted infusion of fairy tales into the narrative. Carrie Wasinger points out the "genre's efficacy as a vehicle of socialization" that maintains traditional gender roles that marginalize women (Wasinger 270). Even in Mr. Gibson's relatively progressive home, there is evidence of this ideology when it comes to his views on Molly's education; "don't teach Molly too much..." (Gaskell 34). Understanding the ideology of Gaskell's England informs my discussion of femininity as a nurtured trait both in the home and in the public sphere as well.

Gaskell positions Molly within an environment that puts her learned differences in relief to the culturally normative behaviors around her while giving insights to Molly's nature through

her affinity with the natural world. Through Molly's connection with trees, flowers, and other wild things, Gaskell intimates the qualities that Molly has been born with and the ways that she *has not* been altered by nurturing. By relating Molly to all things wild and unruly in nature and separating her from the nurturing influences of a mother or other culture, she puts the emphasis on Molly's nature as uncultivated. We get a fairly clear image of Molly's untamed nature as a young child in the opening scene at the Cumnor's garden party; even at her young age she is independent, displeased with artifice, and just different enough for a lady at the residence to exclaim, "poor little woman, she looks wild and strange!" (Gaskell 22). This "wildness" and "strangeness" stems from Molly's lack of socialized Victorian femininity. Molly is in constant contrast with paragons of this image, the lady-like Miss Brownings who scold her for her "tomboy ways"; her ultra-feminine step-mother Clare, whom Mr. Gibson married partly to provide guidance in such matters; and Lady Harriet, who calls her "a little wild creature" (237). Gaskell demonstrates Molly's difference in comparison with the generation of women before her—whose allegiance to cultured gender norms is ingrained—through her stepsister Cynthia, who adopts those norms with a cynical self-awareness, and through expectations of the other sex as well.

In the beginning of her relationship with Roger Hamley, the second son of that family, Molly very typically sees him as more of a mentor than potential husband. At the fateful meeting that began their friendship, when Roger discovered Molly bewailing her father's impending remarriage under an ash-tree, Gaskell demonstrates how Molly's nature—or her lack of nurture—allows her to forge a different kind of relationship than might have been if she was raised like a typical Victorian young lady. Carrie Wasinger points out this divergence in her suggestive

description of the scene, claiming that it “ought to mark the growing attraction between hero and heroine”:

Molly, escaped to a secluded part of the grounds hidden by “shrubs and evergreens and over-arching trees,” gives vent to her passionate grief. Roger, returning from dredging with a “fine midday appetite” and distracted by a plant he has finally found “in flower” spies Molly. Roger even worries that approaching Molly might not be “delicate.” Yet instead of securing Molly in the field of heterosexual relations, Roger’s story rebounds off Molly’s failure to identify.” (288)

With this scene, Wasinger argues that Molly stands out against a “tableau of sexual players,” and that she resists “socialization” in this way (288). This point is sound, but I argue that Gaskell also uses this scene to show that Molly does not just “resist socialization,” but was never socialized in the first place. Molly was never nurtured to act like a Victorian woman “should” in this type of situation, so she completely misses any social cues that might have been there. In fact, Mr. Gibson was so completely repulsed by the idea of broaching the subject of love or courting that he sent Molly to the Hamley’s to shield her from the gaze of his love-lorn, live-in pupil, resulting in her introduction to Roger. As a result, Molly’s education in the art of Victorian womanhood is very stunted. Gaskell also shows this by identifying Molly with a wildflower. Wasinger relates Molly to the wildflower that Roger seeks in a sexualized way, but when paralleled with the cultivated flowers that repel Molly at the beginning of the novel, and the repeated image of cultivated and exotic flowers associated with Cynthia—short for Hyacinth—throughout the rest of the novel, it can be assumed that the wildflower also represents Molly’s lack of overly-feminine nurturing. As a result, friendship, not romance, blooms between Roger and Molly.

In another attempt to sooth young Molly's trouble after her father's marriage, Roger advises her to "think more of others," to which Molly replies, "'No, I shan't! ... it will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and live only in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as well never have lived'" (Gaskell 135). Gaskell narrates that there was an "unconscious depth" to Molly's outburst, what Patsy Stoneman calls "the image of the feminine death" (Stoneman 117). The "altruism" that Roger suggests "is a threat to life," and also a threat to Molly's nature; she sees that to heed the virtuous selflessness inherent in Victorian femininity is to lose touch with one's self (117). Molly is young, but not quite young enough to begin accepting conventional nurturing now.

After all, Molly has not been totally bereft of nurturing; she has only been missing the maternal kind that might transmit the most unconscious of feminine ideals. Stoneman points out that although she had a "relatively unconventional, motherless girlhood," she was "tutored by her clear-sighted, witty father," which made her uncommonly "self-assertive and outspoken" (117). Molly's unconventionality runs from tomboyish behavior like climbing trees and running in the house to more serious breaches of societal norms (Gaskell 237). She flies in the face of gender roles throughout the novel, in particular when she insists on both comforting the grieving Squire and nursing Aimée unchaperoned at the Hall; speaks her mind readily to the Miss Brownings, Lady Cumnor, and Lady Harriet; and most shockingly ambushes the cad Mr. Preston (Boiko 103).

In the ironically named chapter "Molly Gibson to the Rescue," Molly draws from her solid nature and unconventional nurturing to bargain Cynthia's freedom from her unscrupulous suitor (475). In a reversal of roles, "Molly actually plays the chivalric gentleman on Cynthia's behalf, risking her own reputation" to save her sister's honor from Preston (Boiko 103). Molly's

behavior is so gallant that it even momentarily impresses Preston, for “he forgot himself for an instant in admiration of her” (483). Besides her cleverness and courage, “there was something that struck him most of all perhaps, and which shows the kind of man he was—he perceived that Molly was as unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman, as if she had been a pure angel of heaven” (483). He sees innocent young Molly as nearly an equal, almost as if she were another man. Gaskell narrates that his perception of her indifference to him as a “young man” shows what “kind of man he was,” but it also shows what kind of woman Molly is. She is a free agent, unencumbered by nurtured or cultural gender roles.

In another departure from typically feminine conduct, Molly takes an interest in natural science and becomes Roger’s willing pupil. In a comical exchange with the curious Miss Browning, Gaskell again demonstrates Molly’s divergence from the expected female norm in her interaction with Roger, “‘How was he kind to you, Molly?’ ‘Oh, he told me what books to read; and one day he made me notice how many bees I saw—’ ‘Bees, child! What do you mean? Either you or he must have been crazy!’” (Gaskell 149). As one of Molly’s late mother’s best friends, Miss Browning sees it her duty to be concerned with Molly’s nurturing—in this case, her interactions with a potential husband—but Molly’s reaction signals her departure from the nurtured femininity that Miss Browning would expect from someone of her own generation. In *Scheherazade in the Marketplace*, Hilary M. Schor sees Molly’s “careful reading of scientific texts and her attention to Roger’s lessons” as evidence of her “moral and emotional...depths” (Schor 195–6). The Miss Brownings miss what Molly gains from her unique willingness to venture into the “masculine” realms of science because they are so locked into the particular brand of femininity with which they grew up.

Gaskell celebrates Molly's lack of cultivated refinement by showing the benefits of her atypical nurturing. Many of Molly's finer learned attributes come from nurturers of the male persuasion. Molly's father seems to approach her education with the typical Victorian attitude; "she must sew, and read, and write, and do her sums; but I want to keep her a child....Many a good woman gets married with only a cross instead of her name" (Gaskell 34). However, Mr. Gibson seems only half-convinced of his own decree, calling such infantilization a "dulling of mother-wit," and so Molly learns to read. He still fears her becoming "too much educated," but clever little Molly sharpens her "mother-wit" with an education anyway. Besides her literal education, Molly is nurtured by her father's "excellent mothering" in matters of personality (Davidson 98). Molly's loyalty to the truth is observable throughout the novel, and Morris points out that "by her father Molly is nurtured to be self-denying and good," qualities that stand out against Clare and her progeny Cynthia (xxiii). The lady's "babble" is also contrasted against Molly's "plain speaking," which Stoneman claims is "fostered by her father's rationality..." (Stoneman 118). Molly also jokingly calls her "rudeness," an offshoot of the plain speaking she learns from her father, "an hereditary quality" (79).

Molly picks up another male nurturer along the way in Roger. In their initially platonic relationship, he assumes the role of nurturer and fills in where her reserved father is "silent" (Stoneman 118). Stoneman points out that Mr. Gibson "was not fond of expressions of feeling at anytime," leaving Molly to fend for herself in matters of emotion (118). In this way, "Molly comes to see Roger's prescription as the 'clue to goodness and peace' and embraces it as a 'new...larger system of duty'" (118). Molly's reliance on two male nurturers in development of her own ideology goes a long way in understanding her unconventional femininity.

Molly's counterpart Cynthia, however, reacts very differently in situations similar to Molly's. Gaskell recalls Molly and Roger's meeting at the ash-tree when he is first introduced to Cynthia, "'I want to know her—your new sister,' he added, with the kind smile Molly remembered so well since the very first day she had seen it directed towards her, as she sat crying under the weeping ash" (Gaskell 238). This time, though, the smile was directed at Cynthia, whose nurturing in feminine wiles was expert, and it receives a very different response; "She put on her armour of magic that evening—involuntarily as she always did; but, on the other side, she could not help trying her power on strangers" (238). In Molly's contradictory description of Cynthia's reaction to Roger, Gaskell questions whether Cynthia's feminine behavior is natural, nurtured, or something more. In her introduction to the novel, Pam Morris claims that the "text suggests that Cynthia's and Mrs. Gibson's 'feminine' subtleties are the result of nurture not nature," but Gaskell treats Cynthia's "powers" as more than simple nurturing; Cynthia's "armour" sounds rather like an adaptation, a nurtured trait that has evolved into a natural one in an involuntary bid for survival (238).

Cynthia, on her own and having gained little hereditarily from her mother's "superficial and flimsy character," had to develop a way to survive; her hyper-femininity works like a charm on poor Roger, "of all the victims to Cynthia's charms he fell most prone and abject" (140, 239). Roger responds as expected when Cynthia models the prescribed Victorian femininity; to re-apply Wasinger's argument about Molly at the ash-tree, Cynthia adeptly "identifies" her role in the scene and plays it well (Wasinger 288). Cynthia's femininity is almost like a superpower, "she used no exertion, but simply followed her own nature, which was to attract every one of those she was thrown amongst" (Gaskell 223). In contrast with Molly, who has trouble identifying with her feminine role at all, Cynthia seems to be defined by it.

Cynthia sees her own faults as the product of faulty nurturing. The combination of Clare's destitution after her husband's death, combined with general selfishness, made her a less-than-attentive mother. Explaining her childhood to Molly, Cynthia says, "I am not good.... Somehow I cannot forgive [mother] for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her..." (223). Cynthia seems to be talking about her own nature as "not good," but intuitively that her lack of nurturing as a child is really to blame. Cynthia was certainly neglected, but there was still a certain amount of behavioral nurturing. Cynthia has learned and adapted her mother's theory of survival, which can be surmised by her perception of matrimony, "marriage is the natural thing; then the husband has all that kind of dirty work to do, and his wife sits in the drawing room like a lady" (98). In her views on marriage, Clare expresses the Victorian ideal of separate spheres for men and women, and Cynthia works within the same framework. Laurie Buchanan posits that daughters are "vulnerable...to entrapment within the mother's experience and identity," and Cynthia's adapted femininity shows her own identification with her mother (502). Buchanan also argues that Molly "matures successfully in part *because* of her mother's early death...this death frees her from the identity crises that will arise as she enters adolescence and tries to separate from her mother" (500). This is especially true if part of maturing "successfully" includes avoiding the mother's transmission of Victorian ideals about femininity. Thus, Molly was able to escape from societal expectations in a way that Cynthia could not.

In Cynthia's case, the lines between nature and nurture blur; Gaskell seems to elide the distinction between the two. Neither the reader nor Cynthia can clearly define which of her traits are nurtured or natural. Cynthia seems to have "inherited" many of her mother's traits such as selfishness and coquetry, but Cynthia's own attitude towards them and her seeming ability to switch them on and off speaks otherwise. It seems that we are, as Buchanan argues, witnessing a



crisis of identity. Gaskell demonstrates this in the ways that Cynthia downplays the traits she perceives to be from her mother such as her affinity for dress and even her own name.

Like Molly, Cynthia is named for her mother but uses a changed form—Molly’s mother was Mary, Cynthia’s is Hyacinth Clare. This in itself is not extraordinary, as women sometimes pass down their names, but the significance of the name itself is. In comparison to Molly’s identification with Roger’s wildflower above, “Hyacinth” calls to mind the frilly, exotic, and highly cultivated blooms similar to the specimens that might have been growing in the Cumnor’s greenhouse. Along with her silly and affected ways, Clare has “perpetuated” her “silly” and “affected” name (121). Identifying Cynthia with the flower this way gives new meaning to her treatment of them throughout the novel. She is constantly pulling apart, rearranging, or even destroying flowers in the narrative. For example, the first hope she gives Roger of returning his affection is in the form of a handful of “demolished roses;” he is thrilled, but Cynthia has just demonstrated how she feels about her legacy. She knows who she *does not* want to be, and that is a reincarnation of her mother (317). The nosegay that Roger and his brother send before the charity ball are similarly dismantled by Cynthia, “pulling out some camellias, then a rare kind of flower” to decorate Molly’s hair (278). Cynthia also uses flowers in such a way to communicate with others. When Roger sees her walking in the garden with a new fiancé mere months after their own broken engagement, “coquetting with him about a flower,” the message is clear (642). Cynthia is submitting to the drive for survival, even if it comes in the form handed down from her mother.

Like flowers, fine dress is associated with both femininity and Clare; Cynthia’s relationship with clothing reflects her relationship with both. The plot of the novel itself hinges on Cynthia’s dress; the twenty pounds that she borrows from Preston and its matrimonial

collateral bring the storyline to its crisis. Besides this, Gaskell identifies Clare as a bit of a fashion plate, and this vanity is another role that Cynthia does not want to model. Upon Cynthia's arrival to the Gibson house, Clare's first expression is shock "to find that Cynthia had but four gowns, when she might have stocked herself so well, and brought over so many useful French patterns," which is hardly the sentiment expected from a mother who's been away from her daughter for years (218). Cynthia soon shows no lack of panache in dress; she is "her mother's own daughter" in that way, but she also seems reluctant to identify with this facet of her mother's repertoire. Cynthia's gowns are "tumbled," "tossed away untidily," limp and creased (238). She doesn't show any extraordinary desire to amplify her natural graces; in the same way that she tears apart the flowers, she attempts to dismantle any nurturing that falls in line with her mother's example.

At the root of Cynthia's distance from her mother is her abandonment, but also her fear of becoming like her. She sees marriage as a way to survive, but also perceives its drawbacks as the institution existed, as a union of unequal partners. Contemplating a reunion and ultimate marriage with Roger, whom she has wronged, she exclaims "I could not bear to have to tell him I'm sorry, and stand before him like a chidden child to be admonished and forgiven" (548).

Cynthia knows how to play the part of "submissive femininity" but has developed a "sceptical...awareness" about it (Morris xxiv). Cynthia's cynicism might indicate that she is a woman on the precipice of an awakening, but at the novel's end, she is still beholden to the Victorian concept of femininity. Molly, however, free from those constructs, embodies Gaskell's version of the new woman, unconditioned by a childhood of repression and blessed with a relatively equal and loving marriage.

Gaskell demonstrates that a system built on divisive concepts of femininity cannot sustain itself. Her heroines gain strength from one another. Morris notes that “the sisterly love between Molly and Cynthia produces a revisionary reworking of the traditional stories dependent upon oppositional images of women: the good and bad princess, Cinderella and her wicked stepsisters,” and as Roger compares them at the novel’s end, as Spencer’s Una and Duessa (Gaskell 642). Roger’s usual clear-sightedness and gift for classifying fails to recognize that the lines in reality are not as clearly drawn as in a fairy tale. Gaskell’s narrative defies this trope; Cynthia is not purely “bad,” and Molly is not perfect; both are products of their own unique nature and nurturing. Gaskell redefines the parameters for the generation to which Molly and Cynthia belong by providing for them a “different script,” a “newly evolving story of women’s consciously committed loyalty and cooperation” (Morris xxiii). Molly is able to participate in this evolution because her girlhood lacked the divisive gendering that ruled the former generation, and Cynthia becomes part of the change through her hyper-femininity that belies a cynical awareness of “the fictional nature of all social roles” (xxiii). Gaskell illustrates that women’s roles will not change until women are nurtured differently as girls. Cynthia was brought up steeped in divisive gender roles, but she became disconnected from them by her estranged relationship with her mother. Because Molly’s upbringing was so much less divisive, she has many more options. Her future with Roger, although obscured in the unfinished novel by Gaskell’s death, has the promise of a more united existence. If her tutoring by Roger in the world of natural history is any indication, her place might be with him in the lab rather than in the “drawing room” of Clare’s marriage description.

Molly Gibson is an unlikely “new woman” for Gaskell to use in her exploration of nature, nurture, and femininity. It is no accident that Cynthia nearly steals the novel away from the

rightful heroine. Where Molly is shy, Cynthia shines; Molly's simple elegance is dimmed by Cynthia's obvious beauty, and where Molly fails to identify, Cynthia is expert. *Wives and Daughters* is centered on this binary between the two sisters and through their interactions with each other and the other characters of the novel. Gaskell plays off of the reactions of the Miss Brownings, Clare and Preston; their reactions to Molly's unconventionality in the small town of Hollingford parallel the changes beginning in larger society. Litvack claims that "Molly displays a preparedness to deal with the challenges that the Victorian age would bring"; these changes stem from her unconventional nurturing (Litvack 736). Litvack contends that Gaskell is "suggesting a wider range of possibilities for women..." on the scientific level through her experiences with Roger. I argue that this truth extends to possibilities for women's social roles in general. Molly successfully gains education, defies societal expectations without becoming a pariah, even acts as her sister's gallant hero, and in the end finds happiness in an equal marriage without ever "flirting" or engaging in submissive feminine behavior. In this way, Gaskell uses Cynthia and Molly both to demonstrate these possibilities and the role that nurturing has in them.

## Nature and Nurture at Hamley Hall

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* appearances can be deceiving. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, characters' first judgments are often mistaken, and the resulting reversals not only characterize the novel's comical nature, but also its tragic moments. On Molly Gibson's first trip away from her home in Hollingford to the Hamley's ancient family seat, she finds herself in the midst of a very different, but equally important, domestic scene. Shortly after her arrival to Hamley Hall, she observes a crayon sketch of the Hamley brothers in which "the elder was sitting down, reading intently. The younger was standing by him, and evidently trying to call the attention of the reader off to some object out of doors" (Gaskell 65). Mrs. Hamley urges Molly to guess their natures, and their game uncovers much about the brothers that will inform the plot of the novel. The reader learns that Osborne is the "beautiful boy...reading some poetry," and Roger is "fond of natural history...that takes him...a great deal out of doors...he is a good, steady fellow...but he is not likely to have such a brilliant career as Osborne" (66). The portrait gives the reader a quick "sketch" of Osborne and Roger's characters and their potential. Of course, the brothers' fates cross at school, but the great tragic reversal of the novel is the premature death of Osborne and elevation of Roger. In much the same way that Gaskell demonstrates the influence of nature and nurture on the step-sisters at Hollingford, she uses this reversal and the many diverging qualities of the brothers—natural and nurtured, physical and mental, and even moral—to explore the evolving nature of masculinity in her time.

Gaskell writes from a time of great scientific discovery, particularly in the field of evolutionary studies, but sets her *Wives and Daughters* (1864) sometime “before the passing of the Reform Bill” in 1832 (6). She writes with hindsight—with knowledge of changes that might come to her characters—to make predictions of what will come in her own time. One specific change she documents in her novel is the evolution of masculinity. Lisieux Huelman identifies this “new masculinity for mid-Victorian British culture” as one that values “merit over birth” (2). Roger’s climb is indeed based on his merit rather than his birth—or his nurture over his nature—but this new masculinity also marks a break from earlier forms of gentlemanly behavior. Manliness in the novel is of two kinds: the first and outdated is the genteel feminized masculinity like that of Lord Cumnor, who “had...a little turn for gossip” (Gaskell 7); Mr. Gibson, who had a “genteel appearance, and elegant figure, and was apt...to give himself airs” (30); and Osborne Hamley, who is “sweet-tempered and affectionate, almost as demonstrative as a girl” (43). I base my division of these two masculinities on what Emily Blair calls “excessive sensibility” in Osborne, and an “‘unhealthy,’ ‘morbid’ attention” that the Squire and his eldest son “direct to their feelings” (Emily Blair 587). I include Mr. Gibson and Lord Cumnor, even though they don’t demonstrate a particularly “excessive sensibility” and despite their manly interest in science, because Gaskell gives them otherwise feminine attributes that mark their masculinity as obsolete. In contrast Roger displays, rather ahead of his time, the new evolution in manliness coined “muscular Christianity” (Morris 30). Pam Morris defines this emerging masculinity that became popular in the 1850s as the “ethos of moral and physical fitness” (655). Morris also points out that Roger is represented in these terms upon his return from Africa, “he looks broader, stronger—more muscular” (Gaskell 589). He is described so years before the term came

into vogue, which demonstrates Roger's evolved masculinity ahead of his brother's who is still of the old school masculinity as demonstrated by Mr. Gibson and Lord Cumnor.

Roger's evolved masculinity is a combination of excellent nature and proper nurture; it is displayed by his outdoor physical activity and scientific prowess, and both of these qualities are tied to his physical and mental health. As Roger and Osborne become men, the disparities that Molly intuits from the crayon sketch at Hamley Hall become more pronounced in ways that surprise their parents. Despite his mother and father's disparaging view of his abilities, Roger quickly outstrips Osborne at Cambridge. Mr. Gibson attributes Roger's success to his solid nature, "I, being a doctor, trace a good deal of his superiority to the material cause of a thoroughly good constitution" (366). Dr. Gibson proves himself to have less-than-perfect judgment, however—a point Gaskell demonstrates earlier in one of the novel's funnier reversals—his marriage to Clare. In Roger's case, he seems to forget that good health is not all that Roger has inherited from his parents; Squire Hamley has a "natural shrewdness (42)" and Mrs. Hamley is "clever" (69). Besides possessing physical and mental gifts, Roger also nurtures his natural cleverness with education. The Squire, who Gaskell points out has "natural wit and sense," was "imperfectly educated" and so not successful academically or in society (42). Roger's success is not only due to a good physical and mental inheritance, but also his father's insistence that he nurture his natural gifts at Cambridge alongside Osborne. Roger's masculinity emphasizes the evolutionary importance of a strong nature and proper nurture. Because he has his father's innate strength and mother's intellect along with a nurturing education, Roger will carry on where his uneducated father and sickly brother can not.

Although Roger's masculinity seems to be a construction of ideals, there is a balance in it that makes him not only modern, but also fit. In an interesting twist to his character, he is

simultaneously a paragon of rugged and enterprising masculinity as well as a natural nurturer. In her biography of Gaskell, Patsy Stoneman argues that Roger embodies all three of Sara Ruddick's characteristics of "maternal thinking" (178). By her definition, he is "rooted in care," pays "constant and acute attentions to detail, and expects change and growth" (178). During Molly's stay with his family, Roger comforts her in her misery and "nurses" both Molly's "desire for information" and morality, behavior which is typically motherly and feminine (Stoneman 120). His evolved masculinity depends on a balance of typically feminine and masculine traits. This balance creates a "fitness" in Roger that will allow him to thrive in a modern England.

Roger proves superior fitness for survival in comparison to both his father and his brother. He provides the means for maintaining the family seat when Osborne's poor choices financially threaten Hamley Hall, and he literally survives his brother's sickness and death. Leon Litvack notes that in an evolutionary sense, "Gaskell endows [Roger] with those qualities which are needed to survive the rigours and challenges of modern life, and thus avoid extinction" (736). Even intellectually, Roger is more fit for "modern life" (736). Although he was not considered as naturally gifted as Osborne, his efforts as a naturalist provide the means of survival for not only Hamley Hall but also for Osborne's own wife and son when his intellectual efforts to support them fail. Osborne's poetic endeavors to earn a living recall a fading Romantic masculinity, while Roger's manly empiricism point to an emerging and vital one.

Roger's nurturing and naturalist qualities lead him into the role of Molly's mentor when she first visits Hamley Hall. Just as this relationship evidences changing roles for British women, as in Roger's encouragement in Molly's scientific interest, it also points to changes for men. Huelman notes that by engaging Molly in his scientific studies at Hamley Hall, Roger blurs



“boundaries between private and public spheres”; Roger brings “man’s work” into the home where hitherto only “women’s work” was done (2). Huelman argues that scientific research done at home during the Victorian period began opening up the spheres; I argue that it also portrays the new model of masculinity that might allow a man working alongside a woman. While Mr. Gibson’s work was purposefully separated from Molly by a locked surgery and house calls, Roger’s inclusion of her in his research within the typically female sphere points to changes in gender boundaries (Gaskell 34). Huelman attributes Roger’s attitude to “his exposure to more progressive thinking about women,” which is almost certainly the case, but it also exhibits his more progressive thinking about men (7). The consequence of Roger’s including Molly in his home-based research is his masculinity evolving further away from earlier forms that rested on separation. Roger not only embodies the “new Englishman,” with “vigour, energy and moral and physical fitness,” but also a masculinity that is not feminized but pairs well with the “new woman” (Morris xxx).

Compared to Roger, the new Englishman, his older brother Osborne symbolizes a dying breed of masculinity. Osborne recalls both the previous generation’s Romantic poet and the model of gentleman by birth. Subsequently he appears out of sync in the environment in which Gaskell places him, illustrating how masculinity evolves in the novel. The characters of *Wives and Daughters* are participants of the scientific revolution, as well as a social one that Karen Boiko identifies as “the discussion of the idea of the gentleman that was most intense in the 1850’s and early 60’s, ‘the period when the spirit of middle-class reform was making its challenge felt within the aristocratic framework of English institutions’” (96). Embedded in the middle-class struggle for agency was the definition of gentleman and the notions of masculinity

that are enmeshed in that concept. The poet-heir that Osborne recalls comes under fire, as can be seen in his story.

From Osborne's first appearance as child-poet in Mrs. Hamley's pencil sketch, he is built up in Molly's esteem until the likelihood of his meeting expectations is very slim. In fact, Molly's first encounter with Osborne finds her attempting to "reconcile the ideal with the real" (167). He looms large in her imagination as a Romantic hero, but in her observation falls somewhat short, "The ideal was agile, yet powerful, with Greek features and an eagle-eye, capable of enduring long fasting, and indifferent as to what he ate. The real was almost effeminate in movement...He was dainty in eating, and had anything but a Homeric appetite" (167). Molly's letdown is symptomatic of the "old" masculinity in a modern world. Osborne's ill-fated association with Romantic sensibilities informs the social climate from which Gaskell writes in which masculinity is evolving. Joel Faflak and Julia Wright argue, "the Darwinian competition between the brothers...is shaped significantly by the discourse of sensibility as a means of identifying...Osborne with a Romantic past that must be discarded as an ineffective cultural mutation" (164). The feminized Romantic masculinity too must have been seen as a "mutation," especially in contrast to Roger. Faflak and Wright also note a progression away from the degeneration of the previous generation towards a more perfect modernism as can be seen in their argument for "Molly as a symbol of the nation's progress from Romantic puberty to Victorian maturity" (165). Again, their argument translates to a discussion of Osborne's Romanticism as one characteristic of an irrelevant masculinity. The nation's maturation from Romanticism to Victorianism can also be charted through the evolution of masculinity from one brother to the next. Just as Cynthia light-heartedly discards the Romantic Byron for the hardily English Johnnie Gilpin at Mrs. Gibson's dinner party—"to Osborne Hamley of all men, too!"—

the elder brother's ineffective masculinity and its enmeshed romantic sensibilities make way for the younger brother's meritorious and empirical manliness (267).

Gaskell also considers how Osborne's vintage masculinity has been transmitted. Is the Romantic sensibility a combination of natural traits or learned behaviors, or a mutation as Faflak and Wright suggest? Osborne's feminized masculinity seems to be partially inherited from his mother and partially the outcome of faulty nurturing. Hereditarily Osborne is almost solely identified with Mrs. Hamley; the name Osborne itself is her maiden name. Gaskell describes his appearance as having "all the grace and refinement of his mother's," and he is called "'fine' delicate almost to effeminacy in dress and in manner" (249). Like his invalid mother and in contrast to Roger's out-of-doors pursuits, he spends much time inside reading and writing poetry. Osborne's masculinity is bound with his poetic intellect that he also seems to get—either by nature or nurture—from his mother (69). Tragically, he also inherits his mother's frailty—another Romantic standard—and they both die of a long drawn-out illness. In the evolutionary sense, Osborne's premature death is in accord with Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest. As a representative of an obsolete masculinity on its way to extinction, Osborne's death seems like a natural consequence.

Although Osborne has clearly inherited many of the traits that make up his masculinity, Gaskell also considers the nurturing that comprise it as well. In a discussion with Mr. Gibson, the Squire wonders briefly what the effect might have been on Osborne's character if he had "got out o' doors more" (367). The Squire's off-hand comment about Osborne getting outdoors more represents how nurturing might have changed Osborne's fate, but it also brings to mind the more outdoorsy brother Roger and their different childhoods. Again, Mrs. Gibson's portrait anticipates the paths the young boys would navigate as they grew. As the first son and heir, Osborne would

have been born a gentleman of leisure, traditionally been free to pursue more leisured activities like poetry writing. However Roger, as second son, would be expected to find occupation. Roger's instincts lead him well, but Osborne's legacy of leisure is endangered. Huelman claims that Gaskell uses *Wives and Daughters* to define "a new masculinity of mid-Victorian British Culture, one that values merit over birth," one in which Osborne's high birth is not enough to sustain him or his legacy (1).

Gaskell's last and unfinished reversal—Roger's marriage to Molly—highlights Osborne's last "failure": his marriage to a French servant goes against his father's expectations of him. Roger goes to great pains to make certain that Osborne and Aimee's marriage is considered legitimate, but his adamancy calls attention to its seeming inappropriateness. A marriage that requires so much documentation seems morally questionable, especially when the wife shows up at Hamley Hall with a toddler after Osborne's death. In comparison, Roger's marriage to Molly would emblemize a modern English marriage. Roger and Molly create a union of the new Englishman and Englishwoman that will presumably nurture the next generation of evolved gender roles.

## CONCLUSION

For a 1912 celebration of literary centennials, Annie Kimball Tuell expressed in *The Atlantic Monthly* her speculation that “Elizabeth Bennet would have loved to know Molly Gibson.” Indeed, they might have bonded through their independent spirits, love for reading, and interest in men with strong personalities, but would Elizabeth have seen in Molly the future of womanhood? I think it likely, but the more important issue is how Austen would view Gaskell and her work. Austen no doubt would intuit the thread of empirical thought that she delicately wove through *Pride and Prejudice* as a driving theme in *Wives and Daughters*. The assumption that Gaskell admired Austen is bolstered by her appropriation of *Pride and Prejudice* for her novel *North and South*. Like her cousin Darwin, Gaskell might have looked back at *Pride and Prejudice* and recognized a fellow scientist at work, and her own novel’s empirical predecessor.

Remarkably, Austen’s subtle study of nature, nurture, and gentility anticipates the works of Darwin, his cousin Galton and his other distant cousin Gaskell; she writes empirically without the scientific environment from which Gaskell would have written. She considers scientific concepts before the field has its own lexicon when, as Beer explains, science was still borrowing from the language of literature (41). Beer has demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinarity in understanding the interconnectedness of literature and the history of science, and she looks specifically at the works of Victorian novelists like Eliot. These Victorian writers are a natural fit in consideration of the science that was emerging in their cultural moment; they often knew each

other and associated with Darwin and other scientists of the day. Although Beer does not write much about the connections between Gaskell and science, there are associations between Gaskell and the authors she does dwell on, such as Eliot and Darwin himself, that attest to the interconnectedness of Gaskell and the writing and scientific community. On at least one occasion, Eliot wrote Gaskell, calling *Cranford* an “inspiration” (Eliot). Darwin too, was a fan of Gaskell as well as Austen; he read and praised at least a few of her novels (Litvack 729). Austen’s accomplishment is all the grander considering that she was writing from her father’s rectory, without the encouragement of letters from fellow novelists and the influence of a scientific revolution.

Beer’s groundbreaking studies of Darwin, Eliot, and other Victorian novelists have broken down the “two cultures’ thinking” that has long pushed science and literature into separate spheres (Sellers n.pag.). I hope this thesis begins to take that interdisciplinarity back even further. I surmise that Austen was neither the first to use fiction to explore scientific themes, nor to use those themes to negotiate delicate social issues. If Austen’s work can be perceived as part of the scaffolding that Gaskell built upon, what might Austen have read that inspired her foray into realms empirical? Austen’s other novels alone beg to be scrutinized; at the 2013 JASNA AGM, speaker Cheryl Kinney discussed Austen’s advanced medical knowledge in *Persuasion*. Austen diagnoses Anne Eliot’s friend Mrs. Smith with “Rheumatic fever” (Austen 109) before medical professionals of the time used the term (Kinney). What other scientific insights might be waiting within Austen’s texts, and how might these discoveries change current understanding of the birth of modern science?

The significance of this topic begins and ends in curiosity. By examining the works of Austen and Gaskell and mining them for their empirical efforts, readers come closer to

understanding their own curiosity. As advanced as she was, Austen was asking the same questions about human nature that poets and playwrights were asking centuries before her and that modern day writers and scientists alike still ask today. In this age of DNA tests and genetic mapping, the quest to understand human nature looks different from Austen and Gaskell's graceful prose, but the same wonder drives the search. As we trend towards interest in science even in the field of literature, discussions like the one entered here can add understanding of not only Austen and Gaskell's curiosity but our own.

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