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Feminine Realism in Cornhill Magazine: Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Frances Parthenope Verney

Abstract

This thesis explores the literature published by two lesser known women writers in *Cornhill Magazine* during the 1860s: Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Frances Parthenope Verney. By using the magazine as a context for their fiction, I examine the ways in which these writers both reflect *Cornhill's* brand of realism, which privileged masculine ideology, and diverge from it, inserting a feminine perspective. Because the magazine's representation of the multiple facets of its society is varied and complex, my thesis examines a particular aspect of societal representation: one that depicts mid-nineteenth-century society in transition from traditional to progressive values. Caught between these phases, Thackeray Ritchie and Verney recognize and reflect the implications such a transition had on women and their place in society. Both embrace traditional values and comply with gender norms, creating distinctly feminine texts, but, in so doing, they argue for more opportunities for women, including education, vocation, and independence. In the process of portraying women, they create a feminine realism that complies with but expands *Cornhill's* masculine ideology and realist constructions.

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FEMININE REALISM IN *CORNHILL MAGAZINE*:
ANNE THACKERAY RITCHIE AND FRANCES PARTHENOPE VERNEY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Alexandra Scamahorn

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RITCHIE AND FRANCES PARTHENOPE VERNEY
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This thesis explores the literature published by two lesser known women writers in *Cornhill Magazine* during the 1860s: Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Frances Parthenope Verney. By using the magazine as a context for their fiction, I examine the ways in which these writers both reflect *Cornhill's* brand of realism, which privileged masculine ideology, and diverge from it, inserting a feminine perspective. Because the magazine's representation of the multiple facets of its society is varied and complex, my thesis examines a particular aspect of societal representation: one that depicts mid-nineteenth-century society in transition from traditional to progressive values. Caught between these phases, Thackeray Ritchie and Verney recognize and reflect the implications such a transition had on women and their place in society. Both embrace traditional values and comply with gender norms, creating distinctly feminine texts, but, in so doing, they argue for more opportunities for women, including education, vocation, and independence. In the process of portraying women, they create a feminine realism that complies with but expands *Cornhill's* masculine ideology and realist constructions.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 2008, *Victorian Periodicals Review* celebrated forty years of continuous publication. When it began, periodical research was not an established field of literary scholarship. Walter Houghton's and his wife's compilation of the *Wellesley Index* allowed scholars to navigate a morass of printed material for the first time. During this period, the *Review* was only a newsletter, struggling to attract contributors and funding. Early periodical scholars recognized that newspapers, magazines, and journals could provide a fuller picture of Victorian society than information gleaned from traditional historical and literary sources. As Michael Wolff points out, elite members of Victorian society documented significant events, beliefs, and trends that historians considered important and relevant. Periodicals, however, allow the modern scholar to glean information on other groups, like poor working-class men or middle-class women, and periodicals thereby offer an opportunity to rediscover lost voices and perspectives.

In his landmark article "Charting the Golden Stream" published in 1971, Wolff calls for scholars to make periodicals easier to access both physically and bibliographically, stating that periodicals and newspapers provide new research materials needed to revitalize studies of Victorian England. Early research demonstrated the ways in which periodicals reflect Victorian culture. Lyn Pykett describes the various methods employed by scholars including the reflective/constructive model and the foreground/background model. Houghton used the reflective model, demonstrating how

periodicals provide historical and cultural information on their society while other scholars employed the foreground/background model to help legitimize periodical research for mainstream scholarly work, arguing that periodicals provide a context for studying canonical writers (102).

By the late 1980s, critics began applying theoretical questions to periodical studies. Focus shifted from the idea that periodicals reflect culture to the belief that they actually construct it.¹ Though the background model is still useful for Victorian studies today, Linda K. Hughes explains that periodicals actually helped shape Victorian society, and this fact highlights their importance in understanding this period (318). Lyn Pykett argues,

Periodicals can no longer be regarded in any simply reflective way as “evidence” . . . as transparent records which give access to, and provide the means of recovering, the culture which they “mirror.” Far from being a mirror of Victorian culture, the periodicals have come to be seen as a central component of that culture. . . . (102)

Identifying periodicals as either reflective or constructive involves consideration of the genre of realism and whether this genre reflects society and nature or portrays them in a way that reinforces accepted values and beliefs, or, in other words, constructs a culturally specific ideology.

Viewing periodicals as both reflective and constructive provides the modern reader with multiple approaches to the genre. Pykett describes Michael Wolff’s method as a “mixed reflective/constructive model”: Wolff acknowledges that periodicals constructed Victorian ideas, opinions, and beliefs as well as reflected them (102). As Hughes points out, the reflective or background model has beneficial uses, such as allowing readers to rediscover authors who were popular and influential in their own time

but failed to reach canonical status. Periodicals also preserve work by writers who were not necessarily popular but who offer the modern reader new insight into the periodical itself. These writers interact with the periodical's context in various ways, painting a wider picture of how the magazine responded to specific issues, but also actively constructing part of the magazine's ideology, both conforming to and altering it as a context.

Periodicals provide social, political, cultural, and historical contexts for the works they published, which helps the modern scholar to recover lost writers. Each periodical targeted a certain audience based on class, gender, and education, among other factors. Periodicals adopted a philosophy, or ideology, and a political position, reflected in both content and overall tone. In consideration of these factors, the scope of this paper focuses on *Cornhill Magazine* because it attracted a wide audience and specifically targeted middle-class readers. As a magazine that avoided controversy or extreme positions on most important issues of the period, *Cornhill* illustrates a middling portrait of Victorian society that would have appealed to a wide audience. In accordance with expectations for periodical literature of the time (i.e., to furnish readers with educational material as well as entertainment), *Cornhill* reflects the values of the middle class while also creating standards towards which its audience could strive. As discussed below, the magazine's editors and publisher were concerned with accurately representing Victorian society, and in the process, they constructed their own ideology and "realism" to satisfy their audience and reinforce Victorian values.

Situating the magazine among the numerous Victorian periodicals of the period and identifying *Cornhill's* representation of its society provides a better understanding of

the writers who inserted their work into a specific ideological context, including how their works interacted with other pieces and authors published in the magazine.

Examination of women writers and their treatment of women in their work, for instance, requires a broader understanding of the magazine's attitudes toward women. On the surface, *Cornhill* conveys a conventional treatment of women in society, but closer study of individual works, especially by women writers, reveals a more complex view of how women were represented in the magazine's literature. This thesis examines how women are represented in the literature written by women writers who contributed serial novels to *Cornhill* during the 1860s and how they employed a feminine realism to expand upon the ideological context in which they placed their work.

Although major *Cornhill* writers have received critical attention, large gaps exist in scholarship on lesser known writers who contributed to the magazine. One of the few articles to explore women writers at *Cornhill*, "Not Suffering and Not Still," by Janice H. Harris, examines four better known writers, including George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, and Margaret Oliphant. Though modern readers are less familiar with the latter two than with Eliot and Gaskell, Thackeray Ritchie and Oliphant have become increasingly acknowledged in recent critical studies. The work of other women writers, however, is neglected entirely.

Although women writers contributed consistently to *Cornhill* during the 1860s and 1870s, only five published serial novels during the 1860s: Eliot, Gaskell, Thackeray Ritchie, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frances Parthenope Verney. Most contributions by women are short fiction, poems, or articles. Critical work on Eliot, Gaskell, and Stowe is relatively extensive; Eliot's dealings with *Cornhill* are well documented as is Gaskell's

relationship with George Smith, *Cornhill*'s founder. Thackeray Ritchie's relationship to *Cornhill* has been the focus of some critical work, but no scholarship exists for Verney except for a brief article written in 1958 by E.D. Mackerness. Examining the novels written by these two writers through the lens of the *Cornhill* provides a basis from which to understand their works as a Victorian reader would have read them. This reading involves examination of *Cornhill*'s portrayal of Victorian society and the realism the magazine adopts. Accessing a standard reading makes it possible to step back from this perspective in order to assess how these writers moved beyond reflecting *Cornhill*'s realism and constructed a realism of their own that privileges the female perspective. Thus I argue that Thackeray Ritchie and Verney create a feminine realism that modifies the masculine realism endorsed by *Cornhill* in order to reveal and argue for women's relevance to their society and to advance women's rights and opportunities.

The first section of this thesis provides a history of *Cornhill*'s beginnings and the development of the magazine's philosophical and political stance. It explores the magazine's target audience and the importance of that audience, its specific brand of realism, and its attitudes toward women writers and readers. The second section analyzes in detail two novels by Thackeray Ritchie published in *Cornhill*: *The Story of Elizabeth* (1862) and *The Village on the Cliff* (1866). Thackeray Ritchie's nonfiction articles are used to understand the writer's attitudes towards women in society and to provide a context for her novels. The third section explores two novels published by Verney in *Cornhill*: *Stone Edge* (1867) and *Lettice Lisle* (1868). Verney's nonfiction is also examined, an even more crucial exercise with the lack of biographical material on the

author. For Verney especially, the reader is dependent on *Cornhill* and other periodicals to offer a context for the writer's works.

Cornhill's Context: Transition, Realism, and Periodicals

In *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, Walter Houghton characterizes the nineteenth century as a time of transition. Though many periods in history are transitional, the Victorians recognized their own time as a shift from traditional society, as a break from the Middle Ages (1). Houghton describes the medieval tradition as “Christian orthodoxy under the rule of the church and civil government under the rule of king and nobility; the social structure of fixed classes, each with its recognized rights and duties; and the economic organization of village agriculture and town guilds” (2).² Although changes started with the Renaissance and Reformation, the French Revolution marked a new phase and signaled that “Europe was in a state of transition” (2).³ The British realized this turning point in the 1830s with the development of significant changes, such as the Reform Act of 1832.⁴ During the nineteenth century, British society moved from “feudal and agrarian” to “democratic and industrial” (4). The resulting democratic society, with “the people” gaining political and economic power from the aristocracy through the Reform Acts, allowed talent and industry to dictate a person's position in society over rank. During this period, many experienced doubt in their beliefs and opinions as each man and woman became free to decide important issues and ideas based on his or her own judgment. Houghton explains that industrialization allowed for a democratic society; “once the middle class attained political as well as financial eminence, their social influence became decisive” (4-5). He also delves into the effects of this social transition on the human mind: “Though the Victorians never ceased to look forward to a new

period of firm convictions and established beliefs, they had to live in the meantime between two worlds, one dead or dying, one struggling but powerless to be born, in an age of doubt” (9-10).

Houghton explains the ways in which the turn toward an industrial society affected literature, specifically with the genre of realism. Though this genre was not unique to the period, “classic realism” historically belongs to the Victorians, who developed certain expectations as to what should or should not be represented in art. Despite this fact, their ideas on this matter varied, and many writers tested the limits of realism in their works. Some generalities, however, on the values and ideas common to the genre can be assessed, such as its conduciveness to representing an industrial society engaged in scientific discovery and empiricism as modes of thinking,⁵ and its representation of the middle class in real life detail. Rather than the upper class occupying the center stage, as in romances, the middle class became the focus of realistic fiction.⁶

Although artists like George Eliot acknowledged that “the act of writing was a distorting intervention,” many writers believed realism resulted from a faithful depiction of nature (*Cambridge Guide*). As a general rule, many Victorians believed in the possibility of a unifying belief dictating the laws of realism, but they would have recognized that the mediums of art limited the portrayal of real life. They thought, however, that realism should not be reduced to mimetic devices but should portray the best parts of nature in order to elevate its audience. G.H. Lewes argues that “Art always aims at the representation of Reality, *i.e.* of Truth Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but *Falsism* (493). Far from opposing realism to

idealism, Lewes expects realistic art to portray the ideal. Lewes's "middle position" on realism comes in part from John Ruskin, who believed that art "should not omit what is ugly or evil, but it should emphasize what is good and great. It should be ideal in the sense that it should embody a vision either of potential beauty . . . or of that actual beauty . . ." (Houghton 303).⁷ In her review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, George Eliot defines realism as "the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality" (626).

Modern scholars continue the debate on realism.⁸ Echoing Eliot's definition, George Levine characterizes mid-Victorian realism as belonging to an "affable and moderate tradition" and states, "It belongs, almost provincially, to a 'middling' condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures" (O'Gorman 101). Levine argues that despite all of realism's various meanings and changes throughout history, "it always implies an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some nonverbal truth out there" (102).

Mid-Victorian realism had already changed by the end of the nineteenth century with writers like Hardy, James, and Conrad (102). Some writers at the end of the century believed Victorian realism was "too ideal, insufficiently real or faithful in its copying," but this contrasts with complaints by mid-century critics who claimed that many novels, specifically the domestic ones, lacked poetry (106). Because realism defies definite boundaries, Levine describes his method of identifying and analyzing realistic texts as based on a "circular inductive method: the abstraction from novels we already presume to

be realistic of the qualities that make them so” (107). As described below, *Cornhill* establishes its own standards of realism in its selection of texts, and the novels examined in this study are “presumed to be realistic.” Definitions of realism depend on the specific time period in which the texts were written, down to the decade in some cases, and also depend on the time period in which the texts are read and analyzed.⁹

Feminist critics have approached Victorian realism in various ways. Some critics dismiss the genre, “privileging elements beyond it,” and thereby ignore important female voices who contributed to the literature (O’Gorman 135). Francis O’Gorman includes Penny Boumehla’s critical work as an opposing voice to these views. Unlike these other feminist critics, Boumehla argues that, “Overlooking the textures of realism . . . was to ignore a key mode of writing that allowed women in the nineteenth century a form of self-expression, a textual space in which to articulate their own experience under patriarchy . . .” (135). Rather than avoiding the realist text, critics should be aware of the woman writer’s “ideological resistance” (135). The woman writer was often aware of the connection between the “conventions of realism” and the conventions of society that limited women’s lives (135).¹⁰ As Boumehla states, “Realist texts can be read by and for feminism, not in a flatly mimetic sense but as they enact in both their coherences and their incoherences the struggle between their representation and its own limits and incompletions” (O’Gorman 135). She tackles feminist criticisms of George Eliot that fault the writer for denying her heroines the opportunity to realize their potential and for ending their stories in marriage or death. Boumehla explains that Eliot’s adherence to realist fiction problematizes her treatment of women characters and that critics’

“requirement of fantasy heroines in realist textual environments places anachronistic and unanswerable demands upon the possibilities of writing mid-nineteenth-century realism” (138).

In order to be accepted into *Cornhill*, women writers had to conform to the magazine’s ideological positions. They would have been aware of these expectations and would have constructed their work accordingly. As will be shown, Thackeray Ritchie and Verney work within the patriarchal boundaries of realism and avoid any overt disruption of this framework, but, by demonstrating how their heroines struggle to define themselves within rigid social structures, they illustrate that masculine realism, and its social ideological counterpart, cannot accommodate the feminine perspective. This simultaneous acceptance of and resistance to *Cornhill*’s realism create a feminine realism in which the writers inject their voices into the available textual space of realism and thereby expand upon it.

The woman writer’s participation in the periodical press would have made her even more aware of her negotiation with the public sphere. She would have had deadlines, negotiated payment, and been involved in the business aspects of publishing. Periodicals were expected to entertain as well as educate their readers, and by publishing in this form, women writers became important voices influencing readers. Women authors writing about tradition and the past, like Thackeray Ritchie and Verney, fulfilled another function of the periodical—to provide stasis and security in a time of flux. As they reinforce traditional values, they perform a duty often assigned to women: preservation of the past and morality, not only for their households but for their readers. These writers accept this role but also use it as an opportunity to help women. They

demonstrate the need for women to move beyond the limited opportunities of traditional roles and communicate to their female readers the importance of suitable female role models both from history and fiction.

The woman writer constantly engaged in the parameters of realistic fiction and periodicals, which often occupied similar ideological boundaries. Periodicals served as a convenient vehicle for realistic literature. Barbara Quinn Schmidt describes the sense of control readers received from periodicals and realistic fiction: “Realism in fiction provided comfort by reinforcing the validity of social manners and mores, by celebrating possessions, and by suggesting the possibility of certitude and progress” (“Novelists” 142). During this period of uncertainty and change, “Victorians found in magazines moments of stasis and choice which they could control and enjoy. Serials provided a sense of continuity for these moments” (142). Readers expected novels to be contemporary, nostalgic, or escapist, and to reaffirm their beliefs (142). Schmidt explains that these “ideas solidified, thus shaping social boundaries which became rigid through Mudie’s censorship” and comforted parents wanting to “pass on traditional values when all seemed to be in flux” (142).

Realism also reinforced middle-class values, and the functions of serials and realism often parallel each other. Like realism, serialization, as a form, reflected the ways Victorians thought and read, as discussed at length by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund in their book *The Victorian Serial* (1991). Serials offered a materialistic sign of wealth for the middle class and promised a long story full of rich detail. They also required patience and dedication on the part of the reader, who would read some novels over the course of several months or years. Although these are only two examples

Hughes and Lund provide, they give an idea of how the method of serialization was conducive to the way Victorians thought and also helped shape their values and reading habits. *Cornhill Magazine* creates its own brand of realism through its serial novels as well as its nonfiction articles, the combination of which provides a new way of informing its audience and helping them reflect on their society in a holistic way.

Cornhill Magazine

In 1859, George Murray Smith first determined to start a magazine that would offer quality literature at an affordable price.¹¹ Few magazines of literary merit were affordable to the middle class at this time. Quarterly reviews were expensive and aimed at the upper class while cheap periodicals were geared towards the working class. Smith wanted to combine the serial novel with the literary review, which he would offer at an affordable price for the middle class. From the beginning, he planned to include a serial novel by William Makepeace Thackeray as well as quality, nonfiction articles. At the time, readers could buy novels in parts or in the expensive three-volume format, and they could purchase quarterlies and reviews to obtain their informative and high-quality articles. The new magazine would combine these types of literature into one periodical. In his recollections of this time, Smith wrote,

The existing magazines were few, and when not high-priced were narrow in literary range, and it seemed to me that a shilling magazine which contained, in addition to other first-class literary matter, a serial novel by Thackeray must command a large sale. (4)

Smith would gather the greatest literary talent in order to sell a quality magazine and attract a wide audience.

When approached with a generous offer by Smith, Thackeray agreed to provide the first novel for serialization. Smith asked Thomas Hughes to serve as editor, but he refused on account of his loyalty to *Macmillan's*, a publishing house also engaged in starting a shilling monthly. After failing to find an editor, Smith offered the position to Thackeray, who agreed as long as he was not responsible for the business aspects of editorship. Thackeray and Smith collaborated on the details of the new magazine from its name to the appearance of its cover.

Throughout the 1860s, Smith closely oversaw the direction of the magazine. After Thackeray retired in May 1862, a triumvirate served as editorial committee, including Smith, George Henry Lewes, and Frederick Greenwood. Lewes left in 1864 and Greenwood became editor until 1868. Smith, Lewes, and Edward Dutton Cook then served as editors until 1871 when Leslie Stephen became sole editor. Throughout the 1860s, Smith "seems to have been the main directing power . . . whether the name of editor was conferred on another or not" (Huxley 118). Smith's vision guided the appearance and content of the magazine, and his management provided a consistent editorial vision during the 1860s, despite the fact that after Thackeray, there was no *one* editor in charge of the magazine until 1871. Thackeray's direction and tone for the magazine, set forth in his *Roundabout Papers*, helped build this guiding vision. Anne Thackeray Ritchie describes the professional relationship between Smith and Thackeray as contributing to a unified vision for the magazine: "There can never have been a more brilliant partnership of cause and effect, of philosophy, fancy, and enterprise, that during that too short time while the editor and the originator of 'The Cornhill Magazine' worked

together” (“First Number” 6). Smith’s and Thackeray’s philosophy continued to dictate the context *Cornhill* provided for its contents throughout the 1860s.

Macmillan’s Magazine was based on similar principles to those of *Cornhill*, costing one shilling and offering high quality material. It preceded the publication of *Cornhill* by two months becoming the first shilling monthly. Smith’s unique idea was to combine the serial novel and the literary review. As Leonard Huxley writes, “The novelty of his scheme lay in uniting the popular lure of the serial with the literary work of the more serious reviews, and at the ordinary price of the serial part alone or of the cheapest of the magazines alone” (89). *Macmillan’s* fiction, however, was not as successful as *Cornhill’s*, though it excelled in the nonfiction article.¹² The combination of these two types of literature contributed to *Cornhill’s* initial success, but the same factor may have led to the magazine’s loss of popularity and decline in sales during the 1870s, when the serial novel lost favor and other types of periodicals attracted readers, such as magazines with lighter fiction and illustrations (Huxley 119). As Huxley explains, other periodicals provided more specified interest, resulting in “a pulling apart of the two stools on which the *Cornhill* was seated, and the general public to which it had first appealed was split into several parts” (119). Evaluating *Cornhill’s* popularity in these terms illustrates the magazine’s relevance to the decade in which it was most successful. The idea behind *Cornhill* envisioned well-rounded readers who sought fiction as well as nonfiction to satisfy their educational needs.

Thackeray compared the magazine to a dinner table, a place where the entire family could partake of the same meal. Such imagery drew on the title of *Cornhill* which Thackeray described as having “a sound of jollity & abundance about it” (Harden 903-4).

The magazine cover designed by Godfrey Sykes depicted the phases of a crop cycle; four medallions portray the plowman, sower, reaper, and thresher. According to George Smith, the title of *Cornhill* received much criticism because it was named after the road on which the publishing house was located, an unusual practice considering that many magazines were named after the publishing firm or after cities. The significance of this seemingly minor criticism reveals a deeper contradiction within the portrayal of the magazine. *Cornhill* attempted to evoke the ideals of country life, an ideal with which city dwellers could connect, while developing this image from the name of a street in London, the center of British society and progress. The title signified two opposing sets of values.¹³ Country life privileged tradition and rustic simplicity while city life signified social, intellectual, and technological progress. In the country, the seasons and crop cycle dictated the measurement of time, and this image recalled a simpler time and place in which tradition influenced how people behaved and thought. In the city, train schedules and magazine publication dates created a faster paced lifestyle, and progress placed an emphasis on what the future would bring along with all the technological and scientific progress. *Cornhill* portrayed itself as privileging country life but in reality it was a product of its time. Middle-class readers living in the city would have appreciated the homage to country life while also proving their social status by purchasing such a worthy commodity.

When it was released, *Cornhill* was a literary sensation and sold 110,000 copies, becoming the most successful magazine of its time. Smith had advertised and promoted the magazine, touting the talented and famous writers who contributed their work and assuring his audience of the new and excellent literature they would have available to

them. Another aspect that lent to its success was the need for an affordable magazine for the middle-class reader. Few periodicals catered to this audience. Cheap publications often featured sensational or popular literature and were associated with the working classes. Elevated journals, such as the quarterlies, were written for an educated audience and were more expensive.¹⁴ The middle class, of middling education and wealth, fell between these two types of periodicals. Richard Altick describes the middle-class reader as one of

superior education but relatively little spending money: the people who disdained cheap weeklies, with a few exceptions like *Household Words*, but who could not spare the two shillings or half-crown at which the principal monthly magazines were priced. (359)

The middle-class reader who desired educational literature but could not afford it provided an untapped audience, the potential of which Smith recognized.

The magazine's audience included the professional middle class, seeking education and a means of engaging in a world where new information was constantly coming to light. The magazine intended to help its audience understand this society, which was continuously changing and developing. Smith and Thackeray tried to satisfy

the needs of these readers . . . to be entertained and also to understand, in a simple and pragmatic way, the sense of upheaval inherent in the world that was developing around them. More crucially, it also promised to be a space for the consumption of that once exclusive commodity: knowledge. (Maunder 247)

The rising middle class itself was a part of this change. Thus the magazine had to reassure readers by drawing on traditional values and customs but also had to promise a progressive outlook in keeping with its advancing audience. The magazine provided its audience with the knowledge needed to be connected with society.

Critics writing for elite publications portrayed *Cornhill* as a commodity, as opposed to a high literary achievement, and worried that the magazine provided new reading material for the “disturbingly mobile classes” (Maunder 249).¹⁵ Gaining political and economic power, the middle class supported the growing number of periodicals, to which critics responded with anxiety: they believed that readers were not capable of judging what constituted good literature. Many *Cornhill* readers were not university educated but rather self-educated. Critics worried that magazines like *Cornhill* published a great deal of literature indiscriminately and provided a format in which all pieces were equally represented. As a result, critics emphasized their roles as surveyors of the abundance of literature, responsible for informing their audiences of what they should be reading.

In his *Roundabout Papers*, Thackeray reassures his readers that all works published in *Cornhill* are of literary and educational value. He envisions readers sitting down to the meal provided by *Cornhill* contributors to demonstrate that the magazine’s writers are accessible to their readers through the monthly format. Readers could engage in the serial novel in a way they could not with a novel published in volume form. Both parties meet at *Cornhill* in order to partake in a mutual exchange of ideas. Though the writer is privileged in this exchange, the reader is potentially elevated to a more equal intellectual position than he or she would be when reading a novel in volume form. Thackeray also encourages readers to submit their work to the magazine. In his advertisement of the *Cornhill*, Thackeray invites anyone to contribute, including women, so long as the contributor is knowledgeable about his or her subject. He implies that, at the *Cornhill* table, all will be heard equally and that his own voice will not dominate the

discussion, thus reassuring the audience that the magazine will not take on any political or ideological stance that would exclude possible contributors or readers. Thackeray writes,

. . . at our contributors' table, I do not ask or desire to shine especially myself, but to take my part occasionally, and to invite pleasant and instructed gentlemen and ladies to contribute their share to the conversation. . . . If we can only get people to tell what they know, pretty briefly and good-humouredly, and not in a manner obtrusively didactic . . . If our friends have good manners, a good education, and write in good English, the company, I am sure, will be all the better pleased; and the guests, whatever their rank, age, sex be, will be glad to be addressed by well-educated gentlemen and women. (Smith 7)

Thackeray's message is inclusive, relying on the contributor's good intentions and quality of work rather than overtly basing his selections on class or even gender distinctions--though these of course would have determined the type of contributor Thackeray would accept. With this message, he welcomes all readers as well. All members of the family can sit down to the *Cornhill* table because nothing controversial, such as politics or religion, would be discussed.¹⁶

In his *Roundabout* addressed to the lazy idle boy, Thackeray assures the reader of sitting in "good company" in order to dine on a wholesome meal, as the "*Cornhill Magazine* owners strive to provide thee with facts as well as fiction . . ." (11). Thackeray promises quality literature and defines what he considers quality in this first paper. He imagines the idle boy reading Alexander Dumas, and while he admits the appeal of novels, Thackeray warns his reader that these are like sweets that need to be consumed in moderation and balanced with healthy facts. While "all people with healthy literary appetites love them—almost all women;--a vast number of clever, hard-headed men," excessive novel reading is a gluttony that ruins one's enjoyment of fiction (10). Wise

readers will “partake of novels in moderation—eat jellies—but mainly nourish themselves upon wholesome roast and boiled” (11). In a letter to Anthony Trollope, Thackeray asks the novelist to contribute nonfiction pieces in addition to his novel because one of the objectives with *Cornhill* “is the getting out of novel-spinning, and back into the world” (Harden 908). Continuing the food imagery, Thackeray compares himself to a pastry cook who prefers bread and cheese over tarts. He implies that they sell novels because the public devours them and so they “must bake & sell them” (908). Thackeray’s illustration of the magazine’s objectives carries out Smith’s original vision of the magazine featuring both the novel and the literary review. Privileging fact over fiction, Thackeray implies in his letter to Trollope that getting “back into the world” requires fact-based literature that reflects or represents the real world.

The magazine’s inclusion of various subjects intended to inform a diverse audience without eliminating readers with polarizing positions. Andrew Maunder describes the influence of this multiple appeal, “the extent to which the *Cornhill* seemed to cross the tenuous boundary between gendered spheres, between political factions, between metropolitan and provincial” (242). Although many praised *Cornhill* upon its release, some of Thackeray’s contemporaries criticized the magazine’s inclusivity and availability, both of which marked its openness to more of the middle class and its intentions to help elevate this audience by educating them. Maunder argues that *Cornhill*’s inclusion of multiple subjects and genres that appealed to a wide audience highlighted and crossed divisions between elite and popular cultures and thus class hierarchies. While many reviews praised the quality of the magazine, elite publications criticized the content and tried to align *Cornhill* with the popular in order to maintain

these distinctions. As Maunder notes, “The *Cornhill*’s pages aimed to bring together classes that would normally have been separated both in life and in reading. . . . In doing so, Smith and Thackeray crossed the boundary between the elite and popular cultures, demonstrating its demarcation” (247). The magazine recognizes and, to a degree, complies with these demarcations, but, in the process, it moves beyond restrictions and boundaries to create a new way of reading. Without rejecting traditional, or conventional, attitudes, *Cornhill* progresses towards a new concept of society by its simultaneous inclusion of the old and new.

The ability to maintain yet cross boundaries centers on the magazine’s inclusion of fact and fiction, a feature that merges high and low cultures as well as masculine and feminine genres. These mixtures concerned critics attempting to maintain distinctions between these groups. By merging them, *Cornhill* becomes a welcoming forum for middle class women writers and readers. Jennifer Phegley discusses the critic’s focus on the woman reader, who was considered in especial danger of the negative influences of unguided reading. Women’s centrality to the debate arose from their position as the moral leaders of the household and from the fear that novel-reading could undermine their values and make them discontented with their lives (5). Phegley argues that while elite critics tried to limit women’s reading options, the family magazines not only encouraged women to read a variety of materials but viewed themselves as providing education that was otherwise denied. She describes these magazines as targeting “women as the primary consumers of literature and the disseminators of culture within the home” while they were excluded from the elevated quarterly reviews (6). As a result,

family magazines outsold these reviews, which had dictated literary standards since the eighteenth century (6).

For *Cornhill*, Phegley examines Thackeray's assessment of fact and fiction and the roles of these modes of literature in the magazine. By providing more fact than fiction, she argues, the magazine took its female audience seriously:

With its combination of serialized fiction and serious articles, the *Cornhill* promoted women's learning, and that learning would begin first and foremost with the monthly delivery of the magazine to the middle-class home, where it would stand as a symbol of cultural knowledge and authority. (80)

Phegley draws on this mixture of fact and fiction to explain how the magazine actively entered the reader's life, instructing her on how to be a better member of society. With emphasis on realism in the fiction and the use of fictional techniques in nonfiction, the magazine blurred boundaries between the two forms. These practices allowed fiction "to merge with real life" and encouraged women readers to define themselves and the world around them (78). Readers were expected to incorporate both fact and fiction in their understanding of a subject (79).

Mark W. Turner explores this concept in his analysis of the intertextual relationship between Anthony Trollope's *The Small House in Allington* and the nonfiction surrounding it. His discussion centers on the ways in which the nonfiction informed the novel's treatment of the Woman Question. He argues that Thackeray created a specific kind of realism through censorship, as he dictated that no material would be published that was offensive to women and children. Because the magazine excluded political and religious discourse,

Cornhill's version of reality constructed female readers and female reading, and the content of each issue was regulated according to these constructions. The exclusion of politics and religion was an emasculation. . . . *Cornhill*, the most successful of the new monthlies, participated in creating a periodical literature that was gendered female. . . . (229)

Turner describes the magazine as “petting” the middle class by reinforcing its ideologies through noncontroversial material. The texts, fiction and nonfiction, become politically charged when read within the context of the magazine, as this context invites an ideologically dominant stance that guides intertextual readings. In Turner’s characterization, *Cornhill's* ideology focuses on the importance of the domestic ideal: “Marriage was increasingly seen as a moral safeguard and the domestic hearth as the centre of stability” (230). Trollope develops gendered spheres in his novel associating female characters with the country, which is private, and male characters with the city, which is public. Women are assigned to the domestic sphere and are expected to comprise its “moral center” (233). Turner analyzes mid-century debates on the redundant woman¹⁷ in relation to Trollope’s novel, as this issue would have been part of the “middle-class *public* discourse” of the time (232). He argues that *Cornhill* reinforces the “ideological positioning of gendered spheres” and the “domestic ideal” (233), and demonstrates that its literature responded to women’s issues. He shows how works read intertextually “participate in blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction while simultaneously constructing ideological positions” (233). The magazine’s feminization, gender ideology, placement of fact over fiction, and blurring of distinct boundaries are central to *Cornhill's* realism.

The magazine’s representation of reality acknowledges the transitional and unstable aspects of its society. As mentioned above, *Cornhill's* image attempts to paste a

stable, traditional image over a new product, which, as some critics point out, became a symbol of the literary marketplace. Smith's vision for the magazine itself was progressive as he conceived of an advanced form of reading, incorporating the old (the literary review and the serial novel) into a new package by including both fact and fiction into a single entity. These binaries were incorporated into the magazine in a way that allowed them to be read intertextually and comprehensively. By actively and overtly involving women and men as readers and writers, the magazine, which reinforced gender norms, incorporated the public/masculine and the private/feminine into a holistic realism that could be accessed by anyone. As Turner and Maunder explain, when texts are read intertextually, boundaries become blurred or are crossed. Though *Cornhill's* realism reflects a masculine representation of society, which can be found immediately in Thackeray's designation of fact's importance over fiction, the magazine's inclusion of important women writers provides a feminine representation, or feminine realism, that reflects but expands upon the masculine perspective.

The progressive image and attitude the magazine conveyed, however, was tempered by its traditional ideological views. While opening the forum to any knowledgeable writer, Thackeray characterizes the magazine as moral, middle-class, and non-controversial and, of course, involving a primarily masculine discourse. The magazine's content, specifically its fiction, is often presented as anti-sensationalist, and the image of the magazine's cover and title recalls a traditional and idyllic past. *Cornhill* adhered to gender norms and other Victorian ideologies. It can be viewed simultaneously as traditional and progressive in outlook and image, and modern critics tend to characterize it both ways, though rarely do critics examine this binary and its effects on

the literature. Appearances of traditional and progressive attitudes throughout the magazine convey another set of seemingly opposing binaries with which *Cornhill* writers struggle. These struggles reflect a contradiction that can be found in the culture at large and one that is deeply imprinted in the workings of the magazine itself.

Modern critics have shown how *Cornhill* constructed its brand of realism on a system of inclusive binaries: fact and fiction, masculine and feminine, elite and popular. Deborah Wynne explores the sensational qualities in some of *Cornhill*'s fiction, specifically in Wilkie Collins' *Armadale*, thus demonstrating that realism itself is set in relation to sensationalism within the magazine. A crucial binary, however, is that of tradition and progress. Like the other binaries that can be roughly characterized as belonging to either the masculine or the feminine (such as fact and elite to masculine and fiction and popular to feminine), the ideal woman maintains traditional values and morals and guards tradition for her children and household. Progressive ideals belong in the public sphere where men implement new systems: technological, social, and scientific. These binaries work to construct the realism for which *Cornhill* strove.

The mixture of progressive and traditional attitudes is reflected in the literature, especially in works by women writers. Mid-Victorian women found new freedoms in the publishing world, a place where they could enter the public forum and practice a vocation anonymously. Although women writers became increasingly successful during this period, they were discouraged from pursuing any objective outside of the home. They foreshadowed the New Woman towards which they were progressing but they were held back by traditional ideals and expectations. Thus women writers show a particular concern with the transition of women's places in society and recognize this transition in

society at large, as Victorian society was in the process of change. Examination of this transition can be discerned to varying degrees in the works of women writers who found at *Cornhill* a new forum that assured its audience of familiar territory but encouraged forward-thinking attitudes.

As mentioned above, Thackeray invited women to contribute to the magazine, and *Cornhill* published a fair number of women writers. Janice H. Harris reports that during the 1860s and 1870s contributions from women comprised around twenty percent of the total content and in some issues reached sixty to seventy percent, the highest ratio occurring during the magazine's most popular years.¹⁸ Harris's essay poses certain questions about these writers who provided a great deal of material on a variety of subjects in which they exhibited expertise (385-6). Harris asks how these women writers fit into the public world of publishing when they were encouraged to "suffer and be still." She writes,

It invites speculation: who were those women contributors? what were they writing about? how did they fit into the competitive, commercial world of *Blackwood's*, *Macmillans's*, *Fraser's*, and the *Cornhill Magazine*? As important, how did the great Victorian periodicals fit into the lives and ambitions of those 1,426 women? (382)

Many of these questions have yet to be fully answered. Major works like Eliot's *Romola* and Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* have received critical attention though not as much concerning their placement in the *Cornhill* context. A few critics have discussed Thackeray Ritchie's development and connection to *Cornhill* within the last few years but little has been written on her specific novels appearing in the magazine, and there is no current scholarship or criticism on Frances Parthenope Verney, Florence Nightingale's older sister. Just as *Cornhill* serves as a useful context within which to place Thackeray

Ritchie's progress as a writer, it helps the modern reader appreciate the impact her work would have had on her contemporary readers, as her first two novels *The Story of Elizabeth* and *The Village on the Cliff* were highly praised by critics and fellow writers. The *Cornhill* context enables the modern reader to discover lost voices, as with Verney, for whom there exists little biographical information or published letters or journals. Because of this, Verney's fiction and nonfiction published in periodicals serve as a means of understanding her contributions to the *Cornhill* context, providing answers to many questions, such as "Who were the women writers who made up twenty percent of *Cornhill*'s content?" "What did they write about and how did they contribute to the magazine as a whole?"

Chapter Two: Anne Thackeray Ritchie

Anne Thackeray Ritchie published her first article “Little Scholars” in *Cornhill* in 1860. She continued to write for the magazine, serializing her first two novels, *The Story of Elizabeth* (1862) and *The Village on the Cliff* (1866) within the first decade of *Cornhill*’s existence. Early in her career, she wrote several articles, short stories, and fairytales, which have received critical attention in recent decades. Under the editorship of her brother-in-law Leslie Stephen, Thackeray Ritchie published *Old Kensington* in 1872 and *Miss Angel* in 1875. She also wrote a series of articles on women writers during Stephen’s editorship, which were then collected in a volume titled *A Book of Sibyls* (1883). Her final novel, *Mrs. Dymond*, appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1885. During this period in *Cornhill*’s history, the editor James Payn tried to revive the magazine’s popularity and Thackeray Ritchie’s writings did not fit with his agenda.¹⁹

Analysis of Thackeray Ritchie’s nonfiction provides insight into the ideas and attitudes that prompted her early novels. These early writings were first published in *Cornhill*, which provides a context for Thackeray Ritchie’s development as a writer. Helen Debenham explains the importance of this context on the writer’s early work, characterizing Thackeray Ritchie herself “as a literal embodiment of the magazine, someone so shaped by her early, close relationship with it as to be almost as much written by it as writing for it” (“Literary Formation” 82). Debenham argues that because Thackeray Ritchie had to conform to the standards and boundaries of the magazine, the

Cornhill context limited her individual expression, voice, and ideas. Serial publication, however, allowed her to experiment with form and escape the restrictions of the three-volume novel. She could write short novels more conducive to her impressionistic style and avoid involved and complex plots for her stories. *The Story of Elizabeth*, for instance, began as a short story but grew into a novel when Thackeray Ritchie decided to change the ending. She liked the “longish short story where she was freed from the constraints of elaborate plotting of either the sensational or the realist kind, about which she seems to have been instinctively sceptical” (87). As argued below, Thackeray Ritchie develops this “instinctive” skepticism in her own specialized ideas on realism and explores these ideas in her treatment of women in her literature.

Indicative of this escape from sensational and realist plotting, her writing is often described as impressionistic: she created “sketches of character and especially of place which the *Cornhill*’s intertextual mix of fact and fiction accommodated and perhaps encouraged” (“Literary Formation” 87). James Fitzjames Stephen characterized her writing as a series of sketches or a “little bundle of photographs, the subjects of which have taken the fancy of the authoress and touched her feelings” (495). He remarks on the thin plots of her first two novels, which he reviewed for *Fraser’s Magazine*, and he attributes this to her feminine mind that latches on to subjects for their sentimental value. Stephen implies that this type of writing is proper for a woman writer who can deliver a moral or “sermon” through the novel form, while men are expected to deliver their message linearly and to the point. In his review, Stephen places Thackeray Ritchie’s work within its proper feminine position, from which it is expected that she be a moral leader for her readers by way of nurturing, sentimental, and feminine methods.

Stephen thereby reinforces proper gender norms according to the ideological standards of the period and to *Cornhill*. He positions Thackeray Ritchie, a new writer, in her place within the literary establishment, which typically reinforces ideologies that privilege the masculine perspective. In his explanation of the differences between male and female writers, he expresses the idea that women are expected to deliver moral truths, but men cannot engage in this practice. When a man writes with a moral, the reader wishes the writer had had “a heavier or more powerful weapon” and rather than “indirectly” teaching morality, the male writer “ought to come out and fight in the way of substantive argument and specific statement.” Women, on the other hand, should not be direct or specific, but should couch their moral teachings in fiction and these lessons “must either be said in this form or not at all” (493). Though Stephen believes that women have something important to convey in their literature, he limits their expression according to restrictions imposed on women by society in general. Women should never be argumentative, combative, or even substantive.

Thackeray Ritchie’s writing conforms to these standards that Stephen outlines. Her writing is distinctly feminine. Modern critics explain her discursive style as a “feminine narrative . . . characterized by diffusion and fragmentation rather than ‘masculine’ orderliness and closure” (“Literary Formation” 87). In this light, modern readers can see how Thackeray Ritchie’s novels conform to Stephen’s reading, but, from this analysis, the reader can also understand her conscious effort to move away from a masculine realism that privileges linearity and emphasis on fact, rather than imitating it. Thackeray Ritchie creates a space between the boundaries placed on her as a woman and the ideas and beliefs she wished to express as an individual writer. Despite Debenham’s

characterization of the limitations placed on Thackeray Ritchie by the ideological context in which she wrote, Thackeray Ritchie's writing pushes these boundaries in ways overlooked by a purely materialistic or biographical analysis of her work. While it is undeniable that her writing complies with the *Cornhill* context and that she maintains gender norms, her work tugs the reader towards a certain discomfort with issues concerning women in Victorian society, as she expresses their lack of opportunities, including education and occupation, which leads them into powerless and, at times, into compromising situations. Although her feminine writing upholds traditional norms and expectations for a woman writer, she uses her discursive style to privilege a feminine realism.

Her progressive attitudes toward women can be found within both her fiction and nonfiction. This section explores Thackeray Ritchie's ideas regarding women in society as expressed in her nonfiction, followed by an analysis of how these ideas are further developed in her fiction, first in *The Story of Elizabeth* and then in *The Village on the Cliff*. As shown below, Thackeray Ritchie consistently evokes the past in relation to the present and explores her own time as a mixture of traditional and progressive values. These values relate directly to women who are portrayed in Thackeray Ritchie's writing as imprisoned or trapped in circumstances that make them feel powerless and frustrated due to their lack of opportunity and independence. She argues that women should be educated, informed, and active in their communities and she encourages women to venture into public arenas. While she advocates progressive roles for women in society, Thackeray Ritchie still adheres to ideological gender norms by refusing to engage in subject matter, or to allow her characters to participate in activities, that would not be

suitable for women.²⁰ In her nonfiction and fiction, both traditional and progressive values are central to the construction of her own ideas concerning women, and this binary reflects *Cornhill's* balancing of tradition and progress in a transitional society. Just as the magazine attempts to convey a sense of social stability, Thackeray Ritchie introduces new ideas without dismantling established beliefs. The struggle between traditional and progressive values creates a particular type of realism for *Cornhill* and for Thackeray Ritchie.

Thackeray Ritchie's Nonfiction

Thackeray Ritchie's first published article, "Little Scholars," was proposed by her father William Makepeace Thackeray. She had written several novels and a tragedy before she was fifteen, at which time Thackeray told her to postpone her writing and to read other authors instead. He also had her serve as amanuensis for his own novels. When she was twenty-three and her father was editor of *Cornhill*, he gave her the topic for the article, suggested the title, and edited the finished piece. Some critics believe Thackeray's control over his daughter's early work smothered her individual expression. Katherine Hill-Miller argues that Thackeray's influence produced her writing career but stifled her autonomy and limited her writing as a whole. She believes that Thackeray's need for his daughter to take the wife's place in the household and his guidance over her education and formation as a writer resulted in her lifelong devotion to him. After her marriage to Richmond Ritchie, Thackeray Ritchie primarily wrote nonfiction, reliving her childhood and resurrecting her father's ghost (382). Hill-Miller portrays Thackeray Ritchie as forever dependent upon male protection and guidance, citing Thackeray as the cause and Ritchie as the continuation of Thackeray Ritchie's preference for the "safe

limits of a daughter” (382). Hill-Miller, however, exaggerates biographical detail to explain Thackeray Ritchie’s work, especially in the case of her writings after Thackeray’s death. Thackeray Ritchie’s depictions of women in her fiction and nonfiction encompass a wider vision than that of the dependent daughter, and in fact, she consistently encourages feminine independence. Her perspective reflects her own experiences as a woman writer, apart from the influences of her father, and as a woman who was a spinster until she was forty years old.

Throughout her fiction and nonfiction she reflects upon the necessity for independence and self-respect for women to become functioning members of society. In “Little Scholars” the speaker recounts visiting a Jewish school where the children portray these very qualities—specifically the little girls—who inspire her with admiration for their “respectability and uprightness” as they are “self-possessed, keen-eyed, well-mannered” (555). The female students learn arithmetic and prove their knowledge of various subjects. Above all, the speaker respects their independence, which is absent in Christian children who are taught to believe that “servility was a sacred institution.” She writes,

We seem to expect an absurd amount of respect from our inferiors; we are ready to pay back just as much to those above us in station . . . there is often too great an inequality between those who teach and those who would learn, those who give and those whose harder part it is to receive. (556)

Though she is vague about which group constitutes the learners and which the teachers, Thackeray-Ritchie’s statement encompasses all social hierarchies whether between different classes or between men and women. Her placement of this comment with her descriptions of the female students recalls the fact that men determined women’s

education, which at the time was in a poor state. During the 1850s and 1860s debates over women's education were common in the periodical press, and though not addressing these debates directly, she acknowledges this issue and illustrates an example of good education for girls.

In addition to reporting on the Jewish school, the speaker visits a school for poor children and an establishment that educated housemaids. Her account of the latter describes an institution that shelters and educates abandoned, destitute, or unemployed women. Even in this early piece, Thackeray Ritchie's concerns with women's education and place in society manifest themselves. Visiting and writing about social institutions was an acceptable venue for women writers, and Thackeray Ritchie maintains these boundaries, but her advocacy of independence for women in education and vocation reveals a belief that women should be allowed to participate in society and not be excluded from it.

Thackeray Ritchie continues to argue for independence and greater opportunity in "Toilers and Spinsters" written the following year. In the first part of the article, the speaker expresses her frustrations with spinsters who bemoan their unmarried state. She argues that single women are free to engage in entertainments and activities despite being unmarried. She encourages women to participate accordingly, even suggesting that they need not exclusively concern themselves with the "griefs and sufferings of their neighbours" (319), as single women were expected to care for the sick and lonely. In *Elizabeth*, Thackeray Ritchie depicts the protagonist, in her depressing situation, helping the sick as a means of repenting for her past behavior.

Beyond performing these mundane duties, the speaker suggests numerous opportunities available to the spinster, from attending the theatre to climbing craters to writing articles for the *Saturday Review*. In a comic tone, she asks the spinster whether she has been refused a subscription to Mudie's or *The Times* because of her spinsterhood. She states that spinsters

have been doctors, lawyers, clergywomen, squires—as men have been milliners, dressmakers, ballet-dancers, ladies' hair-dressers. They have worn waistcoats, shirt-collars, white neckcloths, wideawakes, parted their hair on one side—and, oddly enough, it is strong-minded women who take this curious method of announcing that they are single. . . . (319)

She dismisses the label of “strong-minded women” when it is used to limit women's freedom, as she attempts to remove the stigma assigned to women who embrace their single status. She demonstrates that women can function in society without male partners, and she includes the spinster in every part of life, showing the reader that other women before her have moved into the public, active world alone.

In this article, Thackeray Ritchie questions gender restrictions placed on women as well as the notion that women must marry in order to lead a full life. Beyond this, she illustrates the positive and negative aspects of marriage, explaining that though Mrs. B may be happily married, there is Mrs. C “who has to fly to Sir Cresswell Cresswell to get rid of a ‘life companion,’ who beats her with his umbrella, spends her money, and knocks her down, instead of ‘lifting her up’” (320). While she acknowledges that some single women lack “social equality” due to their financial situation, she argues that it is lack of money rather than husbands that compromises their comfort. If women are to eschew marriage, however, they need a means to earn a livelihood. Instead of lamenting their lack of marriage opportunities, they should find a way to make a living. For Thackeray

Ritchie, a woman's ability extends beyond charity; she should be employed in "industry, and application, and determination—how every woman in raising herself may carry along a score of others with her . . ." (322). Employed women help not only themselves but others as well.

In this sense, Thackeray Ritchie reflects her father's efforts to encourage women writers, which he accomplished through his writings, if not through his position as editor. Phegley explains that Thackeray recognized the difficulties facing middle-class women, who had few options for respectable employment, and that he worried about the well-being of his own daughters after his death. Though Thackeray "berated women contributors" and published few works by women, he also "created public sympathy for them" and "integrated [them] into the magazine's support for the expansion of educational and professional opportunities" for women (84). This practice can be found in an article published by *Cornhill* in November 1864 titled "A Tête-à-Tête Social Science Discussion," in which two men debate the surplus woman problem and concoct ridiculous solutions to the issue. This article mocks actual suggestions presented in the press, such as sending unmarried women to the colonies to seek husbands.

Thackeray Ritchie appears to have been prompted to write the piece in response to the surplus women problem first recognized when the 1851 census reported that women outnumbered men by 500,000 and that two and a half million women were unmarried (Levitan 363). She uses this topic as a transition to the "toilers" part of the article and reports on the Ladies' Reading-Room at No. 19, Langham Place, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, the *Victorian Press* and Miss Faithfull, and the plights of shopwomen. She transcribes ads posted by unemployed women who have

been abandoned or suffered loss leading to poverty. She praises the work the Society and the *Victoria Press*, run by women, achieve by employing women as printers and clerks, and she compares them to a press run by men, in the process of which she reverses male and female roles: “The idea of clerks embroidering in their office, and of young women with pens behind their ears, bending over title-deeds and parchments, seemed rather an incongruous one; but young women must live somehow, and earn their daily bread . . .” (325-6). While recognizing the unconventionality of these arrangements, Thackeray Ritchie illustrates the success of working women and promotes the Society and the *Press*’s cause.

Thackeray Ritchie also recognizes that class barriers, another social imposition, limit women’s options, specifically those of the middle class. But she lessens the importance of class by stating that educated and cultivated women also seek employment to help them through difficult times, and that these services are not only available to “needlewomen and shopwomen and servants” (326). Her article would have been read chiefly by middle-class women. She repeats her message that honest, though humble, work allows women to free themselves of narrow “economies which are incompatible with the very existence of cultivation and refinement” (326). Thackeray Ritchie recognizes that class restrictions place a burden on middle class women whose options for respectable employment are limited. She disproves the validity of these cultural limitations and shows women how these social perceptions inhibit them from taking more control of their own lives. Because of the census’s statistics, she recognizes that women need to take charge of their own destinies rather than relying on marriage, an option unavailable to a significant portion of the female population.

Thackeray Ritchie's encouragement of female networks and support systems constitutes the most crucial aspect of her nonfiction writing. She fosters support among women for women by presenting different classes who are in need of help. She reveals the difficulties of shopwomen and needlewomen, generating sympathy among her female readers in order to create a network of women who can support one another. Emily Faithfull serves as a role model for helping other women succeed. Thackeray Ritchie's depiction of the reading room and the printing press run by women prove that they can work together in productive ways. At the house for needlewomen, she writes, "The ladies here do not only give work and money, they go to the women at their own homes, and if they miss them from the house, look after them and give them help if they want it" (330). She ends the article by emphasizing that spinsters run these establishments for other women, and it is to the spinsters' "kindly sympathy and honest endeavours that these places owe their existence" (331). Thus Thackeray Ritchie encourages women to make practical progress for other women in the real world instead of dwelling on failed expectations set forth by society.

In these articles, Thackeray Ritchie uses a woman speaker whose adventurous, sympathetic, and, at times comic, tone contributes to her image as an older mentor trying to help other women succeed. She thus utilizes her privileged access, as a woman, to certain establishments and her feminine voice as a means of bringing about social change, demonstrating that feminine writing has a place in the public sphere where progress can be made. She also speaks as an authority and tries to distinguish between the ways women are taught to perceive their own situations and the reality of their abilities, depicting her own representation of the real world.

These two pieces foreground later articles Thackeray Ritchie wrote concerning current issues, and they contain themes and ideas she extends to her literary articles about women writers. In “Heroines and their Grandmothers” (1865), she expands her discussion of women’s place in society by looking to the past.²¹ Her criticism of modern fiction written by women is comparable to George Eliot’s article “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” (1856) and centers on the argument that contemporary fiction focuses to a morbid degree on feeling and sensation. Thackeray Ritchie begins by questioning the realism of modern literature, particularly by women: if literature is supposed to reflect life, then how is life so differently portrayed in the work of women like Jane Austen from the fiction of modern novelists? She poses several questions: Are the former heroines women as they were, or as they were supposed to be in those days? Are the women of whom women write now, women as they are, or women as they are supposed to be? Does the modern taste demand a certain sensation feeling, sensation sentiment, only because it is actually experienced (630)? These questions address novels by women writers, but they may also be read in a general sense: Thackeray Ritchie examines whether the ideology with which literature is imbued reflects how women truly are by nature or how society says they should be. As in “Toilers,” she examines the reality of a woman’s position compared to how she is made to believe she should be. Thackeray Ritchie also suggests the role women have in perpetuating or creating these images and ideas of fellow women, as if to say women should take care how they treat other women in their writing.

Although her questions address women’s literature, they reflect a more general interrogation of realism and acknowledge the power literary works have in forming

public perception. Her questions indicate a separation of reality and truth that is explored even more in her fiction. Settling on the side of the grandmothers, she believes modern women writers are “morbid, constantly occupied with themselves, one-sided, and ungrateful to the wonders and blessings of a world which is not less beautiful now than it was a hundred years ago . . .” (640). She uses the word “morbid” to describe an obsessive examination of the self, which fails to encompass truth even if it demonstrates an individual reality. Rather than focusing on themselves, writers should expand their scope to the world around them and employ a wider depiction of the good and bad as well as interests beyond the self. In a *Cornhill* article, Leslie Stephen echoes this idea and also uses the word “morbid,” though in a slightly different sense: “No art retains its interest for posterity which does not give permanent expression to something more than the temporary tastes, and, moreover, to something more than the vicious and morbid propensities of mankind” (“Thoughts” 227). Stephen wrote this article while he was editor of *Cornhill*, in 1876, eleven years after Thackeray Ritchie’s “Heroines,” which shows a continuum within the magazine of how realism was conceptualized by *Cornhill* writers and also shows one way that Thackeray Ritchie’s realism aligns with the masculine version.

Thackeray Ritchie distinguishes between two kinds of novels: the objective and the subjective. Objective novels, based on facts and events, belong to men in general, while subjective novels driven by emotion belong to women. She privileges objective novels over subjective ones.²² Jane Austen, however, was an objective writer, and Thackeray Ritchie demonstrates that women can write objectively. She encourages them to focus on character and events, like their grandmothers, without allowing feminine

emotion to overwhelm their work. As James Fitzjames Stephen states in his review, women are expected to be emotional and sympathetic while men should be more direct and linear. Thackeray Ritchie reflects this dichotomy, but frees women from adhering exclusively to the subjective novel. This message recalls her argument about the spinster, whom she criticizes for focusing all her mental energy on excessive emotion and on her own self. Women become more empowered and relevant when they expand their views and concerns beyond their own situations.

Although Thackeray Ritchie succeeded in expanding her own views, her writing defies categorization as either objective or subjective. Leslie Stephen compares her to a painter whose outlines are “muddled and indistinct,” and he writes that she “would not lose her genius nor have more genius if she were as clever in her workmanship as Miss Austen” (Gérin 177). Though he believes she has “real genius and originality—more than almost anybody now working,” he wishes that “it could be just a little combed out!” (177-8). Thackeray Ritchie’s writing defies categorization because it lacks linearity, structure, and workmanship, and thus the standards of masculine realism set forth by two contributors, and later an editor, of *Cornhill*.

Over the course of twelve years, Thackeray Ritchie published biographical articles on women writers from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the grandmothers mentioned in the previous article discussed. These were originally published in *Cornhill* and then collected in *A Book of Sibyls* (1883). Writers included Jane Austen, Anna Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, and Amelia Opie. Thackeray Ritchie wrote a biography of Madame de Sévigné in 1881. While celebrating the success of these

authors, she concentrates on their personal lives and their devotion to family and domestic happiness.

Since she praises these women for their fulfillment of traditional, domestic roles as much as their literary productions, Thackeray Ritchie's purpose again is to educate her audience. She responds to the claim that women cannot both have an occupation and maintain a household. Many Victorians believed that a woman writer would "destroy her femininity, threaten her marriage, and disrupt her household . . ." (Helsing 6). Because of this perception, women writers attempted to show that their "work was neither a betrayal of their womanly nature nor a rejection of their duties" and they tried to "assert their commitment to domestic responsibilities" (9). These efforts correspond to other attempts to cast novels in general as feminine and conducive to "women's natural emotionality and domesticity" (Easley 100). Critics tried to "redomesticate" the woman writer, "locating her achievement within the domestic sphere" (101). Thackeray Ritchie's depictions of women writers follow this line of thought in order to assuage her audience and illustrate, for her female readers, the possibility of producing great works of literature while taking care of husbands, fathers, and children. In her article on Anna Barbauld, she describes the poet's troubled married life due to the mental instability of her husband. Although this causes her pain and unhappiness, Barbauld's writing never conflicts with upholding her responsibilities. Thackeray Ritchie emphasizes the poet's unwavering devotion to her husband.

Thackeray Ritchie describes Barbauld's life as unremarkable in a way that makes Barbauld, the person, accessible to her readers. Through the reader's connection with Barbauld on a personal level, Thackeray Ritchie instructs her reader on the perils of a

difficult marriage by depicting Barbauld's choice to marry her husband. Exhibiting the negative aspects of marriage, Thackeray Ritchie suggests that Barbauld's husband may have dampened her creative output;

It is idle to speculate on what might have been if things had happened otherwise; if the daily stress of anxiety and perplexity which haunted her home had been removed—difficulties and anxieties which may well have absorbed all the spare energy and interest that under happier circumstances might have added to the treasury of English literature. (590)

Thackeray Ritchie illustrates that Barbauld's talents and ability might have been stunted by domestic trials. This portrayal suggests that many women are likewise limited because of their familial or marital situations.

Another aspect that characterizes these articles is Thackeray Ritchie's concern with networking and establishing a canon of women's writing. Dramatist Joanna Baillie was a close friend to Barbauld as was Maria Edgeworth. Her niece Lucy Aikin was a writer as well. Barbauld had "a natural affection for sister authoresses" (597). Her friends included Hannah More, Mrs. Montague, Madame d'Arblaly, and Mrs. Chapone, and she knew Amelia Opie. Thackeray Ritchie emphasizes Barbauld's female friendships, including her lifelong relationship with a woman named Betsy, who helped her through difficult times: "There is something very affecting in the loyalty of the two aged women stretching out their hands to each other across a whole lifetime" (600).²³ She encourages women to recognize their own literary canon but also to investigate the possibility of female networks that can help them in their daily lives.

While she uses similar techniques to convey Jane Austen's character as a person as well as a writer, Thackeray Ritchie expresses her own literary standards. She praises the author for the control she has over her material, including her characters and events.

This recalls her definition of objective novels in “Heroines.” Austen’s ability to describe her worlds allows the reader to live them. Her characters are like friends:

Are not such friends as these . . . creations that, like some people, do actually make part of our existence, and make us the better for theirs? . . . They are, and do actually make part of our lives, one of the best and noblest parts. To love them is like a direct communication with the great and generous minds that conceive them. (165)

Once again, Thackeray Ritchie reveals a means by which readers, women in particular, may connect with women writers through their characters. Women characters also provide role models for their readers, or, as Thackeray Ritchie phrases it, friends who guide their readers and improve them. She attributes to Austen a “natural reality” that withstands the passing of time, though one that still reflects “the light of [her] own hour” (165). Her criticism of modern literature suggests that it illustrates more of its own time than a truth that will survive future ages. Modern writers are too “self-involved,” and though modern literature concerns “wider experiences, with aspirations and emotions that were never more sincerely spoken than they are now,” there is little “actual study of character” (165).

Thackeray Ritchie describes Austen as an “unconscious teacher” who instructs by her life: her novels not only benefited English literature, but she was “loved by all those of her home” (173). By depicting Barbauld and Austen as devoted to home and family, Thackeray Ritchie argues that women can be successful writers without sacrificing their domestic duties. She thus provides support for women who wish to write. Thackeray Ritchie’s practical illustrations recognize the real position of women who were dependent upon their families for support and livelihood, and she enables them to contemplate the possibility of fulfilling multiple roles in society.

The article on Maria Edgeworth demonstrates even more than the others how Thackeray Ritchie ties women writers together into a community, illustrating a network of women supporting other women. She cross-references the other articles, mentioning a fact written in the Jane Austen article in Edgeworth's article (534). Thackeray Ritchie also quotes Austen who proclaimed the importance of novels written by Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, which contain "knowledge of human nature" and "the liveliest effusions of wit and humour," and she acknowledges the debt writers like Edgeworth have to their predecessor Burney, as well as the importance Edgeworth had for both Austen and Thackeray Ritchie herself. Thackeray Ritchie mentions Edgeworth's admiration of *Evenings at Home* by Barbauld and her defense of Hannah More against her protégée Lactilla (421); Edgeworth also read and appreciated Jane Austen's novels. Barbauld celebrated Edgeworth's success, "for your sake and for my sex's sake" (536).

Thackeray Ritchie also emphasizes Edgeworth's close relationship with her father, who encouraged her writing, and her close relationships to both her stepmothers, who helped form her character. Edgeworth refused marriage to Chevalier Edelcrantz, whom Thackeray Ritchie believes could have provided a good match. Toward the end of the article, however, she praises Edgeworth's independence of mind:

. . . her life was now shaped and moulded in its own groove; the consideration, the variety, the difficulties of unmarried life were hers, its agreeable change, its monotony of feeling and of unselfish happiness, compared with the necessary regularity, the more personal felicity, the less liberal interests of the married. Her life seems to have been full to overflowing of practical occupation and consideration for others. (540)

Though Thackeray Ritchie expresses her belief in a good, supportive marriage, she portrays unmarried life as having its advantages. Responding again to the "redundant

woman,” she provides an alternative vision of the spinster who accomplishes goals and even contributes to her national culture.

Thackeray Ritchie gives the men credit for their support of these writers, which she knows to be necessary for them to have succeeded. Above all, however, she emphasizes the importance of friends who helped these women and cross-references all the articles by bringing up the same list of names who constitute the female Victorian writer’s canon. On the first page of Amelia Opie’s article, she mentions the names of Barbauld, Edgeworth, Austen, More, Trimmer, Baillie, and Hemans in the context of their old-fashioned attire. Her nostalgic tone favors feminine writers who “had the pre-eminence in looks, in gracious dress and bearing” and had “little in common with the noble and brilliant writers . . . in our own more natural and outspoken times” (357-8). As in her other pieces, Thackeray Ritchie compares the old with the new. Her position acknowledges that modern literature is wider in scope, but she regrets its overabundance and superficiality. While she praises the merits of past writers, she focuses on the progressive aspects of their real lives, such as independence and productivity, as much as their adherence to traditional roles.

The Story of Elizabeth

Thackeray Ritchie’s first novel was serialized in *Cornhill* from September 1862 to January 1863. Both *Elizabeth* and *Village* adhere to the structure of the female bildungsroman, which follows the “intense self-consciousness or the psychological development of its heroine” and takes place within the domestic realm, “often with marriage as the source of the heroine’s dilemma” (Peterson 66). Thackeray Ritchie’s story concerns the young, willful Elizabeth who is trapped in a strict Calvinist household

after a misunderstanding that causes her to lose her suitor John Dampier. Elizabeth's mother Caroline prevents their marriage because she herself has secretly loved John for many years and has become jealous of her daughter's charm and attentions. Knowing, however, that John detests her, Caroline marries Stephen Tourneur, a celebrated Calvinist preacher in Paris, in order to gain power and admiration. Elizabeth, rebellious and strong-willed, detests her living conditions and finds her only companionship in her stepbrother Anthony, who has fallen in love with her. Just after Anthony proposes, John Dampier returns and secretly takes Elizabeth on outings without permission, leading her to believe in his devotion to her. John confesses his engagement to his cousin Laetitia just before he and Elizabeth are caught at the opera by Tourneur. Due to the shock of these events, Elizabeth becomes ill and nearly dies. After she recovers, Jean Dampier, John's spinster aunt, takes Elizabeth back to England to recuperate. During this time, she meets Will Dampier, another cousin, and he eventually proposes to Elizabeth. She refuses, returns to Paris, and tries to accept her fate and live for others by nursing the sick. After John and Laetitia break off their engagement, John returns to Paris and proposes to Elizabeth. She accepts and they marry.

Elizabeth received praise from numerous periodicals, including *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Saturday Review*. The *Athenaeum* was the only publication to criticize the novel to any significant degree.²⁴ Although Thackeray Ritchie's relation to William Makepeace Thackeray may explain some of the attention the novel received, the praise and acceptance of *Elizabeth* by reviewers went beyond her father's celebrity ("Re-reading" 139). Part of her popularity among critics during the 1860s can be explained by her realistic portrayal of rather ordinary characters, providing an alternative to sensation

literature. Reviewers thought Thackeray Ritchie's writing fresh and original. Some critics characterized the novel as impressionistic and as a collection of sketches. In these articles, realistic sketches offer a kind of foil to sensational plots.²⁵ Margaret Oliphant believes no reviewer could "find any impertinence to say against a narrative so modestly, yet so boldly, kept within the range of observation and experience . . ." (171). She emphasizes the novel's realistic qualities, especially the depiction of Elizabeth.²⁶ *The Reader* believes Thackeray Ritchie's "men and women come before us like the men and women of real life" (378). Like Oliphant, the *Saturday Review* sets *Elizabeth* in opposition to sensation novels: "We venture to predict that startling novels will soon have had their day. . . and, although nobody has denied their cleverness, there is a sort of reaction felt which will favour the introduction of a new novelist of a different class" (501).

"A different class" characterizes Thackeray Ritchie as belonging to an undefined category. As Helen Debenham argues, Thackeray Ritchie's work often defied clear categorization, which unnerved reviewers. Many reviewers believed her plots confused and disorderly, but Debenham argues that Thackeray Ritchie's writing "explores the lack of correlation between plots and everyday life and thus, at a fundamental level, questions the structures of cause and effect that form the moral foundations of Victorian realism" (142). Because her work lacks an involved plot, Thackeray Ritchie's *Elizabeth* escapes the objective/subjective dichotomy she defines in "Heroines," as she attempts to create realistic characters and to explore the emotional turmoil of a young woman. Her lack of strict adherence to many standards of novel formation, a form essential to realist fiction, perhaps impeded her categorization and acceptance into canonical literature. Modern

criticism also contributes to her continued absence. Feminist criticism, which has recovered many women writers, often concentrates on sensation fiction. This criticism, for the most part, ignores domestic romance, which fails to support “contemporary ideologies” (141). Thackeray Ritchie complicates a feminist approach to her writing as she reinforces the systems and ideologies in place, but her work reveals the ways in which she utilized her “limited” feminine perspective in order to promote women’s causes.

The feminine characteristics of her writing are praised but also criticized by reviewers who seek more poetry and larger truths than are found within the scope of her novel. Although Thackeray Ritchie avoids the sins of exaggeration and ornate writing, the *Saturday* reviewer criticizes her for being too realistic: her writing lacks poetry and truth because she aims at “realism at any price” (501). Oliphant dislikes Caroline’s jealousy of her daughter and believes this type of realism is not truth because of its immorality. Though Oliphant describes Thackeray Ritchie as maintaining proper boundaries for the most part, the *Saturday Review* discourages her second-hand philosophy and looks forward to her next “novelette” (501-2). The reviewer appreciates Thackeray Ritchie’s work because she stays within the acceptable standards of proper feminine writing. When her “original” writing appears innocuous, the reviewers encourage her; when she deviates from “truth,” they become nervous and fault her for being too realistic.

Consideration of the novel’s viewpoint, style, and inclusion of certain binaries allows for an alternative reading unavailable to the *Saturday Review*, one that accepted and then dismissed her small work. Despite its unassuming presence, *Elizabeth* provides

the reader with a set of choices that represent a struggle between traditional and progressive values, as represented through the male characters: Stephen Tourneur and Will Dampier. This struggle reflects a binary in the magazine as a whole, and illustrates the unique, or perhaps not so unique, perspective of a young woman working through conflicting influences, between her own desires and inclinations and the social standards imposed upon her. Thackeray Ritchie illustrates this clash between a desire for independence and autonomy and the limitations imposed upon women by society, including her dependence upon relations even into adulthood, her inability to move and function within society, and her prospect for a good marriage as the only viable option for a fulfilled life. Thackeray Ritchie develops this notion throughout the novel, however, into a more general concern: the question of whether one should strive for immaterial or material aims; in other words, whether Elizabeth should sacrifice her identity to higher ideals or whether she should be allowed to concern herself only with worldly ambitions. In the end, Thackeray Ritchie's solution falls in the middle. Elizabeth marries John Dampier and stays true to her own desires, thus maintaining her identity, but only after she reforms her selfish, worldly attitudes. This binary reflects the dual identity of *Cornhill* as a traditional, nostalgic tribute to the past and as the product of a consumerist and progressive society, as well as its attempts to convey a middling position within society and its debates.

Debenham's article on *Elizabeth* provides a foundation for examining Thackeray's Ritchie's interrogation of realism. It helps the reader understand how the novel fits within the *Cornhill* context. Debenham argues that Thackeray Ritchie shows the disparity between fictional plots and real life within *Elizabeth*, and thereby questions

the “structures of cause and effect that form the moral foundations of Victorian realism” (142). Elizabeth is presented as a typical heroine in appearance but not in behavior. Debenham explains that Elizabeth’s “ordinariness . . . problematizes the narrative context in which she is placed, making the conventional framework a site of contest between a ‘real’ woman and the fictional and ideological constructions permitted her” (142). Elizabeth must rely on chance for her story to end happily, and this expectation, as presented in a realistic form, leads readers to believe that life follows art: “The text everywhere balances its demonstration of the contingency of ideological narratives with an awareness of their power to control women’s behavior” (143). Elizabeth believes that the romance plot “of marriage and reform . . . must construct her character and control her life” (143). Thackeray Ritchie often shows the disparity between fictional representations and real life, while also recognizing fiction’s ability to educate its readers. She tries to teach her readers how to read effectively, learning from the factual aspects of literature while recognizing the parts that are not true to real life, especially in the portrayal of women.

As Manuela Mourão points out, Thackeray Ritchie uses the “traditional female *Bildungsroman* plot of courtship and romance and ends it, also traditionally, in marriage” (“Interrogating” 76). Interrogating realism’s ability to represent women accurately, Thackeray Ritchie still employs elements of *Cornhill*’s realism, but extends the boundaries of this specified realism to include the feminine perspective and argues that traditional ideological systems inhibit women from being in control of their own fate. Her incorporation of progressive attitudes in her nonfiction expresses this latter point blatantly, but this technique is also present in the fiction. As in the essays, Thackeray

Ritchie uses the narrator as an authority in the novel to make this argument. Although the story conforms to the genre's expectations, the novel escapes this framework, as the narrator speaks both within and outside of this storyline, freeing her perspective from the realm of masculine realism. Thackeray Ritchie employs the same narrative voice in her fiction and nonfiction, connecting fact and fiction in a way that emphasizes a lack of legitimate space for women that is productive and meaningful.

Katherine Malone examines the narrator in Thackeray Ritchie's nonfiction and argues that she employs the double perspective of a young and old woman to make "feminist causes seem unthreatening to a conservative audience by making her readers feel paradoxically nostalgic for progress" (471). Exploring Thackeray Ritchie's early and late nonfiction, including "Heroines" and "Toilers," Malone argues that Thackeray Ritchie "literally embodies her double point of view in an array of female characters who are simultaneously young and old" (475). In her memoirs, Thackeray Ritchie's young self, a girl among Victorian celebrities, and her older self, an authority on the past, are both present in the writing (476). In "Heroines" she aligns "herself with the older generation" (477). This argument provides support for the idea that Thackeray Ritchie's use of past and present, and tradition and progress, centers on her concerns for women in her society, and the narrator constructs this interconnected and dynamic dualism of tradition and progress. Malone's argument, however, appears to equate Thackeray Ritchie with the narrator, assuming that Thackeray Ritchie at most creates the mask of an older and wiser person, permitted because of the anonymity of *Cornhill*. Malone perhaps makes this assumption because of the continuity in style and tone throughout much of her nonfiction. As Malone argues, the narrator in "Toilers" speaks as an authority, as if she

herself is a spinster who has climbed volcanoes. Her favoritism of older writers over modern ones in “Heroines” and her biographies on women writers might make the reader think the narrator is not a modern novelist. Creating an experienced and older narrator than the writer herself provides Thackeray Ritchie with greater authority and a wider perspective than readers might expect from a young woman writer. Thackeray Ritchie employs a mature voice but maintains the feminine to give credence to her experiences as a woman and a writer. The narrator may resemble Thackeray Ritchie, but, in actuality, she is a carefully constructed voice that connects Thackeray Ritchie’s writings in meaningful ways.²⁷

With this voice, Thackeray Ritchie constructs an old spinster narrator in *Elizabeth* who relates the perspectives of all the women characters through her wider viewpoint. The narrator draws together traditional values in her use of realism (and its implicitly masculine ideology) to convey her story but incorporates progressive values, initially expressed in her nonfiction, in her depictions of Elizabeth, Elizabeth’s mother, and Jean Dampier. Thackeray Ritchie adheres to the expectation that Elizabeth’s story must end either in death or marriage. Her treatment of Elizabeth’s journey, however, creates sympathy for her experiences as an individual. Elizabeth’s situation also represents those of other young women, the truth of which transcends the realist plotline. The narrator’s ability to compare Elizabeth’s ending to her own, comment on how society has misled Caroline, and encompass the story within her own voice which spans a significant period of time situates the masculine realist story within her feminine perspective. By allowing her constructed narrator to frame the story and to question the nature of realism, she

envelops the story in a feminine realism and scrutinizes how women are portrayed both in literature and in real life.

The narrator portrays Elizabeth as a typical woman. Elizabeth rebels against her oppressive environment, which she considers a prison. To ease her unhappiness, she secretly meets with John Dampier, and though she fears she has done wrong, Elizabeth confesses to him that she would “have died for want of fresh air in that hateful prison” if she had not met him (508). Before John’s return to Paris, Elizabeth’s only social engagements are prayer meetings, at which she is humiliated for wearing her pink gown, and she refuses to eat the cabbage soup, a staple of Tourneur’s ascetic lifestyle. She openly confesses to Tourneur, “*I hate your life and your ways, and your sermons*” (344), and admits that she has no Christian charity.

Despite Elizabeth’s lack of noble qualities, the narrator treats her sympathetically and succeeds in presenting her as a likeable character to the reader who can understand her frustrations. By personalizing Elizabeth’s plight, Thackeray Ritchie exhibits a specific case that represents the numerous women who experienced similar situations of confinement and powerlessness. The narrator teaches the reader how to understand Elizabeth, despite her wayward behavior. Even after Elizabeth’s declaration to Tourneur that she would rather be wicked than be good like him, the narrator defends her:

But it had always been so with this impetuous, sensitive Elizabeth; she suffered, as she enjoyed, more keenly than anybody else I ever knew; she put her whole heart into her life without any reserve, and then, when failure and disappointment came, she had no more heart left to endure with. (345)²⁸

Her faults become, to a point, admirable qualities.

As mentioned, Elizabeth represents the numerous women in her situation. When Will hears her story from Jean Dampier, he believes Elizabeth is to blame and accuses her of not actually caring for John. Once he witnesses Elizabeth's grief firsthand, however, he sympathizes with her and realizes that he had been misinformed by John's mother, Lady Dampier, who wished to portray Elizabeth as conniving: "Was this the scheming young woman, against whom he had been warned?—the woman who had entangled his cousin with her wiles?" (822). Thackeray Ritchie represents how easily young women's troubles can be dismissed when others blame them for all their misfortunes rather than their situations or the faults of others. Explaining Elizabeth's poor behavior while living in Tourneur's household, the narrator states,

I don't offer any excuse for Elizabeth. She was worried, and vexed, and tried beyond her powers of endurance, and she grew more wayward, more provoking every day. It is very easy to be good-natured, good-tempered, thankful and happy, when you are in the country you love, among your own people, living your own life. But if you are suddenly transplanted, made to live some one else's life, expected to see with another man's eyes, to forget your own identity almost, all that happens is, that you do not do as you were expected. Sometimes it is a sheer impossibility. (493)

The narrator attributes Elizabeth's behavior to her lack of freedom to choose her own way of life and her own beliefs, as Tourneur's way of life is imposed upon her. These circumstances threaten to destroy Elizabeth's identity. The narrator adopts second person narration to place the reader in Elizabeth's circumstances and evoke a deeper understanding of her situation. She also criticizes Tourneur's insistence, though he means it for the best, that Elizabeth conform to an ascetic lifestyle. By creating this opposition, Thackeray Ritchie constructs a scale of values ranging from emphasis on the immaterial, spiritual, and unworldly to the secular and consumerist lifestyle.

While Elizabeth embraces the worldly, Tourneur tries to convince her of higher ideals. He and others like him “look at this life in comparison with the next . . . and had but little concern with the things of to-day” (340). Elizabeth, however, declares that she cares only for her body (492). Tourneur therefore presents a threat to Elizabeth’s identity. She cannot accept the traditional roles of womanhood forced upon her, including obedience and compliance. Her worldly desires resist this domestic prison of the mind as well as the body. Through Elizabeth, the narrator presents the claustrophobic situations of many young women like Elizabeth whose minds and bodies are imprisoned.

Will Dampier provides another creed, which Elizabeth accepts over Tourneur’s beliefs. Will Dampier represents the modern man actively engaged in a progressive society. Rather than waiting for the next life, he embraces his current one: “He saw wisdom and mercy, he saw order and progression, he saw infinite variety and wonder in all natural things” (105). He tells Elizabeth that “we were put into the world to live in it . . . to do our duty, and to labour until the night should come when no man can work”; whereas Tourneur tells her “you are born only to overcome the flesh . . . to turn away from all that you like most, innocent or not” (105). Will reflects *Cornhill*’s representation of the modern man, a progressive professional who is actively and intelligently engaged in his society. He embodies the masculine ideology of the magazine.²⁹ By making Will Dampier the balanced male viewpoint of the novel, Thackeray Ritchie elevates the middle class and their values, which fits in with *Cornhill*’s focus and target audience.

While Elizabeth accepts his influence and beliefs, she rejects him as a husband.³⁰ Thackeray Ritchie shows her heroine’s acceptance of masculine realism, which would dictate that a wayward young woman must comply with the mandates of society in order

to receive a happy ending. Her near death and escape to England allow her to reflect on life. She vows to live for others and serve her society, thus renouncing her former attitude that such a lifestyle was mere “cant” (495).³¹ As a result, Elizabeth becomes a moral individual but without compromising her identity, an action she accomplishes by rejecting both Anthony and Will as husbands. While she accepts this ideology, she refuses to sacrifice her desire to marry John, which enables her to maintain her own identity and independence of mind, if not of body.

The narrator questions whether Elizabeth’s rejection of Will is “madness or wisdom” and whether this was “the decree of fate or of folly” that after refusing a second good man, she “turned back impotently to the memory—it was no more—of a dead and buried passion” (109). Thus Elizabeth adheres to her own will and rejects the ideal man of the novel, whom the audience might expect her to love and marry now that John Dampier has broken her heart.³² While in many novels the worthy woman marries the noble man, Thackeray Ritchie portrays Elizabeth as ordinary, and not particularly worthy of Will Dampier. Instead she belongs to unremarkable John, whom reviewers believed was not heroic. As in many realist novels, the best suited couples marry in the end. Thus Thackeray Ritchie complies with the forms of realism by having the right couples marry at the end, but on her own terms, by allowing Elizabeth to choose the creed that suits her own identity.

The narrator’s commentary on the wisdom of Elizabeth’s decision draws attention to the construction of her own narrative, as if the narrator herself remains unconvinced that a young woman would make this decision in real life. She sheds light on the contrived aspects of realist fiction, as if to remind her reader that her story is fictional. In

a story, a woman can hold on to an “impotent” memory, but in real life, she would have been considered foolish to do so. The narrator thereby creates a space between her own feminine perspective and the conventions of fiction, suggesting that the narrator belongs to real life and can accurately comment and instruct her reader on reading the text. The narrator speaks within and outside the constructed story, just as Thackeray Ritchie speaks both within and outside of the masculine realist tradition, enabling her to distance readers from the fiction. Manuela Mourão explains that Thackeray Ritchie works within the “ideology she set out to critique” and that she “relied on a positive representation of women as the rhetorical strategy that allowed her to question those dominant ideologies while avoiding radical feminist statements” (“Interrogating” 75). Through her depiction of Elizabeth, the narrator creates sympathy for Elizabeth’s situation and also reveals the parts of the story that are unrealistic, allowing her to question realist literature’s ability to portray women accurately.

The narrator creates a bond with her audience by providing a balanced view of all the characters. She often acknowledges Elizabeth’s faults: “I cannot help being sorry for her, and sympathizing with her against that rigid community down below, and yet, after all, there was scarcely one of the people whom she so scorned who was not a better Christian than poor Elizabeth” (494). Even Elizabeth’s mother becomes a better Christian, serving the poor and sick, though her motivations eventually betray her. Caroline serves others as a means of obtaining power and authority. Despite Catherine’s casting as an evil stepmother, the reader is compelled to feel a measure of sympathy for her as well. The ending paints a moral of a wayward woman who has received her punishment, but the commentary on Caroline’s life reflects not only the individual’s

plight but makes a statement about women in general. Caroline employs the only options available to her to gain the power and industry she desires: she marries and she engages in social philanthropy. With Caroline, Thackeray Ritchie explores her first example of a failed marriage and questions the limited options open to women.

Jean Dampier, an elderly spinster, provides the third depiction of womanhood in the novel. Her constant knitting represents her involvement and influence in the stories of the young people around her. She is also an adept storyteller. Will writes to his sister, “How well she tells a story” (818). Lady Dampier, John’s mother, bored him with the same story, as she made all the characters “selfish and disagreeable,” but with Aunt Jean the “personages all brighten under her friendly old spectacles, and become good, gentle-hearted, romantic, and heroic all at once—as she is herself” (818). Jean wants John to marry the woman he prefers, but she sympathizes with both Laetitia and Elizabeth. Her ambivalence recalls her desire at the beginning of the story that John marry Laetitia even though she liked Elizabeth. Jean takes Elizabeth away from Paris before John can propose to her but then she wishes John had run after them to England. Will calls Elizabeth Jean’s heroine, as she stars in the story Jean relates to her nephew, and he suggests that her interference in the affair makes her a writer of real events. The narrator heard the story of Elizabeth from her friend Jean Dampier. She sets herself in relation to the spinster, the “old maid in the window building castles in the air through her spectacles,” and employs a wry tone to describe her friend: Jean is “only a fat, foolish old woman. All her fancies are but follies flying away with caps and jingling bells . . .” (106). Her comical depictions of Jean Dampier cast her as a stereotypical old maid, a sentimental woman who loves romances, but the narrator also

shows that Jean's fancies become real as she helps advance the plot and encourage the young lovers.

At the end of the novel, the narrator appears in person to visit Jean Dampier. Elizabeth and John are married, walking in the field together, as Mary, the narrator, and Jean watch them from inside the house. Jean Dampier regrets her missed chances for marrying, but the narrator, also a spinster, never expresses any regrets of her own and only attempts to comfort her friend. Mourão argues that Thackeray Ritchie "creates memorable representations of single women that subtly undermine the general understanding of the spinster as pitiful" ("Interrogating" 75). Rather than expressing any disappointment with her own life, the narrator presents herself as fulfilled and capable. She feels equal to the young married couple as she and Jean look out at the "myriad worlds of heaven . . . and light and life eternal," holding hands in feminine friendship (118). This image takes the spinsters beyond their earthly circumstances to realize that everyone shares the same fate, and makes their worth equal to the youthful and married. Thackeray Ritchie balances her concerns with all types of women from the young wife to the old spinster. The spinsters' sincere concern for Elizabeth demonstrates Thackeray Ritchie's call for women to support other women, an argument she makes in her nonfiction, in which she shows real spinsters who take care of women in need. As Mourão explains, Thackeray Ritchie provides her readers with alternative views of single women, presenting positive options outside the realm of marriage.

Because of the census in 1851, single women became an important topic of debate, and both male and female writers examined the nature of female friendships. Many women were unable to marry and therefore had to survive on their own. As Pauline

Nestor explains, this issue encouraged women to aid other women, forming networks, friendships, and support. Female friendships were often viewed as secondary to heterosexual relationships, however, “compensating for the lack of a male and the recognition of a need for male authority,” and female friendships were usually viewed “in relation to men” (Nestor 5). The image of female friendship was either seen as shallow and as a rehearsal for marriage, as many male critics claimed, or depicted much like that of Mary and Jean in *Elizabeth*. Nestor explains that if a “composite picture” of real female friends in women’s writing could be provided, “she would be a single, elderly woman who provided consolation to some other ‘old maid’” (15). She explains that “singleness was seen as the state of something lacking, and female friendships were an appropriate solution for those who were losers in the demographic lottery” (15).

Thackeray Ritchie’s female friendship between Mary and Jean engages in this discussion that ties in with the larger issues concerning women’s rights. Her depictions escape both the shallow and the convenient, as her narrator possesses more authority and freedom in her single status. Although she comforts Jean, the narrator also raises the spinsters to equal status with the married couple. They offer an alternative couple to Elizabeth and John and, breaking from the image of the pitiful old maid, they are empowered writers of the story, especially the narrator herself.

Despite the close relationship between the narrator and Jean Dampier as friends and co-writers of the story, the narrator also sets herself in opposition to Jean, who represents a more traditional image of spinsterhood: a tender-hearted, matronly aunt who focuses her time on the lives of the young, regretting that she never married. The narrator, however, reflects the type of spinster Thackeray Ritchie portrays in “Toilers.” While Jean

Dampier relates her stories to friends and family, the narrator writes her story for a magazine. She travels to visit her friend Jean as well as to the Tourneur home. She also possesses a wider view than Jean, who acts upon her sympathies rather than taking a balanced view. The narrator represents a more progressive spinster, embracing the opportunities available to her.

After she announces the end of Elizabeth's story, the narrator travels back to the Tourneur house where she meets Caroline, who has given up her duties in the community. The narrator again questions whether Elizabeth should have married Anthony and asks, "Self-denial and holy living are better than ease and prosperity?" (119). She thereby juxtaposes Elizabeth's fate with that of Caroline; had Elizabeth married Anthony, she would have suffered the same fate as her mother, marrying where she did not love and did not belong. With Caroline, the narrator portrays a bad marriage and compares Caroline's situation to her own. When the narrator tells Caroline she must leave, Caroline "gasped out suddenly—'Ah! what would I not give----' and then was silent and turned aside" (119). The narrator informs the audience that Caroline "remains with her husband, which is more than I should have given her credit for" (119). Caroline wishes to have the ability to come and go as she pleases, and envies the narrator her freedom. This depiction recalls Thackeray Ritchie's comment in "Toilers," in which she reminds spinsters that though many women have good marriages, others must endure terrible ones.

While Jean Dampier regrets her missed chances to marry, the narrator comprehends both sides of the story. Her view encompasses both the social discourse on women, which presents spinsters as superfluous and aimless and young women as either

conniving or helpless, and the reality of women's situations. Elizabeth appears to be the wayward woman, but the narrator reveals the complexity of her character by teaching the reader to sympathize with her perspective as a woman with few viable options. Jean offers an image of the traditional spinster with a twist; she enables the happy ending, but the narrator fulfills an alternative vision of how spinsters could be in real life. The narrator thus demonstrates a rift between realism and truth and challenges *Cornhill's* brand of realism, which places masculine discourse above feminine and maintains gender ideologies discussed above. She takes advantage of the feminine audience that the magazine fostered as well as its "blurring of boundaries" as she mingles her feminine realism with the masculine. Just as Elizabeth accepts Will's creed, Thackeray Ritchie accepts *Cornhill's* masculine ideology but encompasses it within her feminine perspective, making her own choices as well as something new.

The Village on the Cliff

In *The Village on the Cliff*, published from 1866 to 1867, Thackeray Ritchie again employs the spinster narrator as a character and a commentator on the text, placing her both within and outside of the story. Although the narrator personally knows and connects the two main characters, Catherine George and Reine Chétien, she takes a less prominent role in the story and her character is less defined than in *Elizabeth*. Similarly to *Elizabeth*, however, the narrator explores Catherine's experiences as an isolated woman with few prospects and expresses the intense suffering Catherine endures due to the meddling of others, especially Madame de Tracy, Jean Dampier's alter ego. While Jean Dampier refrains from directly interfering in Elizabeth's life, Madame de Tracy manipulates Catherine's future in destructive ways. Although she believes she helps

Catherine, Madame de Tracy's confusion of the real world with romantic literature leads her to believe she has the authority to direct Catherine's life. While Jean Dampier acts as a sort of unintentional author of Elizabeth's fate, Madame de Tracy takes an active role in manipulating Catherine. The narrator extends Madame de Tracy's confusion of fact and fiction to a broader discussion on women in art. Through Richard Butler, the male protagonist of the novel, the narrator questions art's ability to portray women accurately and sympathetically. The narrator relates her narrative through a realist medium, but operates outside this text, by questioning masculine realism, which constructs certain visions of womanhood, with her own impressionistic style. Through her two main female characters, the narrator splits Elizabeth's character into two complex women. Each woman tackles different circumstances and struggles with the transition between traditional and progressive values in society.

The novel primarily focuses on Catherine George, a twenty-year-old governess working for the Butler family in London. Catherine has no family except for two younger stepsisters. She earns sixty pounds a year and owns "the interest of a thousand pounds besides, she was rich for a governess" (23). She uses her income, however, to pay for her sisters to attend a better school than the "cheap and retired establishment" their aunts offer to fund (24). The step-aunts could have adopted Catherine, but they are "worldly, pushing, disagreeable women" (24). Catherine, however, helps her younger sisters succeed, despite her limited means, and exhibits the female support that Thackeray Ritchie advocates in her nonfiction. As critics point out, Thackeray Ritchie's fiction often lacks supportive maternal figures. The mothers in *Village* sacrifice Catherine's well-being for their own convenience.

Though the narrator portrays their actions negatively, she balances her criticism with understanding, as she shows her reader why these women react to Catherine the way they do.³³ As a mother, Mrs. Butler, for instance, performs the duties society expects of her: “Mrs. Butler was one of those motherly women entirely devoted to their husbands and children, and who do not care very much for anybody else in all the world, except so far as they are conducive to the happiness of their own family” (138). Throughout both her fiction and nonfiction, Thackeray Ritchie illustrates the disadvantages of a doctrine that encourages women to focus solely on their own small sphere; she tries to present a wider viewpoint for her readers. Although she could help Catherine, Mrs. Butler believes she performs her duty towards the young governess, and society supports her elitist claims.

The narrator’s sympathy lies primarily with the discarded heroine, Catherine, who becomes a victim of her lack of social standing, family, and knowledge. Loneliness and isolation characterize her position as governess. The narrator describes the schoolroom in which Catherine works as the Domestic Bastille and Catherine as a prisoner, not only of the house but of her social position. As one of the few respectable occupations available to middle-class women, the governess has little mobility and cannot interact as an equal with the Butler family.³⁴ Thackeray Ritchie sets up a direct contrast between Catherine and the Butler family by naming one of the daughters Catherine Butler, a young woman with marriage prospects, wealth, and social position. Catherine questions why she is deprived of the advantages of other women, suggesting that chance of birth and circumstance limit women like her to inferior social positions. Such women are made to believe they are not entitled to the advantages of women like Catherine Butler, and this,

among other factors, prevents Catherine George from taking control of her own fate. This message would have been particularly appealing to *Cornhill's* middle-class audience; Thackeray Ritchie demonstrates that a person's advantages and disadvantages depend upon social position, a matter of chance, and she casts the Butler family, with the exception of Dick, as self-centered and ineffective.

Like Elizabeth, Catherine struggles to uncover her own identity because of a repressive environment, but unlike her counterpart, Catherine lacks "strength of mind." The "amazons" like Mrs. Butler easily guide her according to their own plans and self-interest (362). As a result, older women do not like Catherine, because they perceive her as weak and dependent:

For it is difficult sometimes for the weary and hardly-tried amazons of life to feel a perfect tolerance and sympathy with other women of weaker mould and nature. . . . The strongest and fiercest of amazons would be glad to lay down her arms at times, and rest and be weak and cared for; but the help comes not for her; she must bear the burden of her strength and courage, and fight on until the night. (362)

Like Mrs. Butler, Reine Chétien lacks sympathy for Catherine's decision to marry Fontaine, claiming that she would not have done so in Catherine's place. The narrator explains that Reine's strength and position allow her to make such a judgment. Mrs. Butler's social position provides her with a platform from which either to dismiss or sympathize with women of less "strength of character" (362). The narrator admires and criticizes the "amazons," women who are both married and unmarried. She encourages strength and duty in women but warns against a lack of sympathy and understanding. One moment she states that Mrs. Butler "dictated, and ruled, and commanded" and at another she demonstrates Mrs. Butler's better qualities. Mrs. Butler silently endures her

hardships: “she gave no sign, allowed no complaint to escape her, bore her sufferings in silence” (363). As with Reine, the narrator shows the difficulties of strong women, capable of withstanding their burdens and duties, but she also encourages them to help women who do not possess such qualities. Thackeray Ritchie thereby defends gender norms, which expected women to be sympathetic and philanthropic, and reinforces them while defending the “strong-minded woman.”

Unlike these strong women, Catherine lacks authority over her own life. Other women write her future without informing her of their plans. Catherine’s existence is defined by uncertainty:

Ah, why would they not at least talk and say what they meant? This was all she was to know. This was all the uncertainty: all her life she might expect no more—nothing else. This horrible instinct of what they were thinking was her only certainty. (499)

Only Richard Butler, called Dick, Mrs. Butler’s nephew, sympathizes with Catherine’s position, and this leads his aunts to fear the two will develop a romantic relationship. Though Catherine becomes attached to Dick, he secretly loves Reine. As Dick’s and Catherine’s friendship grows, Mrs. Butler and her sister-in-law Madame de Tracy decide that Catherine should leave her position and serve as a governess to de Tracy’s daughter-in-law Ernestine in France. Although they offer this new position to Catherine as a choice, she has few real options available to her: she can either work in France, a foreign country in which she knows no one and cannot speak the language, or be without a position or a home.

After taking the position in France, Catherine finds her employment threatened again. Ernestine, who never wanted a governess, wants to dismiss Catherine before the

family travels to Paris, but Madame de Tracy continues to shape Catherine's future by orchestrating a marriage between Catherine and Petitport's mayor Monsieur Fontaine. Once again the circumstances of Catherine's life provide her with few choices, as she faces either being dismissed alone into the world or marrying Fontaine when she loves Dick Butler. Although she has good intentions, Madame de Tracy removes Catherine from a stable position in her own country and traps her in a loveless marriage. Most of the characters view Catherine as an inconvenience, and instead of handling her situation with sympathetic support, they exclude and exile her. The social system provides few opportunities for Catherine to be independent and forces her to rely on others whose interests are at odds with hers.

In *Elizabeth*, the narrator presents the protagonist as a typical woman, making the reader realize the constructed nature of her "heroine" as a type in a story but complicating this categorization by portraying Elizabeth's character and situation as complex and personal. Thackeray Ritchie's narrator in *Village* also casts Catherine as a type, the governess, and explains that others view Catherine as a type or a sign in relation to themselves rather than as an individual with her own plans and desires:

Everybody is something to somebody else. Certain hieroglyphics stand to us in lieu of most of our neighbours. Poor little Catherine herself was a possible storm and discussion to some of the people present—to Marthe a soul to be saved, to Madame de Tracy a problem to be solved and comfortably disposed of; to Monsieur Fontaine . . . the unconscious Catherine appeared as one of the many possible Madame Fontaines in existence. . . . (493-4)

Catherine's identity becomes a sign, or a hieroglyph, for what society expects of her, a fact that detracts from an autonomous identity and allows others to construct their own plans for her life. Catherine thinks of herself as a blank page, furthering the conception of

her as a heroine in a book as this page is filled in by the misguided mothers. Thackeray Ritchie forces her reader to sympathize with Catherine's situation, which represents that of many young women. Real life women in this position are often not viewed as individuals but as social problems, as seen with debates over the redundant woman. With Elizabeth and Catherine, Thackeray Ritchie brings a face and story to real life women and thus distinguishes between the fiction that these women are useless and the reality in which women could contribute to their society if given the opportunity.

Catherine lacks the authority to control her own life and reverts to marriage as a socially acceptable option. She cannot even make decisions concerning herself because she is never fully informed of her situation. Madame de Tracy never tells Catherine that she will need to leave the de Tracy household as she "did not want the poor child to be unnecessarily distressed . . . it seemed a shame to disturb her . . ." (495). Unable to make an informed decision about her future, Catherine marries Fontaine in desperation because marriage for a woman in her position becomes the only means of a livelihood. Mourão argues that Thackeray Ritchie critiques "the idealization of marriage" and remains ambivalent about "suggesting that women should embrace exclusively traditional female roles and necessarily seek a husband and raise a family" ("Negotiating" 57). Thackeray Ritchie demonstrates Catherine's struggle to overcome traditional views of womanhood, which dictate that women's main function and only future is marriage. This belief leads Catherine towards the desperate decision to marry Fontaine.

Most characters in the novel confuse literature and real life. Madame de Tracy orchestrates the marriage and characterizes Catherine and Fontaine as romantic characters in a story: "She looked upon [Fontaine] from an entirely new point of view; a bore no

longer, but a hero of romance, an enthusiastic and disinterested lover . . .” (496).³⁵

Thackeray Ritchie shows the dangers of women arranging the lives of others in real life, and the subtext suggests that women writers should also be careful in how they portray women in fiction, which can lead to misconceptions about women and their real situations among readers. Many of the characters substitute literary conventions for real life, and Thackeray Ritchie shows that fiction, even realist fiction, often fails to depict accurately the true situations of women in Victorian society. Catherine knows of courtship and marriage only through literature: she compares the courtship between Catherine Butler and Beamish to the romances she has read. When she first notices Richard Butler, she has been reading Tennyson’s *Idylls*, and has been immersed in heroes and heroines when he arrives to break up the monotony of her life. Dick tries to act the part of a chivalrous knight to Catherine but always falls short. Through these numerous examples, Thackeray Ritchie depicts the differences between literature, both romance and realism, and real life for her readers. By revealing the space between stories and reality, Thackeray Ritchie brings attention to her own realist story as a construct, which contains certain realist conventions, such as marriage. She then complicates these depictions by illustrating a marriage that is less than ideal. Masculine realism, which often depicts marriage as the final happy ending for women, fails to accommodate Catherine’s situation, which represents the situations of many real-life women.

Through Catherine and Dick, Thackeray Ritchie provides alternative viewpoints outside of traditional conventions, or Victorian ideology. Throughout the novel, Dick alone is truly sympathetic to Catherine’s situation: he tries to defend her from Mrs. Butler and dissuade her from marrying Fontaine. The narrator invokes a wry tone to describe

Dick's "weak-minded nature" that allows him to sympathize with others. She sets him in opposition to the "stalwart hero who succeeds in life, loves his wife and his children . . . but worries himself no farther about the difficulties and sorrows, expressed and unexpressed, by which he is surrounded" (515).³⁶ The stalwart hero works hard but

would never, for instance, dream of being sorry for a lonely, fanciful, little woman who chanced to cross his path. . . . The Mr. Grundys of life are sensible, manly fellows, business-like, matter-of-fact, and they would very reasonably condemn the foolish vagaries and compunctions of unpractical visionaries like Dick. (515)³⁷

Dick causes unintentional harm because society itself fails to sympathize with women who lack a stable position in society. Unlike Elizabeth, Catherine has no older women to support her; only Dick selflessly cares about her well-being, but his status compromises his ability to help her.

Dick's sympathies arise from his feminine qualities: "So far he was effeminate that he had great quickness of perception, that he was enthusiastic and self-indulgent, and shrunk from pain for himself or for others" (10). The narrator states he is "no sinewy hero, no giant, no Titan, like those who have lately revisited the earth—(and the circulating libraries, to their very great advantage and improvement)" (10). Though he lacks traditional heroic qualities, Dick's progressive attitudes allow him to understand Catherine's position and defend her to his aunts who believe Catherine is not a member of their class (149). Dick responds, ". . . I cannot help losing my temper when I hear persons of sense using the wicked old commonplaces which have made so many people miserable, and which condemn a poor child to such a dreary, unsatisfactory mockery of existence . . ." (149). Dick links Catherine's mistreatment to the "world in general and his aunts in particular" (150).

Thackeray Ritchie furthers her examination of women in art through the medium of painting. Through Dick's character, Thackeray Ritchie expresses her ideas on the disparity between real life woman and their depiction in art. She also explores her ideas on realism and truth in art and uses individual paintings to foretell the future of her characters. The painting of Miss Paventry resembles Catherine George. Besides the fact that she is Dick's great aunt, the characters provide little information about her except that she was an heiress and that she never married. Like the woman in the painting, Catherine ends the novel a widow and independently wealthy, after inheriting Fontaine's money. Catherine extends her connection to the woman by walking in her flower garden and smelling the "perfume of other times" (365). The painting connects Catherine to the past and predicts her future.

Miss Paventry's painting prompts a discussion between Dick and Holland on theories of art. Catherine's connection with the painting already established, her character becomes central to this debate as well. Dick believes the painting to be a lie, due to its lack of realism. He points to the foreground and background rather than the subject itself and critiques the lack of detail in the tree. He asks Holland, ". . . do you call that a truthful rendering of fact?" (359). Holland accuses him of stealing the phrase from an art critic, attributing Dick's beliefs to popular theory, and states, "If you want the sort of truth you are talking about, you had better get a microscope at once to paint with, and the stronger the instrument the more truthful you'll be" (360). Dick believes truth is wanted: ". . . we want to go back to a more reverential treatment of Nature, and that is only to be done by patience and humble imitation" (360). Thackeray Ritchie critiques this theory of

realism through Dick's overblown arguments. A microscopic study of nature promises to miss the point, as mimetic representation alone fails to convey truth.

The narrator describes Dick as a reformer trying to break with predecessors and establish his own beliefs. Though there is a "kernel of truth" in his argument, the narrator argues that imitation "is not the end and the object of painting. And, indeed, the right treatment was already visible in his works, fighting against system and theories. What can they produce but dry pieces of mechanism?" (360). Though Dick propounds current theory, he employs the "right treatment" in his own work; his practice fails to follow his doctrines, and this provides insight into Thackeray Ritchie herself as an artist. The narrator argues, "The true painter is the man who paints with his soul, and so finds his way to the hearts of his fellow-creatures" (360). Through Dick, Thackeray Ritchie reveals her own theory of realism, which she expresses through the qualities she describes as effeminate in Dick. Further, he may even reflect Thackeray Ritchie herself as a young artist advocating for but also fighting against "systems and theories" of the period through her feminine perspective. Mourão describes Thackeray Ritchie's impressionistic style as "indirection" which "demonstrates that, deliberately or not, Ritchie was exploring alternatives to traditional Victorian realism so as to diffuse her indictment of Victorian ideologies of marriage and thus avoid the appearance of strong opposition" ("Negotiating" 58). In Dick's discussion of art, Thackeray Ritchie both accepts traditional realism but also warns that it can be used too prescriptively and at times fails to capture the truth, especially with its depictions of women.

Thackeray Ritchie rejects the mechanics of theory that dictate realistic accuracy in favor of "feeling and expression" (134). In her own writing, she aims more for "mood

and feeling” than for fact and linearity (“Negotiating” 58). Dick’s first painting of Reine adheres to the theories he defends to Holland: “. . . the shovel was an elaborate triumph of art . . .” and overall the painting is “all more than true to nature”; the kitchen, belonging to a fisherman’s wife, could be found in any cottage in Normandy (134-5). Unknown to Catherine, the painting depicts a fictional Reine. In the portrait, the woman’s eyes have “life in them, somehow, although the artist had, according to the fashion of his school . . . painted hard black shadows and deeply marked lines with ruthless fidelity” (134). Later in the novel, Reine says the depiction is nothing like her, as Dick disguises Reine in the “fashion of his school.” In his attempts to be contemporary, Dick makes the painting overly realistic of how a fisherman’s wife would appear rather than true to the subject he chose to depict. The narrator explains that the “combinations of real life do not *pose* for effect, and the simple, natural incongruities of every day are more harmonious than any compositions or allusions no matter how elaborate” (17). Rather than depicting elaborate forms of art, artists should capture the essence of the real. Thackeray Ritchie accepts masculine realism but demonstrates its limited portrayal of women, and through her own impressionistic methods, she creates a feminine realism that encompasses her realist story. Her female characters are not types, as they demonstrate the difficulties of women in current society.

The narrator comments on masculine realism through her discussion of art and through her descriptions of Dick’s paintings. His painting of Catherine is the most successful because he employs his feminine sympathy and uses an impressionistic style. This painting foretells Catherine’s future and Fontaine’s death. Dick believes the figures have “an odd distinct life of their own” (642), and the painting

was unlike any of the pictures Butler had ever painted before. There was no attempt at detail, everything was vague and undetermined . . . with all its faults and incompleteness, there was more true stuff in it than in anything he had yet produced. (642-3)

The description of vagueness recalls criticisms of Thackeray Ritchie's work. Oliphant critiqued her plots while others characterized her work as sketches rather than detailed realism. As Leslie Stephen describes her in a letter, "She has not two facts in her head and one of them is a mistake" (Gérin 177).³⁸ Though Stephen acknowledges Thackeray Ritchie had "perception and humour," he believes she could have achieved more "had she had her faculties more in hand. . . . As it is, partly from her desire to put things picturesquely and consequent reluctance to give the proper detail of a commonplace fact, her books were often hard to follow" ("Interrogating" 74). In his discussion of the role of the critic, Stephen expresses a desire for a more scientific method of evaluating literature. Though he acknowledges it as impossible, this idea reflects the focus of masculine realism, which believes in a scientific approach to portraying life as accurately as possible, without sacrificing higher ideals, beauty, and poetry. Like William Makepeace Thackeray and his vision for *Cornhill*, Stephen places importance on fact and linearity rather than Thackeray Ritchie's circular and indirect methods.

Thackeray Ritchie suggests that masculine realism, with its emphasis on fact and detail, is ill-suited for the woman writer and even the female subject.³⁹ Dick overlooks Reine's true qualities in order to portray her according to the theories of the time. He succeeds in understanding Catherine through his feminine sympathy. The vague and undetermined qualities of the painting evoke feeling over straight-forward fact and allow the artist to connect with his audience and express greater truth than he had been capable

of accomplishing previously. As James Fitzjames Stephen and Thackeray Ritchie claim, women's novels, in general, focus on feeling and emotion, and while Thackeray Ritchie never limits women to this type of writing, she embraces the possibility that it can provide a fuller truth and a realistic portrayal of women.

By emphasizing the importance of sympathy for the artist, Thackeray Ritchie elevates women's writing and links sympathy to traditional values, to which women have particular access in her novels. The "amazon" and the "stalwart hero," who belong to the modern, progressive world, are depicted less favorably than the sympathetic and imaginative characters like Catherine and Dick. Just as Catherine fails to be the "amazon," Dick fails to be the "stalwart hero." Both categories appear to characterize the middle and upper classes, which care only for their immediate ties, concerns, and material world. Catherine and Dick are described as sympathetic and as possessing imagination. Both characters are also nostalgic and prophetic, connecting the past to the future through their more visionary ways of thinking.

The narrator links sympathy with tradition and believes that progress produces the business-like and self-centered behavior of the "stalwart hero," or the modern-day professional. While she favors traditional living, including country life, over progressive living, a life in the city and society, the narrator expresses progressive values for women in her treatment of Catherine and Reine. Like *Cornhill*, Thackeray Ritchie depicts a mixture of traditional and progressive ideals, as she takes the best aspects of both modes of thinking and reveals how women are caught in a transition between traditional expectations and progressive ideas.

The narrator expresses her overt preoccupation with the past and tradition in her descriptions of Petitport. She believes that traditional modes were often unconscious expressions of culture and she laments the loss of this pastoral innocence:

Have we not outgrown the charm of tradition, old songs and saws, and ways and appliances, national dress, and simple country life? Faded, battered wire bonnets; vulgarity, millinery, affection, parasols, crinolines—it seems strange that such things should so surely supersede in time all the dear and touching relics of the bygoing still life of our ancestors. Perhaps a day will come when the old charm will exorcise the land again, bringing back its songs and rural poetry, its grace and vanishing sentiment.

It almost appears as if consciousness destroyed and blighted whatever it laid its fatal hand upon. We have all learnt to love and admire art in our daily life . . . but as we look, somehow, and as we exclaim . . . the fairies vanish . . . the simple unconsciousness is gone for ever, and you suddenly awake from your pleasant dream. . . . In these days, one is so used to sham and imitation, and Brummagem, that when by chance one comes to the real thing, it is hard to believe in it. At least, so Butler thought, as he trudged along. (8-9)

Recalling her article on Amelia Opie, Thackeray Ritchie uses dress to characterize the change in time, from a feminine perspective,⁴⁰ and her comment resembles the critique of modern women writers who are so conscious of their emotions and wider feelings that they have lost the naturalness, or the “real thing,” possessed by writers like Jane Austen. Her comment also reflects upon a society that highly values facts and figures and a systematized world that edges out imagination and mystery. She illustrates the self-conscious nature of Victorian society, which tends to focus on detailed investigations rather than a sympathetic and inspired way of thinking.

The narrator describes this loss of unconsciousness in Victorian society, and provides Catherine as a contrast, as Catherine often tries to escape to a dream world. In one example, Catherine sets aside the *Saturday Review* and its article on “women and

marrying, about feebleness, and inaptitude, and missing their vocation; about the just dislike of the world for the persons who could not conduce to its amusement or comfort” (23) in order to read Tennyson’s *Idylls*. Catherine’s dreams contrast with the “stern laws of existence” (23). The article was probably about redundant women, and the narrator criticizes its message, as it reminds unmarried women of how little sympathy society holds for them. She illustrates the self-conscious nature of a society that analyzes and studies issues without always considering the individual women who are the objects of study. Dreams are equated with possibilities in the novel and contrasted with a harsh reality that consciously constructs limitations and boundaries and forces women into dependent and powerless positions within their society.

The narrator explores struggles between tradition and modernity through her female characters who try to negotiate traditional expectations of women with their progressive desires to be independent and active. This reflects Thackeray Ritchie’s own attempts to adhere to Victorian ideology while arguing for more opportunities for women. As Mourão notes, “Most of Ritchie’s work offers compelling evidence of her struggle to create representations that, without being too radical, undermined, among other things, the ideological assumptions of Victorian notions about marriage” (“Negotiating” 57-8). Reine provides the strongest example of this struggle. She chooses to live in the country where she has the freedom to define her own life and conduct business affairs. She is a competent manager of her farms and household. She claims to refuse marriage because she never wants to disgrace Dick, knowing that her personality and background will clash with his upper class family. Though she feels compelled to marry, she worries that it will undermine her individual authority. The narrator describes

her as “a little in advance of her days, and the people among whom she lived. And the price people are condemned to pay for being somewhat ahead of their neighbours, is a heavy one” (384). The text hints that Reine’s mother was ostracized because of her choice of husband, and Reine carries this burden, asking, like Catherine, why she should be excluded from the privileges of the higher class. She questions social hierarchies and the prejudices involved in that structure. Despite her advanced ideas, Reine is closely associated with the pastoral and maintains an old-fashioned lifestyle. Her story also ends in marriage, the most conventional ending in the novel. She thus exhibits both traditional and progressive values.

Catherine lacks Reine’s progressive attitudes and independence, but her ending exemplifies Thackeray Ritchie’s progressive view that a young woman can be useful and contented without marriage. Catherine’s entrapment within the confines of society, due to her lack of financial stability and her dependency on others, prevents her from choosing whom she wants to marry. By the end of the novel, however, she gains independence. Katherine Hill-Miller argues that Reine must compromise her pride and independence in order to be with Dick, and that Catherine’s autonomy leaves the reader dissatisfied (377-8). I would argue, however, that Catherine’s ending is complete and positive. Her sympathy allows her to give up Dick so he can marry the woman he loves. She inherits Fontaine’s money and her step-aunt’s house. Her sisters and Fontaine’s son are able to live with her, and Catherine becomes the head of her own household. She achieves independence, security, and a home, the objects in life she most desired. Her story recalls “Toilers” in which the narrator argues that it is the lack of financial security and not the lack of husbands that women mourn. Catherine’s ending presents an alternative to

marriage because she decides not to marry Dick and lives an independent life. The narrator demonstrates that women can achieve successful outcomes without marriage and thus breaks from the masculine realist tradition.

In her portrayal of women, Thackeray Ritchie demonstrates the struggle between traditional values and progressive ideals and shows that women can progress within society by achieving independence and autonomy while still valuing and maintaining traditionally feminine roles. Catherine's struggle exists in defining her own identity independently of the identity others assign to her. They believe she is of little worth because of her lack of fortune and status. Her difficulties in creating a balanced life for herself arise because of these limitations and her inability to make decisions for herself. Thackeray Ritchie shows that modern society needs to provide more opportunities for women like Catherine, and she illustrates the problems that occur when marriage becomes a woman's only option for security and stability. In the end, Thackeray Ritchie allows Catherine to live her own life and have the space to define herself. Reine struggles with her identity as well. She wants to maintain her independence and her traditional lifestyle, but her desire to marry Dick means entering a society that fails to recognize her role as a strong-willed woman with ideas at odds with current beliefs. Thackeray Ritchie leaves this issue unresolved, and the one marriage ending concludes with uncertainty as to how Reine and Dick's marriage will succeed. Thackeray Ritchie depicts these women's struggles with a progressive society, which leaves women behind, and the problems this causes. She describes women realistically through her sympathetic portrayal of them as individuals who also represent real women, and this becomes

possible because of her ability to escape the confines of masculine realism with her feminine perspective and style.

Chapter Three: Frances Parthenope Verney

Frances Parthenope Verney published numerous nonfiction articles in a variety of periodicals, including *Macmillan's*, *St. Paul's*, *Fraser's*, *The Nineteenth Century*, and *The Contemporary Review*. The topics of her articles ranged widely from “Turkish Invasions of Europe in 1670-83” to “Class Morality” to “Colour in Birds and Insects.” She wrote a series of controversial essays on the peasant properties of other countries, including France, Germany, and Russia, reporting from her own travels to these regions; these were collected in *Peasant Properties and Other Collected Essays*. Research on her husband’s family and the House of Claydon culminated in her *Memoirs of the Verney Family During the Civil War*. Though her literary output was significant, her status as a writer was modest and described only one aspect of her life. Then, as now, she was overshadowed by her sister Florence Nightingale, with whom she had a complex relationship.

Verney was born Frances Parthenope Nightingale on April 19, 1819 in Naples. In her youth, she and her sister were taught serious subjects by their father “at a time when a mere smattering of knowledge, and a veneer of accomplishments were deemed sufficient for female education” (“Memoir” ix). Florence Nightingale’s biographers often cast Parthenope (called Parthe or Pop by family) in a negative light in order to emphasize Florence’s struggle to achieve success, but E.D. Mackerness faults Florence’s biographer Cecil Woodham Smith for ignoring Parthenope’s own achievements for the sake of

elevating her sister. Parthenope and her mother Frances opposed Florence entering the nursing profession and tried to thwart her efforts. Mackerness writes that after Florence began her career, however, Parthenope was “involved in the Crimean operations,” and he continues,

She was not perhaps a practical person, by comparison with her sister; but . . . she drew her own conclusions from what she knew of the campaign with which her sister was associated. She was capable of thought rather than of action; so it is a mistake to find fault with her for not possessing qualities which distinguish her more famous sister. (132)⁴¹

Mackerness argues for more recognition of Verney for her own accomplishments. He explores a few of the numerous articles she published in the periodical press, but dismisses the quality of her fiction. The few critics who do mention her at all do so in passing, characterizing her work as third-rate or comparing her to Anne Thackeray Ritchie in order to elevate the latter’s status as an author.⁴² Although the novels she published in *Cornhill* were never highly acclaimed or bestsellers, they received positive reviews and contribute to an examination of the feminine perspective in the magazine.

During the late 1860s, Verney published three short novels in *Cornhill*. Like Thackeray Ritchie, these were her first works of fiction. Her first novel *Stone Edge* (1867) was followed by *Avonhoe* (1868), and then the longest of the three, *Lettice Leslie* (1868-69). Verney began writing after her marriage to Sir Harry Verney in 1858; she was thirty-nine years old when she married.⁴³ As Mackerness writes, “. . . there is no question but that Parthenope’s union with Sir Harry Verney aroused certain creative energies in her of a kind which had hitherto remained undeveloped” (132). He argues that Verney’s writings “differ enormously from those which so many of the society women of this period produced” as she had an “interest in social and moral problems” (132). Her

daughter-in-law Margaret Verney suggests that her devotion to husband and home became the reason for her not attaining more status as a writer. Her interests were varied. In addition to her literary pursuits, she was an artist. She was involved in society after her marriage to Sir Harry, and concerned with preserving the history of her husband's family and estate, collecting hundreds of letters and restoring furniture and art. In her memoir of Verney, Margaret Verney describes her mother-in-law's devotion to Sir Harry's parliamentary career and reforms, as well as her devotion to the cottiers of her estate.

Throughout her work, Verney criticizes society as superficial and as moving in the wrong direction. Though she hosted gatherings for "men of the most varied opinions and callings," Lady Verney disliked the "unmeaning conventionalities of fashionable life" ("Memoirs" xii). As Mackerness writes, "The superficiality of modern man troubled Lady Verney a good deal; and from her essays on 'Class Morality' and 'Dreams, Visions, and Ecstasies' . . . we gather some idea of the abhorrence in which she held deception and chicanery" (135). Throughout her fiction and nonfiction, Verney questions assumptions made by society, often by comparing the state of England to that of other countries and historical periods to bring new light to the subject. She applies her worldly perspective to various issues, including peasants suffering from poverty abroad, women's education, and the current state of art. Rather than acquiring the veneer of European culture, she encourages her readers to remember their past and rebuild a British tradition that would add depth and meaning to their society. While she often promotes traditional values at the expense of progress, like Thackeray Ritchie, she endeavors to delve into the feminine perspective in her fiction, demonstrating the difficulties and lack of opportunities in women's lives, especially among the peasant classes. She advocates a nationalized

education for girls and for more vocations to be made available to women. Although her writings have not survived far beyond their first editions in volume form, their original publication in *Cornhill* offers a useful perspective on the woman writer's portrayal of women and their place in society.

Verney's Nonfiction

The nonfiction examined in this section was written after the *Cornhill* novels. "Female Education in France" was published in 1869, four months after *Lettice Lisle*, in *Fraser's Magazine* and "The Powers of Women, and How to Use Them" appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in 1870. Verney critiques women's education in England. In the first article, she examines debates on the issue in France in order to compare their systems and views to those of the British, and in the second, she expands this topic to advocate more employment opportunities for women. She frames "Female Education" with the question, "what is the result we ought to aim at in our education of women, and how is it to be obtained," a topic debated in France and England.

Verney quotes at length the Bishop of Orleans, Dupanloup, who argues for better education for women. He offers a familiar argument for his position, pointing out that women are intelligent beings who need to occupy their minds with the intellectual as well as the material. Their education also affects their husbands and children. Uneducated women often direct their husbands away from intellectual pursuits like reading or hamper their work, and they are unprepared for the responsibilities of their children's intellectual and moral education. Through the bishop, Verney characterizes female education in its current state as artificial. She then illustrates the faults of education conducted by the

Catholic Church, specifically in the convents. After agreeing with and challenging the bishop's *Les femmes studieuses*, she states her own point as follows:

To enable a girl to learn something which she cares for so thoroughly as to make it a real interest in her after life, to allow her a greater choice of subjects--indeed, to choose that for which she has a 'vocation,' to use a grand word--to discourage that foolish smattering of knowledge, that series of indifferently taught accomplishments which every girl is forced to pass through, and which nine tenths of them drop entirely when they are married; in short, to be accurate and conscientious, and not to be allowed to skate over the surface of history and languages as they now too often do, is what we should aim at. (377)

Verney criticizes the superficiality of female education, arguing that young women should have a choice in what they learn and be allowed to pursue a vocation. Most of all, she wants female education to be taken seriously rather than viewed as idle distraction for women who want to appear cultured and refined. The knowledge possessed by supposedly educated women is often incorrect and shallow (377). This includes governesses who are in charge of the education of many young girls and women. She explains that women have “never been made to feel that there is any importance in the accuracy of what they learn . . .” (377). Without an institutionalized system of education, they lack purpose in their learning, and without examinations, they cannot compare their knowledge to others or prove qualifications for employment.⁴⁴ The governess was often not well-educated and was “primarily engaged to impart a veneer of learning and genteel manners to her charges, and to act as a babysitter” (Murray 271). The position of governess was an important profession in need of reform, not only because of their responsibilities to children but also because it was “virtually the only occupation open to genteel young women” (271).

Verney takes a practical approach to support her arguments for the improvement of women's education. She reassures her audience that women will not gain more power or influence with more knowledge but that they wield great influence already, and that education would allow them to use it more wisely, especially with their husbands and children. As Verney states, "To know how little we know is the result of all real knowledge, and this certainly will not make women presumptuous or vain; it is the half knowledge, the shallow impertinence of 'cram,' which is really dangerous" (378).

Verney believes that women's lack of knowledge partially results from poor reading habits. Although girls read as much as boys, she worries about girls' superficiality of knowledge and argues that the "power of assimilation" must be taught rather than "the random skimming of a dozen reviews, the whipt cream, as it were, of other folks' knowledge," which is "not equal to the painstaking digging out of the essence of one fact and making it their own" (378). Women possess no ownership over knowledge that results from a semi-education. Verney attributes this superficial learning to the nature of the periodical press and reveals one of her many criticisms of progress. She presents the downsides of a hurried society in which people fail to assimilate real knowledge beyond the easily digestible bits.

Some types of progress, however, are positive. Verney recognizes three universities that allow women to take examinations, and mentions other improvements for women, such as open lectures and a "general sifting and overhauling of our girl schools and teachers" (378). Though she speaks fervently for these opportunities for women, Verney maintains a conservative approach to the matter, stating,

. . . even if, as seems probable, a ‘college for women’ cannot generally be made to fit into the present arrangements of society, it will at least give an opening for girls to obtain (if they please) a year or so of honest work in any pursuit for which they have a real talent. . . . (378-79)

She calls for more regulation of women’s education. Governesses should have to earn certificates, “like the diploma required for governesses in Germany,” which would allow them to be “more considered and better paid, and so open the field to a higher order of ability” (379).

Because of certain advancements, traditional female roles, chiefly household management, fail to occupy or challenge many women, at least of the upper and middle classes. Although women were busy with their household responsibilities in the past, technology and improvements in the home leave women with more time, and they need new options for employment. Verney paints a picture of the Biblical Proverbs’ “virtuous woman,” who is a “merchant, an agriculturist, and an admirable ruler” (379). She calls for a “modern equivalent” (379), as she looks to the past for female role models to serve the modern generation. Her depiction of the Proverbs woman is traditional but also progressive as she possesses the independence and balance many women lack in Verney’s time. She encourages her readers to look to the past and also abroad as they seek answers for providing a good education for women.

Verney continues to express her views on this issue of women’s education in the next article, “The Powers of Women and How to Use Them,” in which she explains that advances in women’s rights are occurring throughout the world. She acknowledges that the discussion of women’s “rights” and “wrongs” has changed for the better even within the past few years, and mentions Parliamentary discussions of female suffrage, the

municipal vote for single women, the Married Women's Property Bill, and education. This progress demonstrates "the break which has been made in the fortress of ancient opinion" (522) and appears in numerous countries, including Russia, Spain, India, and America: "Russian ladies are taking medical degrees at Zurich, and now at St. Petersburg; schools for Hindoo girls are established and well attended at Madras and Calcutta" (522). She again refers to Monseigneur Dupanloup, comparing his call for "a higher ideal of woman's life" to that of J.S. Mill, "our English radical philosopher" (522), to bolster her argument with male supporters.

Revisiting points she made in the previous article, Verney acknowledges that everyone, from the *Saturday Review* to the "most strong-minded of the lady writers," agrees that the state of women's education is untenable. Despite this consensus, there are few ready solutions on which they can settle (522). These discussions on women's rights partially arose from the census of 1851, showing "three million and a half of women working for a subsistence" of which "two millions and a half were unmarried," and the 1861 census revealed "the number of self-supporting women had increased by more than half a million, many with relations dependent upon them" (522-23). To assume that all women possess conventional households consisting of a working husband and a housewife is a "poetic view of life," according to Verney. Though she believes a happy marriage remains the highest success for a man and woman, she argues that many women are unable or unwilling to marry, and for those "who yet have the misfortune to require food and clothing . . . it is surely not too much to ask that they be furnished ungrudgingly with all possible means of fitting themselves to perform well whatever work society will permit them to carry out" (524). Murray explains that Victorians who "believed in the

cult of the domestic angel” never associated women with work. Harriet Martineau was among the first to refute the notion that “most women were supported by men” (259). In response to the 1851 census, she explains that “three out of six million of adult Englishwomen work for subsistence; and two out of three in independence” (259). Verney continues to make this point in 1870. Like Thackeray Ritchie, she tries to dispel misconceptions about women.

Verney continues to refute the image of the fragile woman as she describes the physical labor required of women in many cultures. She argues that perceptions of women are culturally defined and distinguishes between the work women *can* perform and the work society will *allow* them to perform. Mill believes women naturally “drop out” of work for which they are unqualified, but Verney provides examples from around the world (North American Indians, Scottish fishwives, and Amazons) of women who perform more heavy labor than the men. As she points out, women’s capabilities are culturally constructed rather than natural or unnatural, and Mill “hardly seems to allow for the extraordinary plasticity with which women adapt themselves to the ideal required of them by public opinion” (524).⁴⁵ The Amazons, for example, lead vastly different lives from British women and prove the value of a useful education in their accomplishments: “Here is a whole body of women distinguished for the very qualities we should be most inclined to refuse them, the produce of a ‘well-directed’ education to the end required” (526). By describing the physical capabilities of these women and their honor and status among their people, Verney illustrates the limitations society can place on women and their abilities.

Determining these abilities becomes difficult when many nations provide women with little useful education. Verney argues that women's talents and skills are not like those of men, and that each sex performs "different functions in the world's great work" (526). She writes, "Such a variety of gifts is required to accomplish what is wanted around us, that it will be strange if we cannot arrive at a certain joint co-operative action between men and women which shall be better than that of either alone" (526). Verney adheres to separation of men and women into two realms, though she never limits women to the domestic. Women's gifts include administrative skills, intuitive insight, considerateness, powers of observation, and the ability to carry out "her kind intentions with more thought" (527). She believes women are particularly suited to medicine. Though women can succeed in this field, they need training, and "women physicians neither can nor ought to be consulted or trusted who have not undergone the most thorough training and submitted to the most searching examination" (527). Addressing the objection that men and women should not train together, she explains that France allows them to train separately, and women receive a first-class certificate, without which they cannot practice midwifery. The women professors are "physician accoucheurs, not merely midwives, and hold a rank, both scientific and practical, quite equal to our first-class 'ladies' doctors' here" (528). Again, she argues that women must be able to earn certificates or take examinations in order to be taken seriously in the professional world. She wants women to be officially recognized in their education and professions.

Verney supports an institutionalized education for girls and hopes the "Government will not neglect so fair an opportunity of securing what might become a national and lasting provision for this want" (536). According to the "Reports upon

Endowed Schools,” inspectors found that girls perform as well as boys in school, and “that although part of the school-day was devoted rightfully to needlework, they did as well as the lads of the same amount of training when taught by the same masters” (536). Tempering this fact, however, Verney explains that though women’s brains are larger in proportion to their bodies than men’s, they are “more nervous and sensitive,” which is one reason they need education more than men. Verney recognizes possible objections to her argument throughout the article but then turns them into further justifications for the improvement of women’s education.

Verney’s writing reflects her admiration for women, specifically when she speaks of female martyrs and explains that as many women as men “have shown the power to suffer and to die for the noblest causes” (536). In great events and crises, women suffer as men do. During times of persecution, “women have never been found wanting” (537). She mentions the French Revolution and the Indian mutiny as examples and writes,

The stuff is there, it only requires to be adequately made use of. In spite of what Mr. Mill says, there can be little doubt that women are by nature more pliable than men, more ready to take the colour which public opinion represents as right, and also to endure more for what they believe to be true, in small things as well as great. But this only makes it more incumbent upon society, which in this case means men, to see that the ideal life held up to women is a wise one, and that their education is in a wise direction. (537)

Equating society with men, she asks them to guide the direction of women’s education. She recognizes that society must change and that a “move of such an extent as is now taking place in women’s minds cannot be repressed, their further advance is merely a question of time; let us insure that it is made in the right direction” (538). Verney reassures her audience that women pose no threat to men, but, at the same time, she

warns men that social changes in women's roles, education, and opportunities are already happening. She argues that women are influenced by their society and will endure hardship "for what they believe to be true." In this passage, she suggests that this progress is inevitable and that men should lead these changes in a "wise direction" for their own sakes as well as women's.

While maintaining a conservative framework for her discussion of these issues, Verney portrays progress as inevitable, and she also views it as common sense. Women are intelligent beings who need education, but they are too sensitive and nervous to guide themselves. They require men to lead the way. Verney effectively argues for women while easing her audience's fears that women will gain too much power. She accomplishes this by mentioning common assumptions about women. Her approach and tone evoke that of a masculine writer, as she reinforces an ideology that constructs womanhood as admirable and respectable but also unthreatening. At first, her portrayal of the Amazons produces a powerful image of female competence, but, in the end, she reassures her audience that English women would never aspire to being in charge. She presents the multiple vocations for which women are suited, but excludes any type of leadership positions or ones that involve creating policies or laws. Women cannot change the state of society, as only men are capable of doing this. Verney adopts a masculine framework within which to place her argument for progress and to present women as intelligent, competent, and strong, but she subdues these images with her reinforcement of masculine ideology to make her readers more receptive to her message. Examining her views towards women in her nonfiction helps the reader understand her portrayal of female characters in her fiction, and reveals her feminine perspective regarding women

and education, which, though rather progressive, was tamed by conservative hesitations. Her struggle to balance traditional portrayals of women and to insert her progressive agenda resembles the same difficulties Thackeray Ritchie displays in her own fiction.

Part of Verney's ambivalence towards issues concerning women may have arisen from her relationship to Florence Nightingale. Her sister provided a role model, as an intellectual, practical, and accomplished woman who neither married nor adopted a traditional lifestyle. Nightingale opened new avenues for women, but she often failed to sympathize with women on a personal level.⁴⁶ Verney appears to have a more sympathetic and realistic view of women's position in society. She makes clear that society consists of men, and that women are influenced and controlled by cultural standards. In her view, society must change, not women, for them to have better education and employment.

Although her life was more traditional than her sister's, Verney did not marry until she was nearly forty years old, and she was certainly exposed to her sister's defiance of social standards. Though she presents women as inferior to men in her nonfiction, her fiction tends to favor the women characters as possessing more admirable qualities than the men. They are more loyal, steadfast, strong, and even intelligent than their male counterparts, but they are never in control of their own lives. Her fiction illustrates the point she makes in these articles: women possess numerous wonderful qualities that could be useful to society, but they are rendered useless because of their lack of opportunity and control over their own fate.

While she promotes progressive causes, especially for women, Verney's nonfiction reveals her traditional framework, as she favors looking to the past for

answers. She continues this framework in other articles, such as “The Object of Art,” in which she outlines her views on the ways art should function in society. Her explanation of realism reflects that of Margaret Oliphant when she writes, “After all ‘toute vérité n’est pas bonne à dire’ is a very old truth,” and those of Anne Thackeray Ritchie when she explains that art is not “mere imitation of nature however admirable” (667). Her standards of what should be included in fiction resemble Leslie Stephen’s views on the subject. In “The Object of Art,” Verney writes,

The terrible, the painful, the pathetic, the wicked, are all necessary to be shown: art has a higher aim than that of being always ‘pleasing,’ and you cannot solve problems unless the materials are given. But unless there is a sort of reason (felt though perhaps not expressed) for the suffering you inflict, something made plainer which is worth understanding, some conclusion reached through the troubled sea of sorrow and sin, a feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest is produced, which is not the legitimate result of art. (667)

Leslie Stephen discusses this point at length in “Art and Morality,” explaining that the artist has

to reflect what he sees around him. He is like the sun shining upon the just and the unjust. He paints vice and virtue as they exist, and looks on with a Shakspearean toleration at every possible development of human character. His responsibility ends with the duty of fidelity to facts. (93)

Stephen emphasizes “fidelity to facts,” and argues that all aspects of human nature should be represented in literature. Like Verney, he argues that art must be moral in that the artist uses all his or her material for a purpose.

Verney demonstrates the importance of art as a device that lifts its audience to a higher level of understanding of their world or self. She takes this concept further throughout the article, however, by arguing that all members of society must have access to high art, which means that it must be made understandable and relatable to the

common person. Rather than appealing only to the highly educated elite, art should embody the culture's roots and history and express ideals that are meaningful to the audience. She asks, "But if the best cut themselves off from the chance of being 'understood of the people' by choosing what is only interesting and even intelligible to the educated few, are they not themselves curtailing their own mission?" (671-2). She argues that art should embrace the British tradition, as she believes that artists cannot "hope to equal" the past by imitating it:

. . . it must be grown out of the soil of our own life and our own feelings. . . No work has ever become part of the great heritage of the race which has not been rooted in the sympathies of the nation: to appeal to the refined and educated and fastidious few must always make art an *objet de luxe*, not the staple commodity of the food offered to the world. (672-3)

She disapproves of works that are dependent upon the audience's familiarity with other languages. Artists like Homer, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, and Raphael appealed to their people in general and not only to an elite few. The work must be interesting and meaningful to the audience, and it should reflect national values: "The best poetry, the highest art of design has, however, always been essentially national, expressive of the country where it grew, born of the soil, the very anachronisms being often one of their chief charms" (675). Though Greek works of art are beautiful, they are "artificial" among the British, and they are "imitative, only in the highest sense, it is true, but still not *de notre crû*, not wine of the soil, but grapes imported, which can never either materially or spiritually be the food of the nation . . ." and she ends her article by expressing that the "highest part of the artist-prophet's vocation," which is the "education of his people," has been "still left undone at a time when probably such a tuition is more necessary than at any period in the world's history" (676). With this last remark, Verney shows her

awareness of the changes in society, the fracturing of an identity connected with the past, and the useless attempts to borrow culture from other countries. She sees British tradition as an answer to the uncertainty of the period, and she views women as particularly connected to tradition.

These views provide a context for the placement of her fiction in *Cornhill*. Verney's novels focus on English peasants, whose language and traditional ways of life help the reader recall a British past. She directs her writing towards a middle-class audience, following her appeal to artists to speak to the general public, and she tries to instill in her readers the importance of British language, history, and tradition. Her constant evocation of traditional modes of thought and her concerns with preservation of history and culture fit into the *Cornhill* context, which also valued a British tradition and culture while informing its audience of important current knowledge. Her progressive attitudes towards women and their hopes for the future resonate with those of Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Verney also views women as stabilizing forces in a time of change. Women, who maintain tradition and custom, promise that morality and stability will be maintained during such a transitional period.

Stone Edge

In her preface to the volume form of *Lettice Lisle*, Lady Verney groups her three *Cornhill* pieces together as a study of traditional English dialect and history. She explains the ties between English language and culture, which she fears may disappear, and writes, "*Lettice Lisle* is the last of three stories which attempt to save some of the relics of speech and thought still remaining from the old days, but which are disappearing so rapidly before advancing 'civilization'" (vi). She specifically attributes these changes to

developments in the press as well as to literary advancements, explaining that dialects are “fast dying out in England under the influence of books, newspapers, and schoolmasters,” and that the original language is being lost to the “Latinisms of would-be fine writing” (v). Like Thackeray Ritchie’s later writings, Verney’s work focuses on the importance of preserving the past in the wake of a rapidly changing world. She argues that recording the “proverbs and traditions of a district” help preserve the “history of our English tongue” (vi). Though an advocate of education and culture, Verney often criticizes the direction of society, and she emphasizes the preservation of a British tradition.

In “Objects of Art,” Verney makes a similar argument, and she criticizes the prevalence of domestic fiction as it often fails to work with significant concepts that transcend popular and contemporary interests. She endeavors to abide by these guidelines in *Stone Edge*, as she attempts to preserve aspects of the past to remind readers of their tradition while creating characters who appeal to the reader on a human level.

Verney’s *Cornhill* novels are not typical domestic fiction, and she deviates from the standards of realism by placing her novel in the past among the peasant class. As mentioned above, no single definition of realism existed among writers, critics, and periodicals. In general, however, realism was “applied to domestic novels about middle-class families that were considered to have an appropriately moral message, that achieved an acceptable level of verisimilitude, and that focused on character development over plot” (Phegley 24). Verney not only avoids the domestic novel, she also deemphasizes the moral of the story. Although Cassandra develops through Lydia’s spiritual guidance, her personality and character are never drastically transformed. Thackeray Ritchie’s development of Elizabeth’s character from rebellion to charity is more dramatic than

Cassandra's formation. Rather than focusing on the moral development of her characters, she emphasizes the moral character of the peasants, which is privileged over those of the middle-class reader. Verney also deviates from these standards by leaving out the details. Her writing could be described as impressionistic, much like that of Thackeray Ritchie, who, as Leslie Stephen believed, failed to incorporate enough fact into her novels. As Debenham explains, Thackeray Ritchie's two *Cornhill* novels predict the development of impressionism in the art world that occurred later in the century, but the term serves as a useful description of the ways in which the writings of both Thackeray Ritchie and Verney differ from the standards of nineteenth-century realism.

While she idealizes many aspects of the rural tradition, Verney also demonstrates the downsides of a lack of civilization and progress, specifically in her portrayal of how her female characters suffer at the hands of a tyrannical patriarch. She creates sympathy for her female characters, Cassandra and Lydia, and places the two in a dynamic relationship, which asks the reader to compare them as two types of women: Lydia represents the spiritual Madonna figure while Cassandra belongs to the progressive, material world. Verney's representation of women centers on her concerns over the tension between tradition and progress, demonstrating that women are impacted by this transition and rely on traditional as well as progressive ideas to define their own identities. Her portrayal of this transition as it relates to women provides *Cornhill* with another voice representing a feminine realism.

Stone Edge takes place in Derbyshire before the Reform Act of 1832 and centers on the lives of peasants. The protagonist Cassandra lives with her father, German Ashford, and brother, also named German, in Stone Edge, an old hall built in 1630. The

hall once belonged to the aristocracy, of which Ashford is a descendant from a disinherited son. Before the action of this story takes place, Ashford marries Lydia, who is forty years younger than her husband, and they have a child, whom Ashford accidentally kills when he returns home drunk. At this point, Cassandra, who had previously disliked her stepmother, becomes her closest ally against the abusive old man. After falling in love with Roland, the son of Ashford's enemy, Joshua, Cassandra is forbidden to marry. When Cassandra receives an inheritance from her aunt, Ashford manipulates her into giving up the money, promising she can marry Roland, whose father also bargains his permission for some of the money. Ashford intends to use the inheritance to pay back-rent, but he is robbed and murdered on the road, and Cassandra, Lydia, and young German must vacate their home. Roland's father, who was involved in German's death, flees to the city taking Roland with him. After struggling to survive, Roland's father allows him to return home. Roland and Cassandra marry, and, along with Lydia and German, they migrate to Canada to start a new life.

The representation of women in the novel reveals Verney's traditional views towards women's roles in society, but throughout the story, she explores her progressive ideas. Careful to represent women conventionally, Verney also portrays them as possessing a stronger connection to the spiritual and the natural worlds. Lydia has a deep understanding of the spiritual while Cassandra belongs more to the material world. Lydia teaches Cassandra spiritual lessons by word and deed, and, in the end, Cassandra becomes the ideal woman, guarding tradition while engaging in a progressive world. Verney's depictions of women in her fiction resemble those of Margaret Oliphant who often portrayed women in traditional roles with conventional endings but also challenged

many assumptions. D.J. Trela explains that while Oliphant “worked within societal conventions, she was constantly testing the limits of those conventions, pointing out the hidden, unseemly side of the domestic role women were forced into and the abuses of power that men frequently engaged in” (16). Verney demonstrates the severe abuse her female characters suffer at the hands of Ashford and illustrates, similar to Thackeray Ritchie, a horrible marriage.

While she privileges tradition and history, Verney consistently illustrates the injustices done to women in the past and present. In her nonfiction articles on peasant properties, she points out the particular hardships on women as they have to toil as hard, if not harder, than the men, and she articulates this fact in *Stone Edge*: “It was about a month after the wakes, and the two women had been hard at work all the morning in the cheese-room. It *is* hard work, but you will see a slight girl turning one heavy cheese after another by knack which a man can hardly lift” (599). The writer tries to dispel the illusion that women are physically weak or incompetent. Women work as hard as men in these cultures, and Verney recognizes the difficulties of their lives. She also illustrates the emotional and physical abuse women endured from husbands and fathers who had absolute control over their families. By revealing these facts, she endeavors to depict a realistic view of women’s lives rather than portraying them in any ideal or pastoral sense.

Stone Edge follows Cassandra’s development into a woman who possesses both spiritual and material understanding of the world. She moves from daughter of a tyrannical father to wife of an egalitarian husband. When she breaks from the patriarchal system which allows her father to abuse his family, Lydia’s friendship and guidance help Cassandra define her individual identity. In the beginning Cassandra dislikes her

stepmother, because of her loyalty to her father and a protectiveness of their relationship. She then aligns herself with Lydia, against her father, after his heinous crime. As a result, the two women develop a close relationship in which Lydia becomes the mother figure who provides Cassandra with spiritual lessons. Though she never overtly defies him, Cassandra's break from her father continues when she falls in love with Roland, and as she depends more on Lydia for self-definition and moral direction. Her relationship with Lydia grows as the two women depend on one another for consolation and protection.

The centrality of Cassandra's character extends beyond her individual development in the story to her representation of young women and their efforts to negotiate a place and identity in a transitional world. Although unknown to her contemporary readers, Verney names her protagonist after an essay titled "Cassandra" written by her sister in 1852. In this essay, Nightingale dismisses social expectations that women be idle, uneducated, and only succeed in society by marrying and conforming to social standards. Myra Stark writes,

'Cassandra,' then, is an outcry of protest against the powerlessness of women—their lack of control over their lives, their subordination to husband and family, their loss of identity except through personal relationships—and against the boredom and triviality that result from the limitations of their existence. It is also a statement of protest against the waste of women's energies and talents. . . . (13)

Verney also regrets the useless education women receive and argues that women's talents, or powers, should be made relevant to society, which currently limits them to idle, domestic roles. The name Cassandra would have had a specific meaning for Verney and her use of it indicates the presence of these ideas regarding women when she wrote the novel.

In myth, Cassandra's prophesies went unheeded. Likewise, most women during Cassandra's time would have been powerless to express their perspectives on life not to mention their difficulties and triumphs. Verney gives voice to these women who were silenced by class as well as gender. She places her prophetic character in the past, and represents women of the previous generation, much like Thackeray Ritchie's "grandmothers." Cassandra's progress throughout the novel foretells the advancements made by women in Verney's time, a time in which women had gained a louder voice through the periodical press, but it also reflects on the ways many things have not changed. Verney's placement of Cassandra in the past also allows her to maintain a traditional framework without deviating too far from conventional perceptions of women. Through Cassandra, however, Verney conveys her vision for women's progress: maintaining feminine roles regarding morality and tradition, and also taking part in progress as her husband's equal.

Verney believes women should have more opportunities in society but that they should also maintain conventionally feminine duties. She disapproves of the direction in which she sees society progressing. She often compares Cassandra's usefulness to her society to the idleness of modern young women who contribute nothing because they are forced to remain idle and shallow. Although she lacks education and vocation, Cassandra has duties and responsibilities and eventually makes money to support her family.⁴⁷ Verney portrays these past women as having a sense of purpose that makes them valuable contributors to their society. Despite this, Cassandra lacks the same opportunities as the woman in Nightingale's essay: her hope for the future centers on marriage, and her

education, vocation, and life choices are dictated by a patriarchal system that tries to restrict women to traditional expectations.

Cassandra possesses both traditional and progressive qualities. Descriptions of her recall those of Thackeray Ritchie's *Reine Chrétien*, as she too comes from nobility and as her mother was a "lady of property" (*Stone Edge* 589). Cassandra is described as a "magnificent lassie": "The Scandinavian blood runs in these northern races, which are larger and stronger than those in the southern countries, stouter made, both mind and body"; she also has "a curious natural ease and courtesy-manners which would have been pronounced perfect in any drawing-room" (589). Verney describes Cassandra's appearance according to national characteristics, and though she possesses some features of the southern climates, her main features are northern. She depicts her female characters as rooted to their land and culture in intuitive and natural ways in order to connect her heroines to a strong British culture. With this image, she also reinforces the idea that women are the keepers of tradition. While she physically possesses northern European attributes, Cassandra displays the noble manners and courtesies that would enable her to mingle in society. While Lydia possesses a deeper spiritual understanding, Cassandra would belong more to society and the material world if she had the opportunity.

By the end of the novel, Cassandra incorporates her worldly existence with Lydia's spiritual teachings to form her complete self, and her transition from the past to the future occurs with her marriage, which Verney depicts as a pivotal change in how Cassandra sees the world:

the death of the old life, the birth of the new, as she stands on the threshold, as it were, of an unknown future, giving up her separate and individual existence for ever, and becoming part of another, can be no light matter to her, however deep her affection. Cassie, fortunately for her, had been made to think and feel too much by the sufferings and anxieties of her past life, to take marriage as the peasant class (and indeed a much higher one, for that matter) so often does. (340)

Like Thackeray Ritchie, Verney informs her reader of the seriousness of marriage, and the potential dangers of a woman giving up her “separate and individual existence for ever.” Again comparing Cassandra to the modern young woman, she warns her reader that marriage must be considered seriously. Because of her hardships, Cassandra can fully understand the importance since she had witnessed the bad marriage between Lydia and Ashford and the absolute power of a despotic husband and father over his wife and children. Cassandra now understands her own life as broken into the past and the future, and she brings her past experiences into consideration when transitioning to her future.

Unlike Cassandra who possesses a strong physical appearance, Lydia looks weak and small, which illustrates her emphasis on the spiritual over the material. She depends upon her relationship with Cassandra and young German to keep her connected to the physical world, and her early life represents the physical and emotional hardships such women must have endured. Her marriage to Ashford resembles slave labor, and Ashford makes the decision to marry without asking for Lydia’s consent. As an orphan, she became dependent on her own labor to survive, and Ashford sets forth his proposal as a demand rather than a request:

An alliance with old Ashford was not a delightful prospect, but she was too much accustomed to be ordered about to have much will of her own in the disposal of herself, and accordingly she did as she was bid, going to her husband’s home with no more feeling of hope or gratulation than if it had been a fresh dairymaid’s place. (598)

Although she never explicitly opposes the patriarchal system, Verney shows the pathetic and regretful situations which these women must endure and cannot escape. The poignant description of the death of Lydia's child, a result of Ashford's drunkenness, shows the lack of justice and equality in the husband/wife relationship and makes the reader sympathize completely with Lydia. Like Thackeray Ritchie, Verney demonstrates the potential for disastrous as well as good marriages, and her focus on women in these relationships emphasizes the lack of autonomy among these women for whom she creates distinct individualities. Despite her dependence upon Ashford, Lydia displays a will of her own on behalf of her stepchildren, and suggests that Cassandra and young German should be reconciled with their aunt and uncle, whom their father has estranged.⁴⁸ She also endeavors to help Cassandra and Roland's union. Lydia becomes the spiritual mother of the text who sees beyond the difficult physical world around her:

Lydia had one of those natures which in a different age and civilization would have led her into a contemplative order of nuns, or to have joined a society of Quietists of some description. She lived in another life, and moved almost automatically through the business of this, which seemed to her like shows and shadows, while her real life, as it were, was spent within.

She perceived only through her affections. It was only through Cassie and her brother that she seemed to touch the earth, but her trembling anxiety for their welfare enabled her to see, and hear, and combine for them in a way which she never could have done for herself. (603-4)

Lydia would have belonged to an order of nuns, a life separate from the physical world and independent of the demands of married life and hard work. Cassandra teaches Lydia how to connect with the physical world, however, just as Lydia instructs Cassandra on

her spiritual wisdom. Their mutual exchange enables them both to progress to a fuller understanding of their own identities and the world.

Verney compares Lydia to the praying woman in Guido's *Massacre of the Innocents*, which represents Herod's execution of baby boys as described in the *Book of Matthew*. While most of the women in the painting run to escape the soldiers trying to kill their children, one woman kneels over the children who are already dead and prays to heaven for help, "with a dead baby at her feet and her eyes fixed on its angelic semblance in the sky above" (323). Verney compares this image to Lydia whose son was killed by her tyrannical husband. Like the praying woman, Lydia looks to the spiritual rather than the physical world for escape: "It was the only luxury in which she indulged, to sit in perfect stillness and think of her child,--'gone back again,' as she always called it to herself" (323). Although her own children have been killed, the woman in the painting prays for the children of other women, just as Lydia protects Cassandra, German, and Cassandra's children.

To describe Lydia's character, Verney refers not only to Guido's painting but also evokes Milton and explores Lydia's interpretation of the Bible, which she uses to grow closer to God.⁴⁹ Though she has never read Milton, Lydia speaks to Cassandra as if "she had known him by heart" (242). She also explains to Cassandra how prayer works. Cassandra takes Lydia's advice as if it were divinely inspired: Cassandra "knew that these were no words, but the experience of one purified by fire of affliction, the face was rapt like a saint's" (68). She draws a comparison between herself and Lydia:

It was difficult indeed to believe that there was only three years' difference between the two: the one with the overflowing life, the impulse, and rich hopes and imaginations of youth; the other with every wish and

thought chastened by sorrow and under strict control. But the greatest contrasts often make the strictest friendship, so long as one is as it were the complement of the other. (68)

When Cassandra tries to make excuses for Roland's absence, Lydia tells her stepdaughter that all people must conduct themselves by the same standards, which Verney believes are naturally derived.⁵⁰ Lydia explains, "Nay, dearie . . . I canna think that. Right's right, and wrong's wrong anywheres and anyhow, I tak' it'" (58). Her words recall Verney's argument in "Class Morality" that all classes, all people, should be governed by the same rules. Lydia provides a moral standard by which the other characters may judge themselves, just as these women characters provide positive role models for their readers in general. She resembles the angel in the house who should "preserve . . . the moral idealism so badly needed in an age of selfish greed and fierce competition" (Houghton 352). Lydia's morality serves as a guide for her children, and she tries to protect them from her husband's greed and selfishness, which brings them to financial ruin.

Verney emphasizes the importance of Lydia and Cassandra's friendship, which receives more attention and greater sympathy than the romantic relationship between Cassandra and Roland. After Ashford's death, Nathan asks his niece Cassandra to live with him as a daughter. Cassandra refuses on the grounds that she cannot leave Lydia, and echoes the words of Ruth when she tells Nathan, "She and I is one. I'll not return from following arter her; where she goes I will go, and where she dies I will die' . . .'" (255). Cassandra willingly gives up a stable life for Lydia and tells her, "Sure life's better nor house or land, and 'tis life to live w' thee and German'" (256). Both Cassandra and Lydia give up their chances for an easier life to stay with one another. Lydia refuses Nathan's offer of marriage on the same grounds, and Cassandra makes clear to Roland

her desire that Lydia continue to live with them after their marriage. Though Cassandra and Roland become one in marriage, Cassandra and Lydia are one through their feminine relationship, which has supported them throughout their most traumatic experiences.

Verney expands upon common perceptions of the female friendship that Pauline Nestor describes. Although initially the friendship between Lydia and Cassandra develops because of the lack of a proper male figure, the depth of the relationship extends to a mutual exchange of perspectives and ideas that help them both develop into their mature selves, especially Cassandra. Verney's treatment of female friendships may be linked to Florence Nightingale's success in establishing the field of nursing as an occupation in which women work together, as Nightingale believed in the "potential of the nursing community to encourage friendship" (Nestor 24). Discussions on female friendships included consideration of sisterhoods, nursing, and other organizations that gave women the opportunity to work together and make social changes. Both Thackeray Ritchie and Verney respond to these concerns in their fiction as they acknowledge the controversy and illustrate their own visions of female friendship, which are productive, supportive, and meaningful.

In her fiction, Verney illustrates the lack of opportunity for poor, uneducated women, as they are manipulated and ruled by male figures like Ashford and Joshua, who are uneducated, selfish, and corrupt. Though other male characters are good, they often lack the power to help their female relations. Roland allows his father to take him away from Cassandra in her time of need, and, in *Lettice*, Amyas allows Lettice's father to take her to an unknown world away from home. In *Stone Edge*, Verney's father characters are corrupt and dishonest. The women are more favorably portrayed than the men in this

respect as they escape the corruption that comes with avarice and money-dealings.

Without the intervention of society, men are unchecked and can abuse others, especially women, without consequence. As a result, Ashford's rage knows no limits:

The height to which the untamed passions of those who habitually yield to them can reach, the effect of irresponsible power and unchecked temper in secluded places where public opinion does not come, is something terrible. When men live in communities they are forced to give and take, and education and civilization, though they do not do much for us, teach us at least to restrain, or at the worst disguise their violence. (733-4)

Verney displays her ambivalent feelings toward "civilization" throughout the novel. She expresses simultaneous praise for and distrust of the development of society, which she often believes is moving in the wrong direction: tradition and British culture are disappearing, women lack proper education and relevance in their society, and people gain superficial knowledge and values from materialism and consumerism. At the same time, Verney recognizes the benefits of a society that can protect people from the extremism of past figures like Henry VIII. Ashford and Joshua rule over their wives and children without answering to any authority. In these passages, Verney balances her preference for the past order with a need to recognize the benefits of social progress, specifically in how it benefits women.

Verney uses the peasant way of life, however, as an example of alternative ways of thinking in order to examine the weaknesses of her modern society. Despite the depiction of the negative aspects of past society, Verney regrets the loss of certain ways of life, such as the importance of verbal communication and memory, which in modern society have been succeeded by reading and writing. Using Plato as a source, the narrator comments, "I wish among the scores of essays on the 'advantages of education' some one

would write on the evils attached to reading and writing: how memory decays and independent thought diminishes under its baneful influences” (735). The Athenians would “talk for their information” and remember it, and “no one ever denied the intelligence and high culture of that sharp-witted people” (735). Though Verney supports high culture and learning, she attempts to suggest alternative ways of understanding the world, ways that oppose the direction of her current society that depends heavily upon written materials. These forms of learning could be more conducive to women’s education; as she demonstrates, the women of her novel benefit from independent thought and communication with their neighbors as a means of functioning within their society. Her character Nanny Elmes commits everything to memory and delivers “the news of the district, the ‘hauts faits’ of the community” from “house to house” (735).

In *Stone Edge*, Verney places historical landmarks within the text as signifiers that draw together the characters, nature, and the past. She describes Druid ruins, “remnants of forgotten worship” where two “great uprights still remained, and a rocking-stone . . . the Northern remains, are each perfect in its kind” (742). These ruins remind the reader that humankind worshipped the

beauty of Nature, which we are now taught to think came into the world only with and since good roads and ‘convenient post-chaises’ gave people leisure to look about. No doubt it was a different feeling from what prompts a young lady to put her head languidly out of a carriage-window and say, ‘Look, papa, what a pretty mountain!’ (742)

She emphasizes the deep connection the characters have with these landmarks, which she contrasts with the superficial interest modern young women take in these sites. Her consistent comparison of her characters to modern women reveals this demographic as her prime readership, and consequently, she attempts to connect her readers to their

history and past in order to provide greater depth to their understanding of the natural and social worlds around them. In contrast to these modern women, Lydia and Cassandra live among these sites: “At the foot of the great dark stones which had seen such strange sights in their youth, grim, grey, and terrible in themselves and their recollections, sat the two women, in perfect silence” (65). Modern readers are separated from these sites by a culture that teaches them to view nature and landmarks as scenery. The peasants, however, understand the land differently: “There is little positive feeling for beauty of scenery in the peasant class: it is a taste of cultivation; but there is a clinging love to the old landmarks, a *sehnsucht*, difficult to describe, but very real and deep” (338). For the modern reader, culture serves as an intermediary between the person and nature, which cannot exist for the peasant whose relationship to nature becomes a spiritual practice.

The novel favors a feminine understanding of the world that becomes possible through a deep connection between self and nature. Through this connection, Verney demonstrates that women’s separation from society allows them to understand deeper truths though they may never be able to articulate them. She suggests that anyone has access to these truths though she implies that “civilization” or the “system” prevents many people from connecting to their surroundings in a meaningful way. This idea reinforces Verney’s belief that men and women serve separate functions in the world and contribute their different strengths. She defines the importance of the feminine perspective through her emphasis on nature and the past. Reinforcing the idea that women’s separation from the public world allows them to maintain their morality and integrity, Verney extends this idea to the peasant, untainted by the progress of society. She encourages her readers to look through the past and to try to view the world without

a cultural lens. Through the depictions of her female characters, she suggests that women are capable of this type of reading and hopes that they can escape the materialism of their current age and progress beyond the superficiality of their educations.

Women have a significant connection to the past as shown at the end of the novel when they travel to Canada. While Roland looks to the future and progress, the women look back to England and recall their roots. Lydia suffers from the idea of leaving her country, which Verney describes as a “tearing up by the roots . . . of all her old associations” (342). Throughout the novel, Verney links women to tradition and men to progress. Long before their marriage, Cassandra proves her powers of foretelling their future together when she tells Roland, “Womenfolk bides at home and remembers, most times. Menfolk goes about and forgets!” (729). Verney describes a specific scene in Canada that takes place a number of years after the family’s arrival. Roland looks to the west and admires their new country, believing they could never have experienced the same in England. In contrast to Roland’s progressive outlook, the “women turned towards the old country in the east, where a little moon was rising in a pale delicate blue sky” (345). Verney explains that, “A woman is generally more apt to look towards the past than forward: a man’s mind inclines mores towards the future than to recollect” (345). In her nonfiction, Verney argues that men and women possess different qualities and should perform separate functions in the world. Though she limits women overall to a traditional perspective and allows men to engage in progress, she accords greater importance to the past and tradition, believing that progress is moving in the wrong direction and needs the influence and correction that a backwards look can provide.

Verney conveys her feminine perspective through her depiction of female friendship and the peasant woman's connection with nature and the past. She tries to communicate to her female readers the importance of examining their lives beyond the superficial learning provided by an insufficient education and the periodicals they read. Her attempts to appeal to a wide audience as well as to the female reader fit well with *Cornhill's* readership. Her focus on the country and her attempts to bring English culture and language to the fore in her novels are also well placed in the magazine. While she adheres to *Cornhill's* brand of realism by upholding traditional images of womanhood and, of course, excluding any controversial material, she does deviate from the magazine's focus on the middle class, and she expands the readers' views of women as important to a successful society.

Lettice Lisle

In *Lettice*, published from 1868 to 1869, Verney employs a wider array of characters and explores in greater detail her heroine's internal development. While Cassandra's trials require endurance and fortitude, Lettice's engagement with the world requires her to make decisions and be responsible for affecting the lives of others. Lettice, or Lettie, loses her mother at an early age, and her father leaves her to be raised by her grandmother Mrs. Wyngate and her uncle Amyas. Like Ashford, Amyas cannot pay for the mortgage on his land and becomes heavily indebted to the moneylender Wallcott. Lettie falls in love with Wallcott's son Everhard, whom Wallcott has tried to groom to take over his business, but both Wallcott and Amyas forbid the union. Lettie's father Norton reappears after a ten-year absence and takes Lettie to live with him on the northern coast of England. In her new life, Lettie becomes friends with the local

residents, including Jesse and Mary, a fisherman and his wife. She also becomes acquainted with Caleb, Jesse's brother, who falls in love with her. When he proposes, Lettie refuses because of her love for Everhard. Eventually she discovers that her father heads a group of smugglers who are local heroes for their ability to outwit government officials. One night these officials discover the smugglers' plans and succeed in catching several of them when they come ashore. Caleb sacrifices himself to save Norton, but Norton is caught and jailed. Lettie returns home to Amyas, visits her father in jail, and refuses to marry Everhard without her uncle's and Wallcott's permission. The government ships Norton to Australia where he becomes a successful businessman. Meanwhile, Wallcott falls from his horse, and after he dies, Everhard and Lettie are married. Everhard takes control of Amyas's land, and Amyas lives with the couple and their children.

Verney received positive reviews for her *Cornhill* novels. Reviewers expressed approbation for her country tales that lack any hint of sensationalism or controversial subjects. They categorized *Lettice* as a novelette and a "prose idyll" rather than a novel, thus limiting its overall impact and importance (*Contemporary Literature* 486). These pieces were Verney's first fictions, and though they lack the polish and complexity of other works being produced at the time, her novels and these reviews help the reader of *Cornhill* better understand not only what readers expected from women's novels but how women responded to this expectation and expanded their roles as writers. Though Verney reinforces Victorian ideology, she also critiques aspects of society, specifically regarding women, in order to give voice to important issues. Her character Lettie provides an example of a young woman's struggle to define her place in the world and to make the

pivotal decision about whom she will marry. Verney demonstrates the great importance placed on this decision and the difficulty for a young woman, who has no mother or guide, to choose without a full understanding of the consequences. Lettie's difficulties illustrate a criticism on the centrality of marriage to women's lives that resembles Thackeray Ritchie's depiction of the subject.

Moving even beyond her female characters in *Stone Edge*, Verney endows Lettie with a rich and imaginative intellectual life, despite her lack of official learning. She combines aspects of Cassandra and Lydia, making Lettie a more complex character than either of the former on her own. Lettie explores philosophical questions about life in order to understand better her own identity, sympathize with her fellow human beings, and connect with the world on a larger scale. Throughout her childhood and into adulthood, Lettie struggles with defining the right path in life and contemplates religious and philosophical matters within her natural setting. By demonstrating that a female character of limited resources can contemplate life in a deep and meaningful way, Verney encourages her female readers to escape the superficialities of society and think for themselves.

Verney privileges experiential learning that takes place firsthand without an intermediary. She explains that there exists a mistaken belief in an "indissoluble connection between the ideas of cultivation and reading and writing" (714). Because of this and the fact that women are easily influenced by their society, their perspectives are limited to the time in which they live. Verney believes ideas as well as art should extend beyond contemporary perceptions. She disagrees with the notion that the uneducated are unable to contemplate high ideas:

. . . fifty years ago, books, except in the highest education, were the exception, and very clever men and women thought out their own thoughts and fancies with extraordinary little assistance from anything beyond the Testament. Even in the upper classes reading was not very common among women. . . . There are other volumes in the world than written ones to be read; life is a book which may well last one's whole time, but it requires a great deal of intelligence to understand its difficult pages. (714)

Verney focuses this issue on women, relating an anecdote about an illiterate grandmother who was “more witty and wise than women are now” (714). Like Thackeray Ritchie, Verney calls on the grandmothers to provide examples for modern young women. She also constructs her heroine as a role model. Her portrayal of Lettie as an intelligent young woman trying to establish her own identity and beliefs shows readers the importance of independent thought.

Lettie's character also develops in relation to other female characters in the novel. Rather than being heavily influenced by one person, like Cassandra, Lettie develops in relation to multiple women. Her grandmother, Mrs. Wyngate, helps form Lettie's early identity. Believing the child takes after her father, of whom she has never approved, Mrs. Wyngate claims that Lettie is naturally bad and criticizes all her actions and behavior. As a result, Lettie believes herself to be a lost soul and studies the few texts available to her for wisdom: the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Bunyan's Life*. She “honestly believed in her own exceeding wickedness, over which, by fits and starts, she lamented herself with most sincere sorrow” (472). After reading *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, she tests her soul by holding a finger over a candle flame. When she pulls away, she believes in her “extreme sinfulness, proved thus by this searching test” (472). She questions whether she “could have suffered for her faith like Latimer, or like Faithful in *Vanity Fair*” and these are the means by which she carried out “her little experiments in philosophy and religion like

greater folk” (472). As in *Stone Edge*, Verney demonstrates how individuals contemplate great questions about the world with few materials.

Because of her grandmother’s constant disapproval, Lettie lacks self-assurance. Consequently, her “conscience has been unnaturally stimulated, out of which either a reckless feeling or a morbid sensitiveness arises” (583). Thackeray Ritchie also describes this intense interiority as morbid, and Verney writes that Lettie’s “morbidly sensitive mind” needs activity to “prevent it[self] from dwelling on its own interior sensations” (702). In “Toilers,” Thackeray Ritchie argues that spinsters should not believe in the social restrictions imposed on them, a burden that gives rise to this kind of self-interest and despondency. Likewise, Lettie’s sense of inferiority reflects the negative images assigned to young women in general, and explains why many modern novels by women were self-obsessed as they struggled with their place in society.

Without a proper mother figure, Lettie struggles to develop her own identity in a truthful way, but she understands little of the real world because of her grandmother’s stringent rules. When Lettie moves to a new home with her father, her friend Mary acts as a mother figure as well as a friend. In her exploration of female friendships, Verney describes Lettie as clinging to her “new friend with a passionate affection” (715). Like Lydia, Mary acts as a mother figure to Lettie:

It was one of those earnest friendships which are so beautiful between women of different ages, where the young one contributes to the interest of the future . . . and the older one the living experience . . . and both are the happier and the better for the communion. (715)

Verney portrays this friendship as more conventional and less enduring than that of Cassandra and Lydia, but she also invokes the binary of tradition and progress. As the

older woman, Mary provides experience from her past and Lettie gives hope for the future. This mutual exchange improves both women, and through her female characters, Verney explores this balance as she emphasizes the importance of female networks and connections.

Without a proper mother figure and exposure to the larger world, Lettie remains ignorant of courtship and marriage. The narrator displays her intelligence throughout the novel from her deep sympathy with all the characters to her philosophical experiments to her ability to memorize all the King Arthur songs. She is even characterized as a “real artist” (117). Her lack of knowledge of the world, however, limits her understanding of Caleb and his attentions towards her, as she “had taken his attacks and scoffs quite literally as true expressions of his scorn for womankind” (121). Lettie lacks knowledge of romantic relationships. Unlike Verney’s modern readers, Lettie “was not versed in all the methods and circumstances of ‘falling’ into it [love] by which young novel-readers of the present day know to an iota what will happen, and what ought, must, and should be said under every possible conjuncture . . .” (583). In this instance, Verney criticizes not only the reading habits of young women, but the lack of realism in their literature. Like Margaret Oliphant and Harriet Martineau, Verney suggests that the “female *bildungsroman* too obsessively focused on love, as if that were the only important aspect of a woman’s existence” (Peterson 70). Verney expands Lettie’s experience with subjects such as religion, philosophy, friendship, and even smuggling.

Despite this, the narrator shifts Lettie’s development from a focus on religious contemplations to her choice of husband. Although she knows her love for Everhard, she has misgivings about refusing Caleb. The necessity for taking responsibility for her own

actions weighs on her conscience and forces her into solitude, as she has no one in whom she can confide. As the narrator states,

It is a very painful moment to a girl, all whose actions have been hitherto under the control of others, when she suddenly finds that the responsibility of decision really rests upon her, and that no one else can share with her the bitter burden of inflicting pain—that it is her own will which has done the deed, her own words which have given the wound, and that she can shelter herself behind no one else even in her thoughts for the act. (216)

Verney suggests that many young women are unprepared for this eventuality because all their actions have been “under the control of others.” Lettie feels that she has “no free will or action left her but the power of giving pain” (218). Verney depicts Lettie as a sympathetic character who understands the full consequences of her actions, and who provides a positive role model for young readers. Lettie passes into “grey middle age, wherein she walked up and down and wondered at her own deadness” (299). She feels responsible for Caleb’s capture and worries over her father’s fate. Because of her trials, she matures into a middle age before her time, and thus moves beyond Everhard’s capacity for sympathy and understanding.

As in *Stone Edge*, the interior lives of the male characters are not fully explored, and these characters provide little guidance for the heroine. Verney privileges the feminine mind and its development as her female characters explore their environment in search of a place for themselves. Women writers are best suited to illustrating this feminine perspective: Lettie believes that “a woman maybe best understands what’s the ways of a woman” (708). As Peterson explains, the female bildungsroman focuses on the “psychological development of its heroine” (66), and Verney’s male characters engage in the public world and have little access to this female interiority. These portrayals

constitute a feminine realism similar to Thackeray Ritchie's psychological and impressionistic studies of female characters.

Lettie's understanding of her own life becomes most clear during the final chapter of the novel in which she returns to the Chine with her daughter and Everhard, years into their marriage. She looks for her old acquaintances and discovers that Caleb died years earlier. These past episodes help define her present life and reality:

The past had come back to her so vividly that she could see and hear once again all that went on in the old days at the pilot's . . . while her intercourse with poor Caleb, from the day when he carried her across the river to his pleading on the shore, was as present to her as if it had been yesterday. (625)

Her remembrance of the past becomes more real than her present, and her thoughts rest chiefly on Caleb, indicating that her decision to refuse him continues to unsettle her.

The narrator contrasts Lettie's memory of the Chine to the present development it has undergone. Comparable to the fate of Tourneur's home in *Elizabeth*, Jesse's home has been transformed into new public structures: ". . . where the Pucks used to turn into colts, they came on a row of staring white lodging-houses: a large hotel stood on Jesse's garden, and the little Bethel had been succeeded by an elaborately 'high' Church" (623). Lettie experiences a "puzzled feeling of identity" when seeing a placard announcing coach-house and stables at the "Puckspiece" for the "genteel" (623), and she seeks lodging at the "smallest and quietest lodging" she can find (623). Though she now can afford to be "genteel," Lettie's self-identification as a modest woman reveals her traditional viewpoint that finds these changes distasteful. Her "puzzled feeling of identity" illustrates a division between her traditional views and a progressive society.

Lettie's focus on the past extends beyond her individual perspective in the novel. The exchange of property from Amyas, a yeoman, to Everhard, a middle-class businessman, illustrates a general pattern in which old systems had begun to decline. Verney expands the discussion of tradition and progress even further, however, to an exploration of her ideas on old and modern architecture.⁵¹ Verney favors Gothic over Italian architecture, arguing that the former lives while the latter has an "awkward and inartificial manner" (305). The purposes behind building great structures like cathedrals have been lost. Architecture in Verney's modern time serves a more practical purpose:

In all buildings raised by man for his own use there is a plain serving of a visible end; but the purely impersonal character of the thought of these nameless architects who built for the glory of God alone, the lavish pouring out of all man's best gifts for what was thought to be His service, is a very grand and touching testimony to the intenseness of the belief in the unseen in those days, which we have not gained by losing. (304)

Lettie's visit to a cathedral prompts this discussion. These surroundings differ from Lettie's natural background, and they take her into the past and prompt her to contemplate grander ideas. Lettie sees humans as small and petty, and her ideas are enlarged by the experience, giving her the strength to stand up to Everhard when he pressures her to marry him. In contrast to this great cathedral, the day-to-day dwellings, which Lettie observes, are small and poorly made. They reflect the priorities of a progressive society in which higher ideals are sacrificed to practical and profitable pursuits. Here, drawing on the concept of social Darwinism, she writes,

There are many ways in which Mr. Darwin's 'struggle for life' is carried on; and in many things the meanest, shabbiest, and cheapest win the day. In architecture they are, certainly at present, the most successful. Given the smallest quantity of material to cover a certain space—result, *red* boxes. One has a very keen sense that civilization is by no means all gain,

as one looks at the productions of the ages of barbarism, and compares them to those of our own 'enlightened time.' (303)

Verney responds to the idea of "survival of the fittest," which illustrates the scientific and progressive attitudes of her time, and she again criticizes the direction of society that encourages the "meanest" and "cheapest" to become the norm. Lettie finds the prospect of living in one of the red boxes depressing. Likewise, Amyas refuses to live in the town, a reaction similar to Roland's in Liverpool, and both characters find these kinds of progress distasteful.

Verney balances her preference for the past and tradition with the promise that Lettie's daughter will recover from her illness and become a member of the next generation of women. Her treatment of Lettie's daughter recalls "Heroines" in which Thackeray Ritchie compares modern women writers with the previous generation. Verney's modern generation interrupts preoccupation with the past and brings her writing back to the present, which she illustrates when Lettie's daughter interrupts her mother's reminiscing and asks her to pay attention to her daughter's greatness. When her daughter speaks to her, "the traces of the old life seemed to be wiped away for her mother as if they had been a dream" (625). Verney depicts the present generation in need of guidance from the mothers who came before them.

Lettie's daughter represents Verney's own generation of women, which promises to progress beyond Lettie's knowledge and perspective. Verney agrees with Thackeray Ritchie that despite advances modern women lack certain qualities belonging to the previous generation. The daughter is happier than her mother, "tried by no harsh words or actions, above all, troubled by no misgivings, no self-mistrusts or self-torturings; all the

difference, in fact, between the last generation and this” (623). The new generation, however, possesses “a little less of the shy charm of her mother. The dawn is a very evanescent thing in these times, self-possession and self-consciousness come rather too early, perhaps, in the day” (623). Both Verney and Thackeray Ritchie recognize the relatively greater scope and awareness women possess in their modern day but lament the loss of innocence, as Thackeray Ritchie describes in *Village* and associates with the magic and mystery of traditional cultures. Both writers encourage readers to look to the past as a means of recuperating the charms, innocence, spiritual mystery, and moral stability they find lacking in their murky world.

At the conclusion of the novel, Verney suggests that the marriage ending fails to resolve the story. The text subtly interrogates Lettie’s decision to marry Everhard over Caleb. After years of marriage, Lettie knows that she and Everhard are not equally suited for one another. Verney writes, “Lettice was a great deal cleverer than her husband. There was more of her thoughts which he never knew of, feelings which he would never share: a wider, larger nature, which, however, neither circumstances nor cultivation ever made much use of” (622). Lettie’s situation reflects that of the gifted woman unable to make use of her talents because of circumstance. Despite her superior intellect and the fact that Everhard is “no hero,” Lettice celebrates “his wonderful powers and great accomplishments” (622). When she questions Everhard’s wisdom, she dismisses these thoughts as a betrayal: “Sometimes a dim doubt came over her, when she differed from him, as to whether his right (which was to her right) was so absolutely *the* right; but she put it down as a sort of treason” (622-3). Lettie identifies a division between *the* truth and Everhard’s reality, and Everhard’s masculine perspective differs from her feminine one.

Verney thus suggests that truth and social ideologies, constructed by men, are not the same. Despite her suspicions, Lettie's indoctrination is so complete that she must ignore the truth in order to be loyal to her husband. Verney limits this criticism with her portrayal of Lettie and Everhard's marriage as a happy one. Without rejecting Victorian ideology, she challenges it with her depiction of the marriage from Lettie's perspective. She wishes to inject her own version of realism by showing that though Lettie loves her husband, their marriage fails to serve as a conclusive ending in itself.

Through her complication of the marriage ending, Verney questions the parameters of the genre of realism. The narrator explains the difficulties of completing a story when real life fails to be tied up in neat endings like novels. She writes, "It is only in three-volume novels and fairy tales that, when the proper distribution of deaths, marriages, and sugar-plums has taken place, it can be said of the actors that they lived 'happy for ever after'" (622). Verney directly criticizes the three-volume novel, realism's most popular form in the mid-nineteenth century, by pointing out its constructed endings which are inherently unrealistic. Readers view the "starting-point as the goal, and the preparation for life as the only interesting part,--in fact, the life itself" (622). The novel ending in marriage presents this event as an ending rather than a beginning. Yet Verney's novels also end with marriage, except for the final chapters in both works, which update the reader on the characters' lives years after their marriage. She thus upholds the conventions while also critiquing them.

The narrator admits that this standard ending proves easier than depicting the complexities of marriage. As she writes, "It saves a world of trouble, however, to the narrator; the remainder is far more difficult and complex a subject,--many more keys

minors to be harmonized, more involved discords to be resolved” (622). Reviewers of Verney’s work also recognize her deviation from the genre; as one writes,

Here we have no conventional characters thrown in to eke out the machinery of the story. It seems, indeed as though it were real, and not invented at all; the close and loving observations of a long life carefully grouped round a few characters rather than an effort of imagination, pure and simple. (*Contemporary Literature* 487)

Although his line of thought tends to lessen the authority of the writer, as women writers were supposed to lack the imagination to write proper fiction, the reviewer argues that Verney’s writing escapes the artificiality and contrivances of plotted fiction and represents a more natural thought process. Verney distances herself from generic conventions just as Thackeray Ritchie does through her fiction that conveys character and setting without the use of heavy plotting or detailed facts.

Complimentary reviews focus on Verney’s and Thackeray Ritchie’s realism in so far as it opposes sensationalism. Reviewers felt comfortable with their work because they believed these two women writers drew from their own experiences rather than using their imaginations to construct their novels. Phegley explains that when women tried to represent “detailed depictions of domestic life,” they were accused of “detailism,” meaning they could only “copy in minute detail what they saw around them” (25). If they tried to employ the “high form of realism,” they were accused of “superficiality” (25). Verney and Thackeray attempt to escape both categorizations altogether with their depictions of real characters and their feminine style of writing. They endeavor to create realistic novels without reverting to detailism, sensationalism, or abstract emotions. Their fictions appear to conform to the standards of proper feminine writing, but the modern reader can discern the ways in which Verney and Thackeray employ this medium in order

to be simultaneously accepted by the establishment and also able to critique masculine realism and its inability to depict the lives of women accurately.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Compared to works written by authors like George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, and William Makepeace Thackeray, the novels by Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Frances Parthenope Verney are modest endeavors. Their short fictions stay within the conventional perceptions of women's novel-writing, a "feminine art form suited to women's natural emotionality and domesticity" (Easley 100), and they adhere to the standard female *bildungsroman* in which the female character undertakes an introspective journey. Both authors limit their focus to the psychological development of a single character in order to concentrate on the feminine perspective and to reflect upon real women and their situations.

Beyond their concentration on female characters, Thackeray Ritchie and Verney employ feminine styles of writing, which include a voice and form different from those found in many *Cornhill* novels. The narrators also provide a subjective voice that evokes sympathy for their female characters, and they foster understanding between reader and character, allowing the reader to compare fictional women to actual women faced with similar situations. Their writing is also impressionistic, as their descriptions of setting and character draw on feeling and the senses rather than detailed facts. Along with a lack of detailed description, both authors construct simple plots, a method that allows them to experiment with form. They were not restrained by the three-volume format that often required numerous characters and extensive plots and subplots. As a result, Thackeray

Ritchie and Verney were able to avoid any semblance of sensational fiction, often associated with women writers, and thus could also avoid dismissal by critics and middle-class readers. They create a distinctly feminine style that draws on the traditional assumptions about women's writing, and, by conforming to those standards, they can safely critique aspects of Victorian ideology and expand the boundaries of *Cornhill's* masculine realism to include the feminine perspective.

Central to their feminine realism is their portrayal of how women struggle between traditional views of womanhood and progress towards a new understanding of their lives, identities, and society. Both writers recognize their time as one of transition in which traditional roles cannot satisfy women in a progressive society. Though the two authors handle this binary of tradition and progress in slightly different ways, they both employ traditional conventions and adhere to Victorian ideology in their attempts to promote progressive views of women. In Thackeray Ritchie's novels, the heroines are restricted by traditional views of womanhood, which force them to limited domestic spaces where they struggle to make their own life choices. Thackeray Ritchie demonstrates that when women are given choices and opportunity, they are able to thrive independently, but they require education and employment more than they require husbands. Verney's heroines are also restricted by conventional ideas about women, but she embraces women's connection to tradition and uses this concept to privilege her female characters as moral guides for an uncertain future.

The struggle between tradition and progress reflects *Cornhill's* image and status as it tried to draw on traditional values while promoting progressive ideas. Thackeray Ritchie and Verney uphold some of *Cornhill's* ideologies, such as traditional gender

roles, but they challenge others: emphasis of fact over fiction and employing a realism that privileges a detailed study of middle-class life and values. They modify *Cornhill's* masculine ideologies through their feminine realism, a realism that questions the centrality of marriage in young women's lives, emphasizes the importance of female friendships in the development of character, and promotes a view of women as intelligent and independent members of society.

While these two writers reflect traditional ideas concerning women, they simultaneously construct new ideas about women and their places in a progressive society. This reflective/constructive model applies to the *Cornhill* context as a whole, as it too reflects and constructs Victorian society on a larger scale, including depictions of the feminine and masculine, fact and fiction, and tradition and progress. Though Thackeray Ritchie and Verney are only two voices in this magazine, they each speak with a specific feminine perspective that carefully complies with masculine ideologies in order to find a reputable forum in which to place their works and to insure them of a wide audience. Within *Cornhill's* masculine context, their works construct a feminine realism that challenges the very framework in which they operate, a framework that insists on facts and details as the correct tools for portraying the world. As they oppose these tenets through their discursive styles, Thackeray Ritchie and Verney embrace a feminine way of reflecting and constructing a reality that is equally true.

Notes

¹ In a 2006 article, Linda K. Hughes writes, “During the 11 years between the first and second guides to research in Victorian periodicals published by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, a sea change occurred. . . . periodicals were earlier seen as essential sources or background material for understanding Victorian literature and history; by the end of the 1980s periodicals were understood to construct, not merely reflect, the culture within which historical events and literary texts took shape” (317).

² Drawing from the work of writers like J.S. Mill, Houghton writes, “For ‘old’ and ‘ancestral’ we may read ‘medieval’ or ‘feudal’” (2).

³ Houghton refers to J.S. Mill.

⁴ In addition to the Reform Bill of 1832, Houghton lists “the passage of the Catholic Emancipation, the attack on the Church by Whig liberals and Benthamite agnostics, together with the outbreak of the 1830 revolutions abroad” (2).

⁵ Just as Houghton describes how new ways of thinking replaced the old, it can be found during this period that “rapid advances in science and technology provided empirical beliefs in the place of old religious certainties . . .” (*Cambridge Guide*).

⁶ This focus on the middle class can be found in commentary by Victorian thinkers like George Henry Lewes who suggests that realistic fiction should center on ordinary people in his article “Realism in Art.” He criticizes idealistic novels that focus on the young nobleman artist or poet rather than on the “merchant, a lawyer, an artisan” (492).

⁷ Houghton describes this position as middling because it avoids extremes like “moral optimism,” which “could find fault with the introduction into art of anything that was ugly and painful, and lead to what Ruskin called ‘Purism,’ an idealization of life which creates an unreal world of sentimental beauty” (303). The other extreme would have been French naturalism.

⁸ Frances O’Gorman explains the diversity in opinion: “By far the most debated area in the history of the criticism of Victorian fiction in the past decades has been the subject of realism, and the answers to these questions have been stimulatingly diverse” (94).

⁹ George Levine explains that realism “exists as a process, responsive to the changing nature of reality as the culture understood it . . . (O’Gorman 118). O’Gorman makes a similar point, stating, “The criticism of realism in fiction exposes, with a special force, how the historically situated critic constructs the literary text he or she is investigating at a given moment in the history of the culture, because the investigation of realism has, naturally, involved critics in definitions of the real itself. And therein have been irreducible differences of view” (144).

¹⁰ O’Gorman explains this as follows: “For women writers, especially George Eliot, Boumehla proposed, this self-awareness indicated a realization that the conventions of realism as a practice of writing corresponded to awareness of the constraining forces impinging continually on female lives” (135).

¹¹ George Murray Smith became head of Smith, Elder and Company in 1845, after the retirement of his father George Smith and Alexander Elder, who started the company in 1816. In the beginning, Smith and Elder was a bookseller and stationary shop, supplying their goods to agents in the East India Company. The owners became bankers and publishers, publishing their first work in 1819. By the time he took over, George Murray Smith had worked in the business for seven years. He became head of the publishing

department when he was nineteen and published writers such as John Ruskin and Leigh Hunt (Schmidt 260).

¹² Although the *Athenaeum* described *Macmillan's* as a "review of political affairs," it was a nonpartisan miscellany that tried not to offend its readers. Keith Wilson writes, "Each issue usually contained a political article, a serial, a literary or philosophical article, a historical or travel article, and a poem or short story . . ." (216).

¹³ Jennifer Phegley describes the care Thackeray and Smith took with deciding on the magazine's name and cover: "The name 'Cornhill' came from the London street where the publishing house of Smith, Elder was located. While the magazine was synonymous with London culture, it also portrayed a romanticized pastoral image that would be attractive to busy Londoners caught up in the hustle and bustle of the city" (73).

¹⁴ Thackeray Ritchie confirms this in her history of *Cornhill's* beginnings, "With the exception, perhaps, of the well-known 'Dublin Penny Magazine,' it seemed to be the impression in those bygone days that nothing was worth having that did not cost five shillings or half-a-crown at least" (3).

¹⁵ Maunder describes these classes as "Cockney tradesmen, merchants, bankers, speculators were the new plutocracy who amassed wealth, if not finesse, with alarming rapidity to become the living, breathing symbols of full-blown capitalism in the city" (249).

¹⁶ Thackeray states that the magazine's writers will "suppose the ladies and children always present; we shall not set rival politicians by the ears; we shall listen to every guest who has an apt word to say . . . The kindly fruits of the earth, which grow for all—may we not enjoy them with friendly hearts?" (7).

¹⁷ Debates over the redundant woman arose after the census of 1851 indicated a higher number of women than men in Britain. This topic is discussed in more detail in the Thackeray Ritchie section.

¹⁸ The number of women contributors to *Cornhill* can be compared to the fourteen percent of women contributors to the periodical field as a whole, as reported by Walter E. Houghton in *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* (Harris 382).

¹⁹ Helen Debenham describes Thackeray Ritchie's ties to *Cornhill*, including her close relationships to her father, George Smith, and her brother-in-law Leslie Stephen. Thackeray Ritchie "had no such ties to his [Stephen's] successor, James Payn, and her complaint in 1884 that he was 'hustling' her out suggests that her long absence from the magazine under his regime was his rather than her doing" ("Literary Formation" 82).

²⁰ An example of this can be found in the subjects Thackeray Ritchie chose for her nonfiction. Her narrator engages in philanthropic exercises, visiting schools and establishments for women. She also limits her first two novels to the domestic sphere. I would argue that Thackeray Ritchie wishes to distance her work from any semblance of sensational literature, a genre critics consistently attacked.

²¹ In this article, Thackeray Ritchie reviews two novels: *Too Much Alone* and *George Geith*.

²² Thackeray Ritchie believes that subjective novels can be as good as objective novels but they have to be of a higher caliber.

²³ Thackeray Ritchie repeats this image in the final chapter of *The Story Elizabeth* with Jean Dampier and the narrator Mary, two spinsters who are lifelong friends.

²⁴ This review was based more on the *Athenaeum*'s dislike of William Makepeace Thackeray than on the quality of Thackeray Ritchie's novel.

²⁵ Margaret Oliphant complains of the use of the sensational plot and believes that "there are novels which thrive very well without any plot at all . . ." (168).

²⁶ Oliphant believes that *Elizabeth* calls "back ghosts of recollections to the hearts of women who were once girls, and know what it means; and it bears every mark of deep veracity as a real study of life" (176).

²⁷ Lillian Shankman also recognizes Thackeray Ritchie's use of the same narrator for multiple works: "*The Village* is recounted in the first person by a narrator, Miss Williamson. Anny uses this same spinster in *Miss Williamson's Divagations*, *The Story of Elizabeth*, and *Fulham Lawn*" (160).

²⁸ Though she never approves of Elizabeth's behavior, the narrator's admiration of Elizabeth's spirit may be compared to her description of Mrs. Jacob's daughters as "such good, stupid, obedient, uninteresting little girls, that there was really not a word to say against them . . ." (492). Elizabeth's impulsive feelings are valued more than simple obedience.

²⁹ Thackeray Ritchie describes Will as belonging to the "school of athletic Christianity" (104). From this perspective, Will believes that "nothing was wrong that was done with a Christian and manly spirit. He rode across country, he smoked pipes, he went out shooting, he played billiards and critics. . . . He enjoyed life and all its good things with a grateful temper, and made most people happy about him" (104).

³⁰ Debenham argues that while Tourneur possesses a "loftier spirit" that Elizabeth respects, Will "does her far more good" ("Re-reading" 143).

³¹ In response to her mother's suggestion that she help schools, neighbors, and sick people, Elizabeth tells her that she hates "all that cant!" (495).

³² In fact, this result was one of Thackeray Ritchie's possible endings. As Mourão explains, though in the alternative ending Elizabeth does not actually marry, it is suggested that she may marry the curate, Will Dampier, in the future (78).

³³ Thackeray Ritchie often defends her characters after they err. When Madame de Tracy arranges to take Catherine off Mrs. Butler's hands, Mrs. Butler is glad for the "easy way of getting rid of the poor little objection at once, without effort or trouble; she would be provided for, and Mrs. Butler was not without one single grain of kindness in her composition. . . . she was, to a certain point, a just woman with her temper under control" (366).

³⁴ Janet Horowitz Murray describes the governess position as "the single most important occupation open to gentlewomen" (226).

³⁵ The narrator calls Catherine Madame de Tracy's heroine: "Madame de Tracy was surprised and somewhat disappointed at this silence and calmness with which Catherine accepted her new lot in life. . . . Her heroine would not perform . . ." (516).

³⁶ Dick, like John Dampier in *Elizabeth*, is not the modern hero. He is a man of the world, and he, too, proposes to a wealthy woman after falling into debt. He then withdraws his proposal. The narrator describes him as having "an odd fantastic mind He was sensitive, artistic, appreciative. . . . Like other and better men, Dick's tastes were with the aristocracy, his sympathies with the people" (9).

³⁷ The description of the “stalwart hero” recalls the self-made or professional man who values facts and a straight-forward attitude. This manly persona resembles the male reader of *Cornhill* and a member of the rising middle class.

³⁸ Gérin explains that Leslie Stephen’s “pedantic intellect” clashed with Thackeray Ritchie’s enthusiastic nature, and that they were “ill-assorted.” Stephen writes in the same letter to Julia Duckworth, quoted above, that Thackeray Ritchie is the “most uneducated person I ever knew.” Despite these differences, they shared a “mutual affection” and Stephen goes on to write, “But certainly I think her one of the best and most attractive people I ever met—and worth a dozen senior wranglers and the whole staff of professors at Girton and Newnham. What I said of her want of education is what I should say (I suppose) of a first-rate musical performer who had a bad violin . . .” (177).

³⁹ Thackeray Ritchie never directly states this, as she avoids prescriptive claims that would limit women and their art.

⁴⁰ Thackeray Ritchie provides a small portrait of tradition and progress represented by two elderly women in a carriage with Fontaine. Madame Binaud is a Conservative, “very stout, and wore a high cap with big flaps that were somewhat out of date” (14). She distrusts “machines à vapeur.” The other woman, Madame Nicholas, “was a bright, lively little woman” who wears “a crinoline, a Paris cap, and all the latest innovations” (15).

⁴¹ Margaret Verney also writes of Parthenope’s devotion to her sister during the Crimean War: “. . . during that eventful time, Lady Verney’s life was absorbed in that of her sister. When at length Florence Nightingale returned . . . Lady Verney’s business was to protect her sister from indiscreet and importunate worshippers” (x-xi).

⁴² Barbara Quinn Schmidt argues that *Cornhill*’s search for novelty and their reliance on fiction resulted in lower quality work, and “as early as the late 1860s, *The Cornhill* had begun publishing such third-rate novelists as Frances P. Verney and A.I. Shand in order to save money” (“Novelists” 149). In her article “*The Cornhill Magazine* and the Literary Formation of Anne Thackeray Ritchie,” Helen Debenham compares Verney unfavorably to Thackeray Ritchie.

⁴³ Anne Thackeray Ritchie married at forty. Both authors would have been acquainted with married life as well as spinsterhood, though Verney had both perspectives by the time she began writing.

⁴⁴ Verney explains that women have nothing at stake in their educations and therefore lack incentive. Women “have never realized what it is to know that a class or a fellowship, an appointment for India or a clerkship in a public office—i.e. the whole future of their lives—depended upon the correctness of their construing of a Greek play, their facts concerning Charlemagne or Charles V., their differential calculus or their algebra; and wanting these material incentives, they and their parents have been perfectly satisfied with the slovenly results incident to such dilettante teaching as they have hitherto been only able to obtain” (377).

⁴⁵ As Verney shows throughout her work, this plasticity can also work against women who are easily influenced by society to act or think a certain way.

⁴⁶ Nightingale wrote to Harriet Martineau, “I am brutally indifferent to the rights and wrongs of my sex” (Stark 16). Myra Stark acknowledges this contradiction and explains that Nightingale was not a feminist: “She refused to give wholehearted support to the main feminist causes of her day—suffrage and equal educational rights for women—and was critical of those who did. Indeed, she frequently expressed contempt for the lives and characters of most women” (15).

⁴⁷ Roland imagines the benefits of having Cassandra as a wife, as her duties would include making the house clean, tidy, and cheerful. Verney emphasizes these duties as useful as opposed to modern, idle women's functions: "Indeed it may be questioned whether this list of qualities was not quite as agreeable and meritorious, and even as likely to promote their household bliss, as those which a Belgravian young lady brings to the common stock" (731).

⁴⁸ Despite her physical weakness, Verney describes Lydia as strong willed: "Lydia, like many other very quiet people, had a strong will of her own, when sufficiently moved to exert it by anything she thought right, and she was quite determined that, as regarded the children, the breach should be healed, and the advantages of the connection secured" (590).

⁴⁹ Verney explains that Lydia taught herself to read: "I learnt mysen a bit afore I married. There was a little maid o' Mrs. Goose's as were a rare un for her book, and she learnt me my letters, and fund the places i' th' Bible when parson was a readin', and so I cum for to know the words when I see'd un in their own places . . ." (323-4).

⁵⁰ Verney believes the peasants possess some of the "best manners in England," because of their more natural way of life (254-5).

⁵¹ Her views resemble those of John Ruskin as he presents them in *The Stones of Venice*.

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