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School Novels, Women's Work, and Maternal Vocationalism

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This article examines three school novels within a framework of maternal vocationalism versus materialist approaches to women's work. It considers the materialist orientation of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre with regard to women's teaching work and Brontë's rejection of the maternal vocational model. By contrast, Clemence Dane's 1917 novel, Regiment of Women, valorizes maternal vocational approaches to teaching and decries the single woman professional teacher, invoking as she does so some anti-spinster and anti-lesbian stereotypes. Winifred Holtby's 1936 novel South Riding rejects the maternal vocationalism and anti-spinsterism of Dane's novel and reappropriates Jane Eyre's discourse of equality and the Victorian legacy of materialism.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* / Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* / Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* / maternal vocationalism / women teachers' unionism / girls' education reform, nineteenth and twentieth century / school novels / women's education work

Long before teaching was professionalized in the late nineteenth century, women's teaching was predominantly thought of as both maternal and vocational. Women's employment as teachers—that is, when women occupied themselves with instructing other people's children, whether in a home or in a school—was imagined as continuous with and related to the primary work of mothering. It would be almost inadequate to claim that women's teaching work was “seen as” maternal, since the idea of motherhood already incorporated aspects of teaching. Since the late eighteenth century, feminists and antifeminists debated the meaning of woman's role as mother, because that role was understood by all as a core agent of social reproduction. As Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes put it, “throughout the Victorian period, the widely held perception of motherhood as intensely moral, intensely selfless, and above all intensely pure allowed feminists and antifeminists alike to justify their stance pro or con women's involvement in the world outside the home” (1997, 3). Arguments about what kinds of future mothers schools should be turning out were central to the discourse of nineteenth-century reformers of girls' and women's education. The ideology of maternal vocationalism implies that what women teachers do “comes naturally” and like mothering, is an extension of the self and not work.¹

With the emergence of women teachers' unionism, significant counterdiscourses to maternalism began to appear. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women teachers struggled for equal pay and other rights with their male counterparts in their own union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT). Women teachers were arguably the most vocal, organized, and militant groups of British feminists in the first third of the twentieth century, as Alison Oram has shown (1996). In fact, women teachers made up one of the most active labor groups of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Corr 1987). They began agitating for equal pay in the late nineteenth century and remained "prime movers" in equality campaigns even when other feminist groups gave in to the interwar backlash (Oram 1996, 4). There is little trace of sentimentality in the discourse of activist teachers, which in addition to equal pay demanded fairer representation in the union, and more promotional opportunities for women.²

Women teacher activists and other feminist labor advocates have themselves invoked the importance of motherhood—asserting women teachers' right to both teach and be mothers at the same time. Nor were they necessarily "anti-vocational" in their stance. Nonetheless, activists' insistence on equity issues eroded the social consensus that what women did when they taught was somehow different from what men did, that it was not indeed "work" but rather an expression of idealized maternalism. Therefore, the insistence on women's teaching work *as* work was in this context radical. Increasingly, women activists based their claims on principles of equality, merit, and full economic citizenship rather than any special feminine or motherly content to teaching. To clarify this conflict: maternalist rhetoric emphasized women's difference—biologically ordained gifts and responsibilities that, in this view, translated from private to social and indeed public realms. On the other hand, the opposing rhetoric of professionalism was rooted in a gender-blind appropriation of meritocratic values: it placed training, credentials, experience, and other objectively measurable qualities at the center of importance. In professional ideology, the social value of work is quantifiable, and professionals themselves become responsible for establishing a wage commensurate with their value. Rather than placing the "product" of girls' education—girls—at the center, activists placed the "work process" of women teachers at the center.

The tensions between maternal-vocational and feminist-materialist rhetoric surrounding women's teaching work can be seen over time in three British novels—Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* (1917), and Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936). Literary scholars have tended to read these school novels and others with reference to the formation of female subjectivity through education—emphasizing maternal vocationalism as an ideological factor in the social

reproduction of women, but without exploring the role of organized resistance to dominative institutions. By reading with equal attention to the rhetoric of professionalism and teacher activism, we might also better understand the relationship of early feminism to other social movements and explore questions of class and the labor movement in the formation of female-feminist subjectivity.

Three School Novels

The reform of girls' education has been a popular theme in fiction from Charlotte Brontë to A. S. Byatt.³ I use the term "school novels" to designate those narratives that take place in and concern themselves primarily with girls' schools. Although there is not an agreed-upon term for this category of fiction, nor agreement to accept the category as a genre, there is a proliferation of interdisciplinary criticism that treats school novels (Copelman 1996; Faraday 1989; Kean 1980; Summerfield 1987). For example, school novels are often considered with respect to lesbian experience and culture; Terry Castle has suggested that the girls' school setting is a logical place for lesbian plots to develop (1993; see also Auchmuty 1992, 2000; Smith 1997; Wachman 2001; Zimmerman 1983).

The education critique in *Jane Eyre* predates what has been accepted as the beginning of the reform of girls' education—the 1850s Taunton Commission, after which followed decades of struggle to define the meaning, form, and purpose of girls' education. The commission heard testimonies from headmistresses of girls' schools and others concerned with the often total absence of scholarly or academic pursuits in girls' schools. Leaders of the reform movement sought more academic instruction for girls, and the introduction of "boys'" subjects such as science and math (Bryant 1979; Fletcher 1980; Kamm 1965). Readers have seen *Jane Eyre* in connection with the reformist sentiment, viewing Lowood, a version of Brontë's two childhood schools, as a fictionalized exposé of physical and moral unhealthiness in a certain type of girls' school. (In her 1848 review, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake referred to Lowood as "Dothegirls Hall"—referencing Dickens's representation of the abusive "Dotheboys" school in *Nicholas Nickleby*). Brontë's feminist interest in teaching goes beyond the issues of student experience to embrace the question of teacher experience, often exploring the latter with an unsentimental materialism.⁴

By the time Clemence Dane published *Regiment of Women* (1917), half a century after *Jane Eyre*, Britain had seen the rise of academic secondary schools for girls and the growth of women's postsecondary education along with many other innovations and reforms. These included the success of girls' boarding schools—a few modeled on boys' public schools—which were academically rigorous, with a large emphasis on examinations. While

girls' boarding schools only educated an elite minority, they had a large cultural impact and strongly influenced the discourse respecting all girls' and women's education. Contemporary with women's further inroads into higher education was the new woman, alternately celebrated and decried in journalism and fiction. Often this symbol of newfound social and economic independence was represented as the product of women's education. Increasingly vocal and prominent exemplars of new womanhood, teacher activists, and some elite feminists forged a political front of single women dedicated to equal pay. The backlash against these women, single women generally and women teachers in particular, is the context for the novel.⁵ The title comes from the Calvinist John Knox's 1558 treatise, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," in which he rails against women who "beare rule" as "repugnant to nature" (1558/1878, 11).

Many of those involved in the backlash against the equal pay movement were women and feminists, reflecting the greater attention given by some feminists to the social reproduction of girls rather than the working conditions of teachers. Additionally, single women educators and activists were targets of the campaign against spinsters, an implicitly anti-lesbian movement rooted in sexology and the "new psychology." Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* contains passages attacking girls' schools as breeding grounds for lesbianism, and this was an early example of an attack that would continue to gain force in the decades following (Ellis 1913/1924; Faraday 1989, 34). Anti-spinsterism vilified single women teachers as narrow-minded, sexually "thwarted" and even predatory.⁶ Many teachers were themselves responsible for perpetuating the anti-lesbian hysteria. Dane's novel is emblematic of the contradictions of this moment in feminism. On the one hand, Dane served as vice president of the equal-pay-endorsing feminist Six Point Group and urged that women teachers should have the privilege of marrying. On the other hand, it urged the marriage privilege by way of an egregious participation in the anti-lesbian and anti-spinster backlash, representing the "dangers" of permitting potentially lesbian spinsters to educate girls. Clemence Dane's own lesbianism is evidence of the contradictions of her own position and of the regulatory power of heteronormal ideology in the women's movement.

The continuing backlash against feminism and the women's labor movement in the form of hostility to single women provides the historical context for Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936). It is perhaps a measure of the virulent pitch to which the anti-single woman/anti-woman teacher campaign had risen that one of *South Riding's* most important contributions is Holtby's heroine Sarah Burton, a 40-something headmistress with a trail of ex-boyfriends and a love interest. Sarah Burton's character is reminiscent of Jane Eyre in her spirited rejection of strictures on properly feminine behavior; Holtby makes humorous and revealing references to

her fellow Yorkshirewoman's school novel throughout *South Riding*. She mobilizes Brontë's novel in order to refute her own close contemporary, Clemence Dane. Insofar as Brontë's novel decries not just the condition of girls' education but the conditions of women teachers' work, *South Riding* celebrates the emergence of the professional woman educator as a response to the conditions of which Brontë complained, and provides an optimistic counternarrative to Dane's portrait of "predatory" women teachers. Her fulfilled single heroine also should be seen in the context of the postwar lost generation: Sarah Burton mourns a fiancé who died in the war. Holtby's narrative exemplifies the life of a woman who otherwise possibly would have ended up married (and not a headmistress).

Regiment of Women contains two romance plots—part one, the "Awful Warning" against lesbianism (Hennegan 1995, v), and part two, the execution of compulsory heterosexuality. By contrast, *South Riding's* real love affair is a romance of work. Despite Sarah Burton's *Jane Eyre*-like love for a landowner and numerous interchangeable old boyfriends and male companions, the novel's affective center is Sarah Burton's work, which she "love[s]" (209). Locating her narrative in the domain of public rather than private education, Holtby's portrait of female-feminist professionalism appealed to women teacher unionists who saw themselves as having materialist claims of their own, not just an obligation to do the work of social reproduction.

Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, and "the old business teach—teach—teach"

There is a long tradition of reading *Jane Eyre's* rebellious individualism as evidence of the novel's radicalism.⁷ There is an equally long tradition of using the novel as a lens to focus attention upon the cultural and ideological history of the governess, as well as the critique of girls' education as represented by Lowood. Contemporary observers viewed governesses in a position closely parallel to ordinary schoolteachers (i.e., as working women). Singled out for charity and analytical observation in the nineteenth century, the larger context of governessing was teaching labor. In one of the letters Brontë wrote to William Smith Williams—giving advice about his daughter's plans to take up education work—"teaching" and "governessing" are used almost interchangeably (Barker 1997, 186–7). For contemporaries, governessing was a subset of teaching; the class contradictions of the governess indicated the class contradictions of educated women (and women educators) more generally. The notion that the governess is a lady "in disguise" as a worker was understood by contemporaries the other way around as well: governesses were workers disguised as ladies. As teachers, governesses transmit elite ideology without themselves belonging fully to the elite class. This idea is helpful for recognizing

why the figure of the governess has been so appealing to feminist critics concerned with the intersection of gender and economics.

The present reading focuses on the governess as a working woman. In addition to the feminist individualist themes for which the novel is celebrated (for example the "I will respect myself" internal monologue), as Mary Poovey has demonstrated, the novel's radicalism is informed by the materialist feelings of the 1840s (1988, 126–63; Brontë 1847/1975, 321). It also anticipates some of the collectivist orientation of early-twentieth-century women educators' trade unionism. Eastlake's contemporary review, for instance, alludes to Sarah Lewis's idea for the "combination" (organizing and unionism) of governesses as a group of workers in need of better conditions.⁸ This is not to argue for Brontë or the novel as "proto unionist," or to argue that Brontë, given the opportunity, would have been speaking on behalf of a governess' combination. Instead, my intention is to focus on Brontë's critique of the conditions of women's teaching work, as well the degree to which contemporary materialism informed her representation of schooling. Brontë was particularly concerned with the class issues raised by the charity schools, where the children of the poor were often starved, neglected, and educated into a life of drudgery. One result of the emphasis on Brontë's feminist individualism is to attribute to her other elements of a bourgeois-feminist critique, such as faith in wage labor as fulfilling. On the contrary, Brontë's novel and diaries and other works generally represent wage labor as quite unfulfilling. This unquestionably reflects her personal experience of paid work. Judith Newton captures this when she observes that "the Brontë family felt some lingering though uneasy adherence to the idea of work and rising" and that Charlotte Brontë knew "how arduous and how barren of achievement the working life could be" (1981, 97).

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Brontë analogizes teaching work to slavery. For instance, she describes the governessing positions of the Rivers sisters as "slaving amongst strangers" (1847/1975, 392). In personal correspondence she likewise describes her sister Emily's school-teaching job as "slavery," averring that teachers are "hard-worked, ill-paid and despised" (Barker 1994/1996, 49, 241). Brontë has Jane Eyre describe her teaching work as "servitude," explicitly rejecting the notion of a woman's vocation to teach. For this heroine, teaching is just a "business," which is how Charlotte Brontë describes schoolteaching in her letters (Brontë 1847/1975, 387; Barker 1997, 57). When compared with starving or going into domestic service, Jane Eyre describes teaching at the village school in highly qualified terms as a position of relative dignity: "it was humble—but . . . sheltered . . . [a] safe asylum; it was plodding . . . but . . . independent . . . not ignoble . . . not mentally degrading" (1847/1975, 381). But it is never a question of a higher calling to the woman's task of (social) reproduction. When St. John asks if a life committed to "regenerating your race" through education

would be “well spent,” she firmly repudiates any sense of vocation: “don’t recall either my mind or body to the school” (1847/1975, 415).⁹

Jane Eyre’s most explicit rejection of the maternal vocational teaching ideal occurs in a speech in which she denounces cant about children, teaching, and conventional expectations for women at once. This dismissal nearly resembles Rochester’s blunt opinion: “It would be intolerable to me to pass a whole evening *tête à tête* with a brat” (1847/1975, 130). Jane’s monologue is characteristically unsentimental: she relates how Adèle

entertained for me a vivacious, though perhaps no very profound affection, and by her simplicity, gay prattle, and efforts to please, inspired me, in return, with a degree of attachment sufficient to make us both content in each other’s society. This, *par parenthèse*, will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them an idolatrous devotion: but I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth. I felt a conscientious solicitude for Adèle’s welfare and progress. (1847/1975, 109)

Rather than a maternal feeling for Adèle, Jane Eyre acknowledges a sense of duty and workaday concern and pride in her achievements. On the eve of her wedding to Rochester, Jane Eyre holds a sleeping Adèle in her arms in what could in another novel have been painted as an idealized symbol of maternal feeling. But Jane’s inner monologue contradicts any such expectation: she embraces Adèle but is preoccupied with herself and her future with Rochester: “All my life was awake and astir in my frame. . . . I cried over her with strange emotion. . . . She seemed the emblem of my past life; and he, I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day” (1847/1975, 289). Rather than the focus of her energies, Adèle is an “emblem” who signifies the heroine’s life.

Characteristic of this businesslike attitude to her teaching is the frank and funny exchange between Rochester and Jane about her salary (“you owe me five,” she says) which demonstrates the tension between two conflicting value systems: one, the pricelessness of Jane and her work—the maternal vocational model; the other, the cost of domestic companionship—the materialist model (1847/1975, 226). The frankness about money and salary in the novel demonstrates Jane Eyre’s lack of sentimentality about work and compensation. The businesslike approach to work is connected to the value she places on economic independence as a means to a domestic life free from wage “slavery.” On the other hand, Jane Eyre’s skepticism regarding wage work as a path to liberation is often accompanied by an idealization of unwaged domestic work, in the form of getting Rochester his tea or redecorating the Rivers’s house.

“[T]he thought of such a woman, molding the mothers of the next generation”: Clemence Dane’s¹⁰ Regiment of Women

Clemence Dane, the pen name for Winifred Ashton, was well known for her stage plays and screenplays as well as novels and book reviews. The book review editor for *Good Housekeeping* for many years, she was for a time the vice president of the Six Point Group (a group of feminist activists, one of whose points was equal pay for women teachers), and as a young woman worked as a teacher in a girls' school. Her 1917 *Regiment of Women* critiques girls' schools—but for revealingly different reasons than Brontë's novel. Like many Six Point Group members, Clemence Dane came from an elite background and did not have a personal financial stake in the outcome of teachers' struggles. Likewise, the novel concerns itself with the well being of pupils and not teachers. Remarkably at odds with the facts, she represents teachers as well off and not in need of equal pay.

Dane writes after decades that saw a substantial string of successes for girls' education reform: the establishment of municipal high schools, a more rigorous academic curriculum, and the preparation for and admission to university, for example. By 1917, these successes created a spirit of virulent reaction. Fueled by the lesbophobic pseudoscience of sexology, many reactionary critics focused on what was deemed psychological health, commonly expressing hysterical concerns regarding the presumed sexual life of an all-girls-and-women environment. The single-sex arrangement supposedly fostered “unhealthy” attachments between girls and women, including relationships between pupils as well as between pupils and their teachers. Additionally, the late-century turn toward rigorous academics—the introduction of “boys'” subjects, and the vast importance placed upon performance through test taking—was in a widespread backlash seen as dangerously unhealthy for girl pupils, contributing to enervation and physical collapse and illpreparing them to be wives and mothers.

The plot of Dane's novel recapitulates the hysterical plot of this reactionary lesbophobic and anti-spinster discourse. The core of the narrative is the dangerous and charismatic influence exerted by lesbian teacher-cum-headmistress Clare Hartill. Her relationship with a fragile, gifted, and motherless student leads the girl to jump out of a window. This suicide subsequently causes the nervous collapse of a nineteen-year-old assistant teacher. The young teacher's recuperation is only complete when she is “rescued” from the school by a marriage proposal.

Understandably, the novel is considered to mark an influential (if infamous) moment in the annals of lesbian literary history (Auchmuty 1992; Hamer 1996; Wachman 2001). It is also significant for its representation of the contradictory consequences of the growing power and authority of professional women in schools. On the one hand, headmistresses (mostly, if

not all, single women) had the power to administer the lives of large groups of students and teachers. But this power was often the power to exploit, and, as Alison Hennegan points out in her introduction to the novel, *Regiment* is an example of how unmarried women were coming to be represented as dangerous on two different accounts: for their power to exploit other women, in the case of professional managers such as headmistresses, and also for their perceived threat to the heteronormal order (1995).¹¹

Dane perpetuates the demonized portrait of the single woman teacher that sexological discourse had been promoting since the 1890s. Her very dedication to her job is a sickness:

Clare toiled early and late for them all. She fed them . . . from her own resources of energy, was willing to devitalize herself on their behalf. The strain once over, she appeared slack, gaunt, debilitated. She had, however, her own methods of recuperation. Her ends gained, she could take back . . . more than she had given. Moreover, the supply of child-life never slackened. By the end of the summer term Clare would be once more in excellent condition. (1995, 99)

On the one hand, Dane paints a picture of the all-girls' school as a place of exhaustion, overwork, and physical and mental degeneration—a place where young girls vampirically drain the vitality out of their teachers. The novel includes scenes of teachers spending all weekend at the end of term reading “piles of reports and examination papers,” skipping dinner because they were “hard at work” on school correspondence, and spending “a long evening over [student compositions], weighing, comparing, discussing” them (1995, 195, 185, 32). In this respect, the novel recalls other girls' school novels, often written by ex-teachers, which depict teachers' overwork.

On the other hand, the professional teacher, who has exhausted herself in the work of social reproduction, places on “the supply of child life” a demand for full compensation and more, even “more than she had given.” This vampiricism is bound up with the novel's homoerotics. The contradiction that Clemence Dane, at one time a vice president of the equal-pay-endorsing Six Point Group, as well as a lesbian herself, wrote a book that accorded with the anti-spinster and anti-single-sex-girls' school platform, is intriguing to say the least. By way of the explanation for the “muddle” of the novel's anti-lesbian agenda, Hennegan has offered Dane's own “muddle about sex,” manifest in her reputation for constant, unintentional double entendres (1995, x). *Regiment of Women* is credited with influencing *The Well of Loneliness* and other lesbian novels, in part for its representation of the vampiric “older woman” character. Nonetheless, while Dane's lesbian “villain” draws on anti-lesbian stereotypes, the character is not fully encapsulated by these negative characteristics. Dane is also responsible for representing a complex intellectual lesbian teacher

who is often brilliant and dynamic in the classroom, who has human frailties and passions and even the capacity for self-reflection. There are positive, or at least neutral, representations of hard work in *Regiment of Women* that contrast with both the "vampiric" model and the vocational model, which coded teaching as mothering and "not-work."

While clearly marking the space of teacher overwork, the novel also recirculates social anxieties about the economically independent woman, especially by associating her with a salary spent on selfish pleasures—not reinvested into the family. More specifically, the novel's anti-teacher lesbophobia is intricately bound up with an anti-labor discourse that divided the teaching workforce, rationalizing unequal pay and reduced opportunities for women educators. The majority of male teachers argued against equal pay. Since most women teachers were single by statute, anti-equal pay rhetoric represented that men's wages selflessly went to support families while women teachers inclined to profligate spending on themselves. Within the logic of the novel, economic independence becomes associated with Clare's negative characteristics: selfishness, megalomania, and decadent taste. The "unmaternal" Clare fits closely with the negative stereotype of the defenders of unequal pay: she is a car-driving, vacationing, orphan heiress with no dependents and "too much money" (1995, 5).

Dane's alternative—the nineteen-year-old assistant teacher Alwynne Durand—is maternal and heterosexual, and displays a pronounced lack of interest in monetary compensation, which testifies to her selflessness and the sincerity of her vocation. Initially under the charismatic influence of the older woman, Durand nonetheless has a very different philosophy of work, compensation, and teacher-student relations. She donates her time and sacrifices herself, "thinks nothing" of giving extra after-school lessons to her pupils, caring for them "as she would have looked after a starving cat . . . as a matter of course, and instinctively as she ate her dinner" (1995, 51). This "instinctive" motherliness is the context Dane provides for a vocational approach to teaching, observing that her pupils were always on Durand's "motherly young mind" (1995, 161). Like Brontë, Dane constructs powerful homosocial versions of the *pietà* tableau (featuring the dead Christ in the arms of his virgin mother). Brontë's version employs the *pietà* in considered repudiation of maternalism: as the child sleeps, Jane Eyre's consciousness centers on herself—specifically, on an awareness of herself as an agent in her own history. By contrast, Dane employs two *pietà* tableaux to reinforce traditional maternalism. In one, her heroine holds the actual corpse of a student "clasped to her breast. . . . look[ing] like a young mother" (1995, 179). The other tableau underscores the message of sacrifice, taking place in the classroom in which Durand conducts extra, unpaid private lessons. In both of Dane's tableaux the intent is to present changeless images of eternal motherhood, which even Durand experiences "without a thought

to the passage of time" (1995, 53). *Regiment of Women's* representations of maternal vocationalism accord with anti-equal pay discourse in at least two ways. First, the notion of women's teaching as mothering meant that it was associated not only with unpaid work but with something which could be construed as not-work. The insistence on Alwynne's teaching as instinctive and pleasurable moves the question of her labor toward domesticity and away from the workplace. Second, the motherly Alwynne is an economic dependent herself, first on her aunt and eventually on her landowning fiancé Roger. She uses up her salary on flowers, candy, and Christmas gifts. Motherly yet childish, her economic dependence is a byproduct of her properly "feminine" emotional dependence.

***"[T]urning giggling little creatures into self-respecting women":
Winifred Holtby's South Riding***

In contrast to Dane's paragon of dependent maternalism, Alwynne Durand, *South Riding's* heroine is decidedly independent. Forty-something Oxford-educated headmistress Sarah Burton is spirited and unconventional, with a trail of ex-boyfriends and an abiding faith in the project of girls' education reform. Written during a decade of continuing hostility to single women (particularly hostility directed at single teachers), *South Riding* has been called a "defiant reply" to women teachers' "detractors" after years of "bad press" (Summerfield 1987; see also Auchmuty 1992; Copelman 1996; Faraday 1989; Leonardi 1989, 197, 199–201; Oram 1996; Shaw 1997, 49). In contrast to her predecessor, Clemence Dane, and in a recovery of Jane Eyre's rhetoric, Winifred Holtby mobilizes the women's unionist rhetoric of equality and opportunity. *South Riding*, not nearly as widely known in the United States, has been very popular in Britain, having been adapted twice for radio and once for television. Like Dane, Holtby was a teacher in a girls' school before she became a writer and also was a Six Point Group member; she worked tirelessly on behalf of women teachers—at the same time that she was working for other causes up until her death. Having made a name for herself in journalism and fiction, she was perhaps best known as a journalist and once described herself as a publicist for social causes, rather than an artist (Shaw 1999). She regarded her novel writing as a politically charged intervention in the public sphere. Besides this rebuttal of the pathologized single woman teacher, it is not certain whether Holtby had Dane's particular novel in mind when she wrote *South Riding*. She definitely had Dane on her mind during the early stages of the novel's composition, agreeing to take over Dane's job as *Good Housekeeping's* book reviewer (Holtby 1938, 458; Brittain 364). Holtby may have admired *Regiment of Women*, even though she rejected its anti-spinster argument, as in the past she had admired Dane's other work while disagreeing with its political implications (Holtby and Brittain 1960, 52, 71; Holtby 1933).

This romance of the single woman teacher is remarkable, given the escalating hostility to single women by the 1930s. As Alison Oram puts it: "In popular romance and fiction, positive images of female friendships and fulfilled single women in their thirties disappeared by the 1930s" (1996, 188). Oram also shows how the 1920s were a high point for opponents of single sex girls' schools (1996). This reaction was probably compounded by the growth of state-aided girls' high schools (exemplified by the fictional Kiplington High School for Girls), as this sector had doubled since the first decade of the century (Summerfield 1987). Both Annabel Faraday and Margaret Littlewood show how the anti-spinster teacher movement continued to gain ground in the postwar years. Faraday writes: "The campaign towards co-education was greatly rooted in a loathing of lesbians, but especially of the lesbian spinster teacher. She personified the threat that women might not choose heterosexuality when left to their own devices. The phasing out of girls' schools was one way of making a lesbian existence seem impossible and unthinkable" (1989, 42).

While Dane's novel rails against the danger of single, economically independent women in authority, Holtby's Sarah Burton is not only financially secure and single but an exemplary leader, both within the school and in the negotiations outside of school, which constitute the headmistress' role. The proponent of maternal vocationalism in the novel is the conservative aristocrat Carne (with whom Burton disagrees on every political point), who is looking for "a nice motherly woman [to] be appointed to the high school. . . . but none of the candidates had been kind and motherly" (1936, 46). Holtby's novel confronts the hysteria surrounding the absent-therefore present sexuality of single women teachers in the anti-spinster discourse. When a careless teacher flaunts her marital engagement and insults unmarried women, Burton consoles one of the offended faculty: "There's too much fuss about virginity and its opposite altogether. And I think Miss Jameson may have been reading too many of those rather silly books that profess to serve up potted psychology"—a reference to the anti-lesbian sexology informing Dane's novel (1936, 316). Some critics also have pointed out that Holtby's recuperation of the spinster figure is an emphatically heterosexual narrative that stops short of addressing historical anti-lesbianism (Kennard 1989, 167). Not only is there "the usual dead fiancé in her background" as Rosemary Auchmuty points out: there are half a dozen ex-, deceased, and would-be male lovers distributed throughout the novel to confirm Burton's robust heterosexuality (1992, 104). On the other hand, just because it is an emphatically heterosexual narrative does not mean it fails to challenge anti-lesbianism. Considering a pupil's crush on her, Burton contemplates the variety of human sexuality as a fact rather than a problem to be remedied. The novel does not address lesbianism directly; it does however refute compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory virginity for single women.

Unlike *Regiment of Women*, which in part collaborated with the reaction against the new woman, *South Riding* narrates a realization of the late-nineteenth-century new woman ideal, a world in which a meritocratic ladder is available to academically talented women and girls, and in which equality of opportunity and pay are assumed rather than debated. *South Riding* celebrates the academic and occupational achievements that public high schools for girls signified: academic training and the preparation for jobs, professions, and university study on the one hand; and women in leadership positions and the possibility for women teachers' promotions on the other. Sarah Burton, whose father was the local blacksmith, is a product of the emergent career ladders provided by reformed education for girls. Her less fortunate pupil counterpart is the brilliant Lydia Holly whose future success depends upon her emancipation from the role of principal caretaker to her younger siblings and father. Holtby demonstrates that not everyone is able to benefit from the economic and social mobility that schooling can provide. She represents the girls' school as a social institution that needs defending and improving so that its benefits can be extended to all.

Holtby and Brontë have been compared previously by Vera Brittain, Holtby's companion. Brittain was the first to draw parallels between "the two Yorkshire women": "Substitute Winifred Holtby for Charlotte Brontë and you have at least half the truth" about Holtby, she wrote in the beginning of *Testament of Friendship*, her famous biography (1940, 10). Holtby and Brontë both had a family background in education work—Holtby's father was a school inspector at one time; Brontë's father's involvement in education was lifelong and influential, albeit as a minister, in which capacity he observed and oversaw parish schools. Holtby's mother had been a governess (Shaw 1999, 23, 13).

The parallel between their heroines was intended by Holtby, who extensively appropriated *Jane Eyre* for her own novel. Holtby's heroine thinks of Jane Eyre and Rochester when, in a scene echoing Brontë's novel, she is caught trespassing by the conservative landowner. Both heroines teach the landowner's daughter. Like Brontë's heroine, Holtby's main character is in love with a man whose wife has been locked up for insanity, leaving him, like Rochester, married but available. *South Riding's* romantic hero is struck ill just as he and the heroine are about to make love, saving Holtby from having to directly confront issues that remain unresolved in contemporary feminism: the competing demands of marriage and work, and the morality of adultery in connection with a sexually liberated female subject. Whereas her activism and her writer-as-publicist identity make Holtby a quintessential public intellectual, Brontë on the other hand has at times been accused by critics of social and political isolation. The most vivid if unjust example is Eagleton's contention that Brontë's failure to write about the Chartist rebellion going on practically outside her front

door was evidence of her willful ignorance of the same. Perhaps Brontë has more in common with Holtby than we have thus far recognized. If so, Holtby's appropriation of *Jane Eyre* is more than just intertextual play: she shares with Brontë a materialist approach to the education debates that could be described as the ongoing woman question—and "girl question."

In *South Riding*, the work of teaching is very far from the private, highly isolated activity it is in both *Jane Eyre* and *Regiment of Women*. Rather, teaching is shown to take place in a social sphere and is represented as one of many acts that enable a community to negotiate conflict and difference. *South Riding* reflects the social vision that informed all aspects of Holtby's public and professional life, from activism and speech-making to writing. Rather than a cloistered world, the girls' school is a vital location of the social progress for which Holtby argued. It is also a microcosm of the larger world and a place where girls learn to become citizens in the community and in the world. *South Riding* posits that the social danger is not single women teachers but rather the failure to invest in education and other social projects. It is in this imperfect social sphere that Burton finds the professional fulfillment that comes with "turning giggling girls into self-respecting women" and negotiating for school improvements with the school board—quite different from the motherly fulfillment that *Regiment of Women* vaunts (1936, 209–210). In *South Riding*, school provides an environment for student-teacher relations based on the politics of gender, not the dynamics of mothering or the erotics of teaching—although same-sex crushes are acknowledged by Sarah Burton as a normal event. Rather, school is a place that, at best, liberates teachers as well as girls from the isolation and drudgery of home life.

If Holtby engages Brontë in part to mobilize a legacy of Victorian feminist materialism against the resurgent ideologies of self-sacrifice for women, it is an engagement that remains relevant. As Jo-Anne Dillabough points out, present-day North American women teachers continue to face "reduced agency and autonomy, as well as an increased acceptance of the gender regime, and a reduced ability to participate in the redefinition of the meaning of their work" (1999). In moments when Victorian ideologies and forms of domination persist in the struggle over women's work as educators, it can be instructive to consider that the reform of girls' education involved not just the liberation of girls but the ongoing struggles of women educators.

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Notes

1. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel are credited with originating the phrase maternalism, meaning the ideology that elevates the notion of motherhood—with regard to women's participation in the creation of the welfare state. Maternalism was a position that women themselves affirmed and that was also appropriated by men, sometimes paternalistically. In "Womanly Duties," Koven and Michel write, "maternalist women, while actively seeking to improve the conditions of women, were not necessarily feminists—some, in fact, deliberately refused to so define themselves." (1990, 1091)
2. The history of the NUT's suffragist Equal Pay League (EPL) has been well documented by feminist historians. (Corr 1987; Kean 1980; Littlewood 1989; Owen 1988). The EPL severed their ties with the NUT because of their failure to maintain the pressure for equal pay in the face of setbacks for women's salaries and went on to become the National Federation of Women Teachers, and later the independent National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT). Feminist teachers demanded equal pay, promotional opportunities, and fair representation in the NUT, whose membership was overwhelmingly female but which was controlled by men. In the interwar period, they fought to permit married women to teach. They also fought to preserve single-sex education for girls, since the growing number of coeducational schools provided few if any promotional opportunities for teachers as well as a more unequal education for girls, in what has been called "sex-segregation under one roof" (Copelman 1996; Kean 1980; Oram 1996). These struggles took place in a larger context of the struggle over girls' education in general. As Hennegan puts it, this consisted of "the battle over the true end and purpose of education for girls: was it to prepare them for marriage and motherhood. . . . (o)r was [it]. . . . to produce women capable of achieving and rejoicing in new fields of economic, intellectual, and psychological independence?" (1995, vii). Girls' schools had been under attack for the ornamental education they provided as well as their inadequate physical conditions.
3. Byatt's "Racine and the Tablecloth" (1982) deals with persistent anti-intellectualism in girls' schooling. See the "Adult School Stories" bibliography in Sims and Clare's *Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories* (2000) for more examples of school novels.

4. Certainly, since the novel was first reviewed, critics have seized on Brontë's depiction of the plight of the governesses per se; this topic makes an appearance in nearly all critical studies of *Jane Eyre*. The governess has been seen, variously, as a sexual threat to the bourgeois household (Poovey 1988); unique in class position and therefore isolated (Eastlake 1848; Lenta 1981; Neff 1929; Poovey 1988); an outspoken rebel (Leavis 1966/1985); a victim (sexual, social, and economic) because she is really a lady in disguise (Eastlake 1848; Lenta 1981, Poovey 1988); and, whether proletarian or petit bourgeois, a worker (Eagleton 1972; Lenta 1981; Lewis 1848; Politi 1982; Roy 1989). By the late 1980s, after Mary Poovey's influential article was published, the terms *governess* and *Jane Eyre* were synonymous in much literary criticism. Jeanne Peterson's article, "The Victorian Governess," can be credited with initiating the revival of interest in the governess by feminist critics and historians.
5. For a discussion of the successes of feminist solidarity of unmarried women, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (1985).
6. Following Annabel Faraday's study of interwar novels (in which she shows how nearly all of the lesbian characters are teachers), Rosemary Auchmuty shows how lesbianism and education were joined together in the popular and pseudoscientific imagination (Faraday 1989; Auchmuty 1992). Just as governesses have been described as representing a sexual threat to the bourgeois household, in the first third of the twentieth century, single women teachers were represented as a sexual threat. Sexologists and those influenced by this pseudoscience constructed single women as deviant, potential predators of the girls in their charge and other staff members.
7. Between 1973, when Nina Auerbach wrote that "Charlotte Brontë is out of critical fashion" (328), and 1985, when Gayatri Spivak called *Jane Eyre* a "cult text of feminism" (244), and up to the present time, there have been so many critical studies of Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre* alone that to try to summarize them here would be to attempt a lengthy bibliographic essay. However, a distinction between some liberal and some radical approaches to the novel will be helpful. Radical or materialist-feminist critiques of *Jane Eyre* have been concerned with labor movements, structural changes in domestic life or the family, and the context of colonialism. Marxist critics have focused on sorting out the novel's contradictory politics, which alternate between the apparently conservative and the seemingly revolutionary (Eagleton 1972; Politi 1982; Roy 1989). Liberal critics have focused more on the ways that the novel's radicalism bears on subject formation, tending to emphasize an ethos of the rebellious individual (for example, Gilbert and Gubar's construction of Brontë's "rebellious feminism" (1979, 370). As Gayatri Spivak pointed out in her essay entitled "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," one problem with the latter approach is that it doesn't historicize individualism but rather takes it to be a universally feminist mode of opposition, instead of one historical mode of feminism among many (1985). Spivak warns against

the limited vision resulting from lauding *Jane Eyre's* individualism without examining the novel's imperialist context.

8. Poovey's influential article, which also references Eastlake's review, demonstrated the materialist concerns and assumptions of nineteenth-century critical discourse on the governess—conservative and radical alike (1988).
9. The word "vocation" occurs elsewhere in the novel: once as a synonym for occupation ("It became urgent I should have a vocation of some kind" [Brontë 1847/1975, 357]), and once to refer to Eliza's conversion and entrance into a convent ("the vocation will fit her to a hair," *Jane Eyre* notes critically [244]).
10. In her 1926 essay "A Problem in Education," Dane, like many educationists and theorists before her, warns against the "dangerous" crushes that could develop in the environment of the all-girls' school.
11. This contradiction stems from conflicts within feminist organizations themselves as much as within Dane individually. Scholars have discussed the disjunctures between middle-class and liberal feminist organizations on the one hand and feminist labor groups on the other (Banks 1993). The Six Point Group was just such a middle-class organization, while the NUWT was a unique "combination of . . . feminist pressure group and trade union" (Owen 1988, 83). Members of this group, founded by the militant suffragist vicountess Lady Rhondda, included titled women, members of parliament, and writers like Dane. (Maxine Willett at the Fawcett Women's Library—the location of the Six Point Group papers—helpfully pointed this out to me.)

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