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Abstract

The period 1650 to 1750 in England saw the development of small but positive changes in the education of women and girls. Increasingly, various writers began to argue that more attention and resources needed to be devoted to the way in which girls were taught. Although the accepted curriculum of religion, various kinds of needlework, reading, household management, music, dancing, history and French was not seriously questioned, there were attempts by authors such as Charles Rollin and Archbishop Fenelon of Cambrai to write schemes of study that taught these skills and topics in a more rigorous and interesting manner. A key development was the entry of women into the discussion, with writers such as Mary Astell and Bathusa Makin arguing for the need of better schools and a richer, more serious curriculum for girls. As this thesis is focused as much as possible on actual teaching practices as well as shifts in ideology, changes in the way Primers and Spelling books, which were used by mothers and governesses as aids to teach young children to read are also examined. Increasingly, there was a recognition of the need for intelligent girls to be stretched and of the danger to the household of badly educated mothers and wives. Female authors expressed their frustration with the limited education offered to girls. This thesis examines a range of authors and texts, including the fictional work of Sarah Fielding, the personal records left by eighteenth-century governess Nelly Weeton and discussions which took place in newspapers such as the Spectator, in order to tease out and illustrate the development of these changes.

Declaration

This is to certify that
(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is 29,878 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Introduction

[I]n fine, she was train’d up in the Ways young Ladies in England ordinarily are; her Relations following the common Opinion, that to sing, dance, play on the Spinet, and work at her Needle, are Accomplishments sufficient for a Woman:—Wit she had enough, but was never taught that to accustom herself to Reflection was necessary to ripen that Wit into Wisdom.¹

The above quote was written by Eliza Haywood in the *Female Spectator*, during the early eighteenth century, in relation to a foolish woman who left her husband for a lover and came to an inevitable sticky end. The period from the end of the English Civil War in 1660 to the mid eighteenth century in England was one of great political and social upheaval. One area of social practice and belief that began to change during this time was the proper way in which to educate young ladies. In this thesis a range of sources written by both men and women dealing with the education of girls will be examined in order to try and tease out both the theoretical frameworks and ideologies that were informing changing practice, and, as far as possible the practice itself. The education of girls is an aspect of society which is generally conservative in the sense that fundamental change rarely happens quickly. Change when it does occur is usually gradual, piecemeal and contested. It is the aim of this thesis to examine these changes through a wide range of texts.

Although there were those who in this period argued that women had minds as good as men, and the great number of ignorant and seemingly stupid women were shaped that way by education not nature, they were arguing from isolated examples of excellence, and a particular reading of the Bible. The lack of education women received, its poor quality and limited curriculum was one of the first complaints raised by women such as Mary Astell in

England, and it was one of the first areas which was actually addressed seriously.\(^2\) Despite the challenge to male supremacy inherent in the claim for women’s equality of intelligence, most of those who advocated for the better education of women did so on traditional moral grounds, and argued that improvements to the education of women would in fact bolster male authority. Eliza Haywood, who had nothing against the accomplishments listed per se, advocated the study of Philosophy, History and the Sciences alongside them, so that women would learn to think properly, as well as entertain men, and in gaining wisdom learn virtue.\(^3\) A well-educated wife would truly understand her role in the family, and be better equipped to fulfil it. She would therefore be less likely than Haywood’s foolish wife of the opening quote to run off to France with a lover. Whether education was a help or a danger to the chastity of women was a disputed point in this period.

There are few works of substantial pedagogical literature on the education of girls published in English during this period and the few there are were mostly written by men. Juan Luis Vives’ work *The Education of a Christian Woman* produced in the sixteenth century is among the earliest. Archbishop Fenelon wrote *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter* in 1687 and Charles Rollin published *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres* in 1734.\(^4\) In the first chapter of this thesis these texts along with the more ephemeral debates that took place on this subject in the News sheets will be analysed. Throughout these texts there is an increasing awareness of the need to do more than just keep girls’ virtue intact until marriage. The intellectual needs of the child and the danger in not fulfilling them become matters of great concern. There are still, however, strict limits placed on what knowledge is appropriate for a girl, and what ends that knowledge should

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\(^3\) Haywood, *Selections from the Female Spectator*, 131-132.

serve. In the second chapter the ways in which individual women responded to those limits placed on them are examined. The work of the Marchioness de Lambert, Mary Astell, Sarah Fielding and the diaries and letters of Nelly Weeton, an eighteenth-century teacher, all illustrate how varied and dependent on changing family circumstances and prevailing attitudes was the education of a daughter. Some, like Astell and Weeton articulate an intense frustration with the limits placed on women and awareness of how damaging those limits can be. The last chapter deals with the actual practice of teaching and learning literacy, perhaps the one uncontroversial skill which gentry women at least, were expected both to master, and to teach their children in turn.

Overall this thesis argues that although there was little change in what was considered the appropriate curriculum for girls, the increased emphasis on ensuring the traditional subjects were taught with depth and rigour in order to satisfy the intellectual needs of girls represented a positive change. The emergence of women’s own published voices in the period and their articulation of boredom and frustration with the shallow smattering of knowledge offered to them highlights how important a shift in attitude this was.

**Historiography:**

Serious attention to the history of girls’ education in Britain largely begins with Dorothy Gardiner’s work *English Girlhood at School*. A comprehensive and chronological narrative of girls’ education in England from Saxon times to the beginning of the nineteenth

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century, it is still referred to by practically all writers on the subject. Essentially, Gardiner constructed a narrative of positive progress with periods of significant backsliding. To Gardiner, one of the key developments of the seventeenth century is the availability of sources on education written by women, in which she includes texts such as Dorothy Leigh’s *The Mother’s Blessing* and Bathsua Makin’s *Essay*. On the whole, however, Gardner identifies a negative shift during the seventeenth century towards education which was focused on the one hand on religion and housekeeping, and on the other on Music, Dancing and French.

Certainly skill in French and drawing would not translate into public power or prestige. The male subjects of Latin, the Law and the Classics were largely barred to females. However, many historians of the period, echoing Gardiner, have accepted somewhat uncritically the comments of writers of the time that girls’ education was rotten with meaningless ‘accomplishments’. The poor study of any subject can result in only gaining a ‘smattering of knowledge’, and whether an inattentive boy who knew only a few words of Latin was really better off than his equally inattentive sister who knew only a few words of French is questionable. To draw a parallel with the present, many students complete their schooling today with a similar set of subjects as those considered suitable for a proper eighteenth-century lady. A girl graduating from secondary school with top marks in French, Accounting, Textiles, Creative Arts, English, History, Music and Religious Education would not have much trouble getting into either an Arts or Fine Arts course, or be considered poorly educated. It is worth noting that in terms of vocational education these skills were probably much more tradable for an eighteenth-century girl than her equivalent today.

Much of the source material I will analyse, which was written by both men and women, does lament the prevalence of ‘ornamental’ and ‘useless’ instruction, but for many the

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essential issue was a lack of rigour and depth in the subjects taught, not the subjects themselves. This complaint was still being made in reference to the education of girls as late as 1865 in the ‘Report of the Schools Enquiry Commission’ which decried, “undue time given to accomplishments, and those not taught intelligently or in any scientific manner; want of organization.” This essentially echoes Bathsua Makin’s complaint about education in her time.

When reading the same complaint made centuries apart by Makin writing in the late seventeenth century and the Schools Commission in the nineteenth, it is tempting to conclude that very little actually changed in women’s education. In actual fact, however, the repetition of the same criticism over a long period hides the way in which change can occur both incrementally and suddenly as a result of broader events. The 1865 report was able to say with certainty, “[t]here is weighty evidence to the effect that the essential capacity for learning is the same, or nearly the same, in the two sexes.” This was a major point Makin had to argue for, contradicting the generally held assumption of female inability, and one which was a long time in being accepted. The number of proposals for serious institutions in which girls and women could learn and be taught is a feature of the late seventeenth century. Bridget Hill discusses the many proposals for female academies as a response to changing population patterns, but focuses somewhat narrowly on their importance to adult single women and does not look at their impact on the education system more generally. This thesis expands Hill’s view by examining sources which shed light on the way in which women learnt and taught at home as well as in schools, as adolescents and as young children first learning to read, and how the broader debate on the proper education of girls developed in both ephemeral texts such as newspapers, books of pedagogical theory, and texts designed to be used as teaching aids and curriculum guides.

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The perception that the education received by girls, particularly within boarding schools, was, when compared with that of their brothers, essentially frivolous and therefore inferior has been integral to the historiography of women’s education. Bridget Hill says of eighteenth-century boarding schools “[s]tandards were almost invariably low. The curriculum varied little.”15 William Lempriere, writing in 1924, explained the lack of an earlier history of the girls’ school at Christ’s Hospital in part to the continuing “prejudice” against boarding schools for girls.16 It is only recently, with the work of historians such as Susan Skedd and Michele Cohen that this view is being questioned.17 Specific and local investigations of educational institutions and the development of particular subjects have yielded rich areas of study and links to broader social and political changes.18

Technology, in the form of the printing press, had a major impact on the education of young children. One example may be seen in changes in the content and form of the Hornbook. Hornbooks split into two classes, with the printed versions used for teaching reading and handwritten Hornbooks with different styles of writing used as guides for children to base their own letters on.19 The late seventeenth century saw, based both on the growth of cheap print and pedagogical theories put forward by Locke, the production of illustrated texts aimed at school children.20 By the mid-eighteenth century John Newbery was publishing a range of books with attached toys aimed at very young children which were intended both to entertain and to encourage reading skills.21

15 Hill, Eighteenth Century Women, 47.
21 Ibid., 352.
David Cressy’s research on literacy rates is crucial for establishing basic benchmarks as to how many and which kinds of people had access to basic education which passed on skills remembered in adulthood. Cressy has shown that up to thirty per cent of the male population and ten per cent of women were literate enough to sign their own names.\textsuperscript{22} Margaret Spufford approaches the problem from less direct evidence and in so doing suggests that Cressy’s figures understate actual literacy levels. She extrapolates from the 400,000 almanacs published annually in the 1660’s the implication that one family in three could have bought a new publication every year. This suggests much higher literacy rates.\textsuperscript{23} More recently Elspeth Jajdelska has pointed out that there are many levels of literacy, and suggested that for the children of well-off city dwellers, the opportunity to become truly fluent readers rather than only functionally literate was growing at the end of the century.\textsuperscript{24} Jajdelska argues that the growth in texts which children had available to read privately for pleasure or instruction lead to a great increase in the ability to read silently, as opposed to the much more limited functional reading skills of previous times where texts were usually read aloud in public. One area in which this was felt was the increased market and audience for publications such as \textit{The Spectator} which generated and publicised debates over the place and role of women, social mores and educational theories and practices.\textsuperscript{25}

This development was not regarded as an unmixed blessing at the time, as Kenneth Charlton has discussed.\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, the texts it was considered proper to allow young girls to consume, and the benefits and moral hazards of reading were central concerns of all the writers both male and female whom I will examine in this thesis. While there were great anxieties surrounding imaginative fiction, particularly immoral novels, independent reading of approved feminine subjects such as history and natural science had the potential to allow

\textsuperscript{22} David Cressy, \textit{Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 72, 177.
\textsuperscript{25} Elspeth Jadelska, \textit{Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
women to independently further their education beyond ‘proper’ bounds. So while in the eighteenth century “[all] good girls read history”\textsuperscript{27} they could also feel the pressure to hide their reading of masculine, scholarly texts, as when Elizabeth Hamilton describes hiding Kaim’s \textit{Elements of Criticism} under a cushion.\textsuperscript{28}

Despite the growth of private boarding schools in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the preeminent role of the family as the primary schooling institution and mothers as the main instructors remained.\textsuperscript{29} In his influential work \textit{The Family, Sex and Marriage} Lawrence Stone argued that during the period there was a profound shift from an emphasis on patriarchal control within the family to one where love and closeness became the major motivating and defining emotions, as a result of which women gained a more influential role.\textsuperscript{30} Katherine Rogers accepts Stone’s ideas regarding this shift and argues that it had a positive impact on girls’ educational prospects: “[a girl] should be given a good education, to qualify her to be a companion to her husband.”\textsuperscript{31}

This view has been widely criticised, with writers such as Bernard Capp arguing that there was no profound change in gender relationships.\textsuperscript{32} Judith Bennett, examining women’s economic and work status, also stresses the essential continuity of conditions and reward, in comparison with men, from the medieval period.\textsuperscript{33} Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus highlight the way in which economic and political changes during the eighteenth century impacted on women and family structures in a variety of sometimes contradictory ways depending on region and class. Crucially they note that, “women’s historical experience

\textsuperscript{27} Jacqueline Pearson, \textit{Woman’s Reading in Britain} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 51.
\textsuperscript{28} Pearson, \textit{Woman’s Reading in Britain}, 49.
\textsuperscript{31} Katherine Rogers, \textit{Feminism in Eighteenth Century England} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 1.
was more complicated than had earlier been assumed.”  

Other historians have accepted that there was fundamental change in social relationships and power, while rejecting Stone’s conclusions, particularly his argument, based to an extent on the ideas Arie’s put forward in the 1960s, that high child mortality and the practice of wet nursing and fostering created an emotional landscape where parents were not particularly attached to their babies and children.  

Patricia Crawford argues that there is a large body of evidence showing the deep love and concern parents, particularly mothers, had for their children throughout the period. While I agree that the basic emotions people felt for their family did not change, there were important shifts in cultural practices and understandings surrounding children which necessarily impacted on the way they were educated. John Summerville makes this point in his study of changing catechizing practices showing that children were increasingly being viewed as autonomous individuals.

A positive development in the field is a broader concern with gender, where the way in which masculinity was constructed and changed over time is analysed along with the construction of female roles, allowing for illuminating comparison. “In recent years, much of the finest historical work has attempted to combine women’s history and gender history by looking carefully at the multifaceted relationships between lived experience and ideological concerns.”  

An example of this is Michele Cohen’s analyses and comparison of the construction of masculinity and femininity through schooling. Cohen compared the gendered nature of boys and girls’ schooling in the eighteenth century, with particular reference to the debates between the relative benefits of a private versus a public education. She discusses the negative association girls’ boarding schools took on for some writers in this period.  

Cohen points to the writings of Vicesimus Knox, who advocated public

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schooling as the only suitable method of education for boys in the later half of the eighteenth century, as being crucial in gendering a public education within school as ‘masculine’ and private education as ‘feminine.’ Like many recent works in the area of girls’ education for this period, her approach is more optimistic about the quality of education received by girls. Cohen argues convincingly that historians have been too quick to assume that the domestic education most girls received was in fact inferior to that given in the public schools. In this thesis I demonstrate that a range of documents and texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth century show an increasing awareness of the need to improve the standard of education received by girls both in the home and at school, and often provide practical suggestions and schemes of study to help mothers and teachers to do so.

Margaret Ferguson’s work on the way learning languages such as French and Latin was gendered points to the way divisions of subjects along masculine and feminine lines could in actuality overlap. Although French was considered a suitable subject for a lady, partly because it was the language of courtship and romance literature, it was also, along with ‘masculine’ Latin an international language important in politics and law. Linda Mitchell looks at the way in which the teaching of language changed in this period for both boys and girls. She examines how the study of English and English grammar slowly grew throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century. Latin was still considered the language of the highly educated (and was an international language) but Mulcaster, for one, argued for the superiority of the English language on the basis that it was spoken widely overseas and that this demonstrated its breadth. In the seventeenth century the view (articulated by Jeremiah Wharton in 1564 The English Grammar) that English grammar was easier to learn than Latin and would serve as a good preparation to learning Latin continued to grow.

42 Margaret Ferguson, Dido’s Daughters: Literacy Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 99.
One of the essential issues in the historiography on women and gender history in this period is the debate between the conception of an increasing gendered definition of public and private spheres forming in the eighteenth century and the idea that there was substantial continuity with small and uneven change. Amanda Vickery comments that “it is almost impossible to open a book on wealthier British women between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries that does not offer a catalogue of declining female options.” Jean Rendall suggests that the reality of access for women to learning and participation in philosophical debate depended on the structures in which the debates took place. For example, the Enlightenment ‘movement’ in London was less unified than in Scotland and was based around a number of publications, saloons and Royal Societies, allowing the possibility of female access. In Scotland it was primarily based around the Church and the Universities; both exclusively male domains in which women could not participate. Susan Skedd’s work, which examines the growth of privately run schools for girls and teaching as a profession for women between 1760 and 1820, points out that these institutions provided employment, independence and a public role to many middle class women in this period when it was increasingly assumed they should have no public role: “keeping a school not only could be lucrative but also could secure a woman’s respectability and give her a sense of usefulness in life.”

Monica Peruga sees a broad cultural shift in the eighteenth-century pedagogical debates, with the view of women as basically a weaker and inferior version of men, shifting to a belief that the mental abilities of men and women were of different and complementary kinds. Harriet Guest argues convincingly that ‘small changes’ in cultural practices within

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the private, domestic sphere throughout the second half of the eighteenth century led to the nineteenth century rejection by some women of the notion that “their exclusion from participation in the public life of the nation [was] natural.” Guest suggests that increased access to learning was one of the key changes as it was perceived as a signifier both of moral authority and a “professional qualification.”

Guest’s more positive and textured approach to the developments of the later eighteenth century allows for a more meaningful analysis than the earlier approaches which viewed the informal participation of women in political and educational debate as essentially operating in a ‘limited sphere’ which allowed no opportunities for substantial influence. In this thesis I will tease out the changes in theoretical frameworks, moral concerns and personal experience which informed the education of girls from around the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries. My particular focus on specific teaching practices, particularly surrounding the teaching of reading, and changes in the kind of curriculum girls were exposed to will shed light on the ways in which individual women participated in educating themselves and others and were able at times to broaden the confines of their ‘limited spheres’.

Sources:

There are three main types of primary sources used in this thesis. The first group are works which relate to the theory of teaching girls, outlining what should be taught and how. These include pedagogical works, primers designed to help teach early literacy, and curriculum schemes written by both men and women. The pedagogical texts and curriculum schemes are most useful when trying to piece together evidence for shifts in attitudes about what kinds of knowledge it was proper to expose girls to, and beliefs about the benefits and dangers of education for women in general. There were few of these texts written about the

49 Ibid., 16.
50 Hill, Eighteenth Century Women, 48.
education specifically of girls in English, so it is necessary to examine a very long timeline from St Jerome to Charles Rollin’s *Belles Lettres* published in 1734.\(^{51}\) This is useful as it illustrates both the strong continuities in the theory of girls’ education, along with the small, but significant shifts occurring in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries.

As a former practising teacher myself, however, I am aware that these kind of pedagogical texts are as likely to be ignored, or reacted against as incorporated in to practice. It is impossible to measure the extent to which the theories outlined in works such as Vives *Education of a Christian Woman* really translated into practice within families.\(^{52}\) These texts are much more a reflection of general attitudes and debates surrounding women and children, as well as reactions to changes taking place in society, than a reliable indicator of what was actually happening in classrooms. In contrast, the Primers, when examined, describe essentially the same methods, with only small variation, used to teach both young girls and boys how to read. This similarity, along with these texts being designed more as teacher’s aids or text books than philosophical treaties are likely to be more reflective of actual teaching practices.\(^{53}\)

The second group of sources used come from newspapers such as *The Tatler* and *Spectator* published from the late seventeenth to mid eighteenth century. These ephemeral sources were published for a large, mixed audience and dealt mainly with questions of morality and manners, including how girls should be educated to fulfill their proper roles. Sir Richard Steele was the editor and main contributor to both the Tatler and Spectator, two extremely successful publications which were issued three times a week. Steele was a lifelong Whig, Military Captain, member of parliament and playwright. Although the first issues of the Tatler included news the paper eventually evolved into the form of a single informal essay per issue. Steel was married twice, the first time to a wealthy widow, Margaret Stretch, who

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left him all her money when she died in 1706. He married his second wife, Mary Scurlock nine months later. Steele died in September 1729.  

Newssheets usually reported specific (albeit anonymous) examples to illustrate their arguments, apparently known personally to the writers. Since they are concentrated within the period, reflect a broader range of authors views, and were read by a wider public they provide a snapshot of beliefs about the education of girls which provides a useful foil when read alongside the longer pedagogical texts.

The third set of sources used in this thesis are those written by women which record their own education and teaching practices, as in the case of Nelly Weeton a schoolteacher who left a rich collection of diaries and letters. The novel *The Governess* by Sarah Fielding, although a work of fiction, is useful in that it illustrates an idealised view of how a good private girls’ school should function. As a publication it was extremely successful, and since Fielding attended school herself, she was writing from her own experiences as well as beliefs regarding the purpose and proper set up of such schools.  

The full inclusion of women into formal education, both as teachers and students in schools and universities began in the nineteenth century and continued through the twentieth. In the period I am investigating in this thesis, the late seventeenth to mid eighteenth century, most girls from gentry families were educated informally, at home by their mother or governess, or at a small school which rarely continued any longer than the individual who founded it. There was no equivalent of Eton and Harrow for girls, with long established traditions, standards and practices, along with archives to record the school’s history. What this means for the historian attempting to write a history of the period is that generalising about standards and changes in practices and attitudes towards the education of girls is highly

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problematic. The records I have examined here reflect a huge range of practices and outcomes.

The informality of the period means that records relating to practice are few, largely random survivals and not necessarily reflective of larger trends within the period. However when read together they reveal the debates and tensions within beliefs about what girls should learn, as well as illustrating how varied in outcomes education for women was in this period. By contrasting a range of texts, ephemeral and didactic, written by both men and women, and focusing on the suggested teaching methods and curriculum as well as the personal experiences of learning and teaching described by authors, I will highlight the ways in which women, and some men, pushed to improve and broaden the education it was considered proper for girls to receive.
Chapter One

Pedagogical Theory and Practice

In this chapter I will examine several books written from the Elizabethan period to the first half of the eighteenth century which dealt with the education of women along with the later ephemeral literature of newspapers from the early eighteenth century. All of the texts I have chosen to analyse were intended to be practical guides for the creation of curriculum, often written by men with some direct experience of actual teaching practice. Despite the long time period, there is a strong thread of continuity running through all the pedagogical texts, in that they share a basically similar purpose. From the medieval period, “education, largely limited to rote learning of prayers and manual skills, had no notion of a distinctive body of knowledge reserved for women.”\textsuperscript{57} The main reason to educate girls was to inculcate and strengthen personal virtue, which for all the authors at least included and often consisted solely of chastity. For Vives, the first to write a systematic treatise on the education of girls in particular, the creation of chaste women was the only end of education.\textsuperscript{58} Not only was the learning of languages such as Latin and Greek considered to be pointless, it was widely believed that girls were physically, as well as mentally, unable to deal with the rigours of such subjects.\textsuperscript{59}

In many ways, however, education is a strange weapon to use to ensure a young girl’s virginity and the faith of a wife. Simply ensuring that there is a lack of opportunity to sin would seem to be a more certain and less costly and time consuming way to the same end. The act of writing a scheme of study or theory of education for girls involved accepting the idea that girls could in fact learn, that women could, to a degree, be individually responsible for their own morality. In fact, all these authors put forth powerful arguments against the neglect of girls’ schooling. Girls must be educated so that they could internalise the values

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
held by their societies and the cost associated with their education was one parents should gladly bear.

I will argue in this chapter that there are small but significant shifts in attitudes over the period, towards recognising the need to improve the quality and depth of the education provided to girls. This was based on a pragmatic view that a broader and more stimulating education would be more likely to ensure upstanding wives than one that drastically limited what kind of learning girls could access. Also significant is the way seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts are increasingly concerned with the figure of the skilled and capable housewife. There is a growing belief that there is a ‘body of knowledge’ necessary for adult women to have mastered. This vocational education of girls, what they would need to know in order to fulfil their adult family and economic duties, was seen in earlier texts as either unimportant or something they would automatically pick up from their mother. Later texts, however, give increasingly detailed and carefully constructed schemes of study to ensure the production not just of chaste wives but good household managers.

In order to examine these developments in later texts, it is necessary to briefly examine the teachings of the Church Fathers on the education of girls. Dorothy Gardiner, writing in 1929, could still say that, “[t]hey indicate an ideal type of womanhood and outline a type of instruction which, modified but never superseded, has influenced the education of English girls … to the present day.” The principles, techniques and curriculum elucidated in the early church, and in particular by St Jerome in his widely quoted Letter CVII to Laeta, written approximately in 401, on the education of her daughter Paula, were to form the backdrop of all serious discussions of the education of girls. It is in the modifications and additions that light can perhaps be shed on broader trends in the education of girls and in the position of women generally. The first and most important thing to note about St

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61 J.N.D Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 273-274. Jerome gained many of his ideas about making learning pleasurable in this letter from the first century writings of Quintilian. He also recommended that Paula learn Greek early in order for her to be able to read the Bible.
Jerome’s letter is that the first sentence to deal with the nuts and bolts of what a girl should know is used to explain what it is she should not be allowed to learn:

Thus must a soul be educated which is to be a temple of God. It must learn to hear nothing and to say nothing save what pertains to the fear of the Lord. It must have no comprehension of foul words, no knowledge of worldly songs, and its childish tongue must be imbued with the sweet music of the psalms. Let boys with their wanton frolics be kept far from Paula: let even her maids and attendants hold aloof from association with the worldly, lest they render their evil knowledge worse by teaching it to her. 62

Almost every serious text from this point deplores the influence on girls of worldly subjects such as dance and music and sets out to reform morals within society by returning to a state of serious, godly and pure learning. The idea that girls must be enclosed in order to be safely educated appears in many proposals for female colleges that appear in the late seventeenth century, including those made by Mary Astell and Edward Chamberlyne. 63 Likewise, religious knowledge and the cultivation of piety remained as the central aims of the education of girls and any subject connected to the world was considered suspect. Music, for example, is explicitly denounced in this letter, “Paula must be deaf to all musical instruments, and never even know why the flute, the lyre, and the harp came into existence.” 64

The second thing to notice about the above quote is that achieving the kind of education described is completely, on a practical level, impossible outside of a nunnery, as St Jerome himself acknowledged. 65 Even in a nunnery the kind of complete and holy ignorance of sin, of ‘foul words’ and the ‘world’s songs’ was likely to be impossible to achieve. It is a

63 Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies. Edward Chamberlayne, An Academy or Colledge Wherein Young Ladies and Gentlewomen, may at a very moderate expense be duly instructed in the true Protestant Religion (London, 1671).
64 Jerome, Select Letters of St. Jerome, 359.
65 Gardiner, English Girlhood at School, 7.
description of a holy and ideal form of instruction which will then produce an ideal and holy woman whose vocation as nun has nothing to do with the world. As to the practical curriculum outlined by St Jerome it essentially was made up of the study of the Bible, practical sewing and spinning (ornamental embroidery is explicitly banned) and a course of reading. St Jerome’s letter suggests that it is this last part of her education which will provide the most intellectual stimulation. “She may take pleasure in the learned expositions of all writers as maintain in their books a steady love of the faith.”66 The sole purpose of this education is the salvation of Paula’s soul. She is destined to be a nun and so will have no need of any skills which could entertain a husband or run a house.

In the Tudor period the texts that discussed the education of girls came out of the Royal Court and were principally motivated by the need to design appropriate educational courses and effective pedagogical techniques for the education of royal and aristocratic women. The earliest text I shall deal with is Juan Luis Vives De Institutione Feminae Christianae published in Antwerp in 1523 and in an English translation in 1540. The text is dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, who must have found the theory and curriculum persuasive as she invited Vives to court where he held a position as Princess Mary’s Director of Studies.67

This text was essentially the first substantial, scholarly and widely distributed book in English which dealt solely with the topic of the education of girls. 68 Vives comments in his dedication on the lack of material on this subject while justifying his purpose in producing his text:

I have endeavored to write something for Your Majesty on the education of a Christian woman, a subject of paramount importance, but one that has not been treated hitherto by anyone among the great multitude and diversity of talented

68 Ibid., 16.
writers of the past. For what is so necessary as the spiritual formation of those who are our inseparable companions in every condition of life? 69

On the one hand this elevates the education of women to a matter of ‘paramount importance’ the neglect of which will have serious repercussions. This recognition must necessarily be the starting point for any kind of improvement in the instruction of girls. On the other hand the need for this education is essentially to train better ‘companions’ to men. The personal salvation of the woman as a virtuous Christian is in this sense a positive side-effect springing from the central effort to create chaste wives. Although the influence of St Jerome can be clearly felt throughout the work, the clear difference here is that where for Jerome personal salvation is the only desired end of education, Vives is more focused on the social and worldly implications.

As the title suggests, Vives’ text is essentially focused on education as a means of forming character and virtue. What is actually learned is secondary, almost incidental, to the main project of shaping chaste and submissive Christian women. After religion, women should be taught how to run their household well, although he does not specify how this is to be done. 70 Vives did consider women to be rational creatures who would suffer if denied mental stimulation. He advocated strongly for the benefits of serious reading for women on two counts: firstly, it would leave them less time for unworthy and potentially sinful entertainments and secondly, it would give pleasure and intellectual benefit. The kind of reading material is limited but does include some of the classics. This text appeared in French, German and Italian editions and went through forty editions by the year 1600, clear indications of the influence of the text itself and of the market for substantial works on the subject.

In this early work the division between the public world and the private is clearly defined and its consequences for the respective education of girls and boys explained:

70 Sked, ‘The Education of Women,’ 16.
In addition, although rules of conduct for men are numerous, the moral formation of women can be imparted with very few precepts, since men are occupied both within the home and outside it, in public and in private, and for that reason lengthy volumes are required to explain the norms to be observed in their varied duties. A woman’s only care is chastity; therefore when this has been thoroughly elucidated, she may be considered to have received sufficient instruction.  

In this view girls do not need to know much, but they must be thoroughly versed in the small amount they do know. Gloria Kaufman has used this passage to argue that, “the text belongs more accurately in the tradition of conduct books than educational treaties” as its central concern is the proper conduct of the Christian woman. I would argue that the text is in fact focused on the best way to teach this proper conduct. The consequences for girls who fail to maintain chastity, by which Vives means both a physical and mental state of purity, are described in graphic and violent detail. Examples from history such as the centurion Lucius Verginius who sacrificed his daughter rather than allow her to be defiled, to a personal childhood recollection of Vives about a girl who was suffocated by three other women when she was found in “an obscene act” make the point that a woman’s very life depends upon her ability to keep her virginity. While boys have some margin of error, “[f]or many things are required of a man….If some of these are lacking, he seems to have less blame as long as some are present.” A girl’s virtue, in contrast, must always be perfect.

Vives is not deeply concerned with describing actual teaching practices. Apart from cultivating an interest in good books, the practical means of achieving this understanding of chastity are based mainly on the advice of St Jerome and revolve around keeping

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everything and everyone that could be potentially harmful away from the child. Vives recommended that girls be nursed by their mothers in infancy and kept completely separated from boys. They are not to have dolls to dress up but models of household objects to play with so that they may learn how to keep house without becoming fond of fine clothes.\footnote{Vives, \textit{The Education of a Christian Woman}, 56-57.} Anytime between the ages of four and seven, the girl should begin to be taught how to read and work ‘in wool and flax’ and to cook in ‘a sensible, refined, temperate and frugal’ manner, particularly dishes which are good for illness.\footnote{Ibid., 58-62.} There follows a list of wise and chaste women from antiquity to contemporaries of Vives to buttress his argument that the wide reading of good and moral literature is a means of strengthening virtue. Her knowledge is for herself only, however, Vives makes it very clear that women are not to presume to teach or form opinions outside those of the church and are to keep quiet in public.\footnote{Ibid., 78.}

Roger Ascham’s \textit{The Schoolmaster} was written in 1571. Although this was primarily aimed at the practices of grammar schools and so deals primarily with boys’ education, there are significant passages which deal with the education of girls, and much of the text’s basic thesis was clearly stated as being relevant to all children. Ascham, as Locke would later argue, regarded children as being essentially blank slates, although his description of the state of a child’s mind suggests something more like innocence than simple blankness waiting for sensory input.

For the pure clean witte of a sweet young babe, is like the newest ware, most able to receive this best and fairest printing; and like a new bright silver dish never occupied, to receive and keep clean any good thing that is put into it.\footnote{Ascham, \textit{The Schoolmaster} (London, 1571), 11. Locke also described the malleability of young minds, “I imagine the Minds of Children as easily turned this or that way, as water itself.” John Locke, \textit{Some Thoughts Concerning Education}, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 83-84.}
Children, both boys and girls will naturally take to education and learn to love even the most difficult subjects if they are not brutalised in the process of receiving instruction. Again, preceding Locke, he stressed the importance of a healthy body for a good student.\(^79\) The text opens with a description of a dinner table debate on the subject of the regular and heavy beating of schoolboys. Half are in favour, we are told, and half against. Those in favor would seem to hold the view that children rather than being naturally attracted to learning need to be held to their books with the threat of the rod or nothing will be done or learnt. While Ascham implicitly acknowledged the effectiveness of this approach as far as ensuring submission to the master, he rejected it as an effective method of instruction.\(^80\)

One example offered in proof of Ascham’s view was Lady Jane Grey. The author describes how he went to visit her house one day and found her in her room reading a Greek text. The rest of the household had gone out hunting, so Ascham, who clearly approved of Lady Grey’s decision to stay in and study asked her why she was not tempted to go out with the others. She explained that she had the ‘blessing’ of having parents who were severe and constantly disapproving of her, at the same time as having a tutor who was gentleness and encouragement itself. This meant that as a child she came to regard her lessons as a time of relief and happiness and the time she spent ‘socially’ with the family as something of a penance. As a result she came to love learning passionately and, as clearly demonstrated by the ease with which she could read Greek for pleasure, mastered many subjects.\(^81\)

Lady Jane Grey is one strong and learned female figure in this book, but there are others. Ascham was the tutor to Queen Elizabeth, the dedication of *The Schoolmaster* is written by his widow, a woman who clearly had some degree of education given the high quality of her writing.\(^82\) The impact of a learned female ruler can be seen in that this is perhaps the

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\(^81\) Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 12.
\(^82\) *Ibid.*, ii.
only text I shall deal with that holds up female mastery of male subjects such as Greek and Latin, at least in the individual women he discusses, as being a clear good, benefiting both the state and the individual woman.

Bathusa Makin was to argue later in her Essay that raising the learning of women would shame men into improving their own, as they would not be able to bear being outstripped by a female. This is in fact one of the techniques Ascham uses in order to hammer home his point about the need to improve dismal standards. The Queen is held up as a model of learned virtue, and Ascham asks his readers whether they are content that a woman demonstrates so much greater a knowledge and intelligence than the men. Vives and many of the later writers on the education of girls were explicit in arguing that whatever else a girl gained from schooling, her education should not lead her to think she had any role to play in the public life of the church, the state or the law. This argument is not so strongly present in Ascham. He apparently sees no need to recommend that girls be allowed to read the classics, but only in translation and only carefully selected texts, as in Instructions for the Education of a Daughter or Astell’s A Serious Proposal. Nor is there the implication that women are naturally unable to achieve such heights of learning because of the weakness or softness of their minds, as Hicks was to clearly state over two hundred years later, “[t]heir bodies as well as their souls are not as strong or robust as those of men.” This is not necessarily because the author did not believe in the general weakness of women when compared to men or that, in general, they should have no public role but rather because, while the text is focused on boys in school, it ignores the majority of girls, while the individual women who are described, or in the case of the dedication speak in it, demonstrate in themselves that these views do not represent the reality.

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84 Ascham, The Schoolmaster, 21.
85 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 3. Astell was careful to explain that she was not asking for access to learning which would equip women for participation in the public sphere, “[w]e pretend not that Women shou’d teach in the church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow’d them; permit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc’d to take it upon trust from others.” Astell, A Serious Rroposal, 23-24.
86 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 3.
If the Queen’s learning is both vocational and public, the way in which Lady Jane Grey is represented shows how learning, and not just religion or knowledge of religion, could be a solace for women in loneliness and a bulwark against vice. Astell, Hicks and Vives also put forward the argument that the role of learning in providing comfort and relief from boredom is central to ensuring women are virtuous. However, these authors are far more careful about the kind of learning. History and geography as well as the classics in translation are generally considered acceptable and much preferable to the ‘frivolous’ love of dancing and music. Astell is also a strong advocate for philosophy but only in so much as it will help women understand their religion. They all caution against the kind of books Lady Grey is being praised for reading here.

Ascham does seem to set up a significant difference in the institutional learning of men and women. His examples of female learning suggest that the education learned women received must be gained in the home, from male tutors. Mothers do not feature heavily in the text although they are mentioned in passing when Ascham discusses the responsibility of parents to arrange prudent marriages and of children to submit to them. In contrast, the focus of his work is on reforming the institutional arrangements for boys, particularly the practice of beating schoolboys (witless) and later of sending young men overseas to learn languages and culture. The latter practice he deplores on the basis that what these young men generally learn is neither academic nor particularly moral while often being extremely expensive. However, his ideas regarding the teaching of languages are equally valid inside and outside the Grammar school system. He is concerned with replacing the learning of Latin grammar rules with systematic translations into English and then back into Latin and argues that verbal recitation has too great a place in teaching practice. For this statement he refers critically to his own experience of education as a boy. Instead children should be required to write more, as this will fix things in their memories more certainly.

*Instructions for the Education of a Daughter* was written in 1687 by Archbishop Fenelon of Cambrai and translated into English in 1721 by Dr George Hicks. Hick’s interest in the education of girls was long standing. He had connections with Mary Astell as well as
publishing a sermon in which he urged the creation of colleges for women that would be similar to, if not equivalent with, those provided for men. The reasons given to justify a book on the education of girls revolve around the author’s belief that the majority of daughters are not getting an education of any worth whatsoever:

There is nothing more commonly neglected than the education of daughters…
Whereas the education of sons passes as one of the principal of Affairs, with relation to the public good.

The main reason put forward for this neglect is the widespread belief that girls not only have no need of education, but that education for women is inherently damaging:

[I]t is pleaded that there is no need that women should be learned, that Curiosity will make them vain and affected….This seems confirmed by the experience we have of many women, whom Learning, instead of making more useful, hath made ridiculous.

This is not the only text of this period to address the fear of the educated woman as a ‘freak.’ Like Makin before him, the author goes on to make clear that the kind of education he is proposing does not teach anything that will turn a girl into a defiant daughter or wife. In fact the importance of teaching girls early to bear disappointment and refusals is greatly emphasised. Nor, however, is his text as tightly focused as Vives on morality and personal religiosity. Fenelon argues the need for a rigorous course of study for aristocratic girls that is well planned and focused on their future roles as housewives. The inherent weakness of women is an argument for the need to spend more time and effort on their

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87 Skedd, ‘The Education of Women in Hanoverian Britain,’ 22.
88 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 1.
89 Ibid., 2.
90 “And gently to accustom her to want those things for which she may happen to testify too great an eagerness…Begin early thus to harden her for Disappointments, to moderate her desires.” Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 15.
early education since, although they have no official public role, the threat of disruptive females to the Commonwealth is real:

But what is the Consequence of this natural Weakness of Women? Why, the more weak they are the more the need to fortify them… Is it not they who either ruin or maintain families, who have the direction of all domestic affairs, and who consequently decide, by their influence within doors the greatest concern of all Mankind?91

This creation of good housewives is clearly the main goal of his program of study, however, his second major argument for the proper and systematic education of girls is more conventional and focused on their personal identities as Christians; since women as well as men have souls and were redeemed by Christ, they must have a thorough understanding of their religion and their own Christian duties.

The curriculum Fenelon proposes is profoundly practical and includes an understanding of agriculture and the management of farms, the law as far as it related to estates, a solid knowledge of account keeping, English Grammar, good handwriting and spelling, a working knowledge of all the tasks servants would perform in the house, the History of Britain and Europe, painting and drawing, since these would improve needlework designs, and Christian music and poetry. Music more generally, as well as French, is regarded with suspicion in this scheme. Importantly, the author does allow that Latin would be beneficial to some women and reading is greatly encouraged, including a select list of Greek and Roman classics in translation.

Much of the text and of the actual course of study is taken up with how to teach the right understanding of Christian principles and the best way of ensuring girls learn to love the Bible. Unlike his very carefully traditional curriculum, the method he proposes is fairly new and is based on fostering real understanding rather than rote learning. Bible stories are

91 Hicks, trans. *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, 4.
to be told as treats, with prints to help children understand and remember. Rather than making girls learn catechisms by heart the teacher is to lead them through a series of questions using examples that are familiar to the child until she is sure that the basic concept is understood. For example to explain the separation of body and soul:

‘Do you see this table?’
‘Yes.’
‘Do you know it then?’
‘Yes.’
‘But doth this table know you?’ You will see the child smile at this question.

This process is repeated with the teacher frequently going back and testing to ensure that the child has really thought through and understood the idea being discussed. Some of the examples of conversations are extensive and as in the above quote where Fenelon describes the child’s probable reaction, would seem to indicate that the author had actually had some direct experience in trying to explain theological ideas to small girls. The reader is exhorted to always be patient and never to scold a child who is slow.

The vocational training is also based heavily on direct experience. The child is to be given a small matter to manage and keep accounts for, she is to be taken to market and shown what everything costs and how it is made. Most of all, her questions are to be carefully answered and not dismissed. The key to ensuring that children will learn well is to make their learning pleasant and something that they attend to eagerly. Like Aschram, Fenelon did not believe that forcing a child to their books with the rod was an effective teaching strategy.

The author’s view of the nature of children is essentially a positive one, and his comment, “[i]t is too ordinary with those who govern children to pardon little or nothing in them, but

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92 Hicks, trans. *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, 82.
93 Ibid., 247.
94 Ibid.
everything in themselves” suggests someone familiar with and sympathetic to the injustices and harsh demands of the classroom on the young. He accepts, for example, that children are naturally not able to pay close attention for long periods of time and expects teachers to work around this. The key to building character is to ensure that the examples given by parents and teachers are of good behavior. Girls are to be taught early that they will not be able to have everything they want and so should be denied anything desperately asked for. It is most important in particular to keep children from spending too much time with their social inferiors.

The method outlined in this text was heartily recommended (and largely copied) by Mr Rollin, a Professor of Eloquence at the Royal College in The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres. Although the bulk of this pedagogical text was taken up with the education of young gentlemen he includes a relatively large segment of the work to the proper schooling of older girls and young unmarried women. The opening lines on the topic quickly establishes both the links to the earlier work of the Archbishop and the impeccable religious foundations on which his program of study was to rest, “[t]he Archbishop of Cambray begins his excellent treatise on the subject with complaining, that scarce the least care is taken of the education of girls; a complaint that is but too well grounded.” The following chapter is taken up with a discussion of Saint Jerome’s letter to Laeta.

The key difference between the two texts lies not in the curriculum or method of teaching which is essentially the same, but in the extended treatment Rollin gives to the proper way to instruct adolescent girls in history. While this is simply listed as a proper and useful area of interest in Fenelon’s work, Rollin writes a detailed, and rigorous, course of study which assumes considerable skill and time on the part of the teacher and ability and motivation on the part of the student. Woolf posits that history in this period increasingly became seen as an alternative to the potential dangers of novel reading, for while history had the potential

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95 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 29.
96 Rollin, The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres, 442.
to provide proper role models and inculcate virtue, it was also entertaining.\textsuperscript{97} It is clear that Rollin himself takes great enjoyment both from the study and teaching of this subject, the sections which deal with it in his text are scattered with his personal asides about techniques he has seen work and used himself. Like Fenelon and unlike Vives he is concerned with the practicalities of the classroom and the realities of dealing with young students.

Naturally, sacred history is the starting point of study. What is significant about the author’s discussion of the best methodology to apply to the study of sacred history is his rejection of relying completely on catechisms and his general dislike of rote learning. History is seen as a pleasant study that will “take off that dryness which is found in catechisms…”\textsuperscript{98} He recommends a particular text, and suggests that half to a full chapter a day is a reasonable expectation of what can be learned. Although students are to be examined on what they have studied every week on a Saturday, and again once a month on the whole course of study, it is made clear that the aim of this examination is not the ability to recite the text verbatim, but a thorough and permanent knowledge linked with clear understanding of the content:

\begin{quote}
It may be proper, in order to exercise and strengthen this last faculty, for the pupil to accustom herself to repeat the several histories faithfully, and in the terms in which they are written without, however, being so vastly scrupulous as not to let her change a single word in it; for provided she substitutes another in its place which has the same sense the instructress ought to be satisfied. For the chief thing is, to make this study agreeable to the scholar; and to remove, as far as possible, the thorns from it.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{98} Rollin, \textit{The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres}, 461.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}, 462.
When the student has finished repeating her lessons, the teacher is to ask a series of questions designed to both build and test understanding, and to ensure the child is really thinking about the subject matter. Rollin gives several example questions for the benefit of teachers along with advice on how to best deliver them, for example pretending surprise at some event and requesting an explanation from the child for it. If the student is unable to answer a question the teacher is told to “suggest them” and clearly explain every point until the child is able to comprehend the answer herself. Rollin suggests a game in which the teacher gives a theme, his example is, “Dependence on the Almighty in the greatest dangers” and the students compete with each other to come up with examples that demonstrate it. Students are also to write detailed reflections on the material in order to draw personal meaning from it. Geography is also central to the study, teachers are told to point out on a map the exact place where the events being learned occur, as well as to teach basic chronology. After sacred history girls are to learn ancient Greek and Roman history (where they will be required to write abridgments, analysis and summaries of their lessons following the form of examples given by Rollin) and finally the history of their own country.

What is interesting about this course of study is that it would easily take a whole morning each day for several years. When combined with the other subjects recommended, namely housekeeping, needlework, drawing, music, arithmetic and Latin for those girls who are both very intelligent and very modest, it is clear that in this text the complaint that not enough time or care is given to the education of daughters is supported by a program of study that would ensure girls spent the whole day in school just as their brothers did. If what they learn is not the same there is a least a real belief articulated that girls deserve to be given equal time to learn, and that what is learned should not be mindless and tedious but truly exercise their understanding, memory and imagination. In point of fact, the course outlined by Rollin is not so very different from that found in many history text books today used to teach secondary school students (and in some cases Rollin’s is in fact more rigorous). The statement made at the start of the text, that girls are capable of learning and

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100 Rollin, The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres, 464.
so should be taught, is clearly not a platitude. This course of work assumes an intelligent and hardworking student.

The key question to ask of these texts is: how accurate were they in describing the general neglect of girls education and was their view of female ability and need to learn and be taught really a minority view? One set of sources which can illustrate perhaps more clearly the way this debate took place in the early eighteenth century are the news sheets and periodicals that frequently were written for a mixed audience and which devoted a great deal of space to addressing cultural issues and questions of manners and morality. Unlike the books I have discussed which are ultimately the works of a single author attempting to produce an authorative and comprehensive treaties, news sheets published correspondence from a range of people both men and women and often responded to particular reported incidents and stories. It must be noted that often the editors wrote both the letters and the papers responses, the key motive being to correct mistakes and follies commonly committed and “increase audience appeal.”

In these sources as well, those who argue for women’s education also have to argue for their basic ability to be educated, and for the importance of their role in society and the disasters attached to not properly preparing girls to fulfil it. In highlighting the public implications of women’s private roles within the family, newsheets were raising the status of women. As Stephen Howard has commented in his survey of female obituaries published in the eighteenth-century, “[t]he insistent promulgation of this conception of virtuous femininity may well have played a role in laying the foundation of a future assertion of female rights.”

It is in fact impossible to disconnect from a discussion of the education of women in this period the contemporary debate on the basic nature of the female mind. There was little

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101 William Kinsley, ‘Meaning and Format: Mr. Spectator and His Folio Half-Sheets,’ *ELH* vol. 34 no. 4 (December 1967): 482-494 at 484.

disagreement as to the perceived reality that the majority women of the time were both less learned and less able to become learned. Letters to newspapers written by both men and women and their replies accept this fact. The cause of the difference, however, was disputed. The key debate was whether women were naturally less intelligent than men or whether this was a result of education. The works of John Locke in challenging the structure of the state and family suggested that “neither patriarchy had a rational foundation.”

Female letter writers to publications sometimes illustrate the frustrations felt by intelligent women who found themselves constricted and dismissed as a result of the basic assumption of their inherent stupidity. A lady writing to the Weekly Oracle in January 1737 both complains and seeks public support as:

I have got a Lord and Master who overbears every Proposal and Reason I can offer with the Prerogative of Sex; pray, Gentlemen, deal candidly; has your Sex in the general, naturally, a very great Superiority over ours in Point of Understanding?

This writer is clearly conscious of the way in which the cultural assumption that she is naturally less able to comprehend issues affects her influence within her own household. Her request that the editors of the paper ‘deal candidly’ also indicates awareness of the fact she is asking her male correspondents to publicly undermine a basic source of their cultural authority. They do not in fact disappoint her, concluding that:

Had Women the same Advantage [of education] how can we say they would not make as good Returns of it. Some of them, who have been tried, have been eminent in several parts of Learning.

This was not an isolated case of a newspaper coming to the defense of the intelligence of its female readers. If there was an equivalent to ‘Dear Abby’ in the seventeenth century it was

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104 *Weekly Oracle*, 1 January 1737.
105 Ibid.
the Athenian Mercury, a highly popular periodical published between 1691 and 1697. The format consisted of the printed questions and letters of readers which the editors then responded to. Although academic questions were asked and addressed many wrote in with personal questions concerning what the correct conduct in courtship and marriage would be, given their particular situation, some of the questions being written by women. Both the participation of women as writers and the topics covered created controversy. In the December 8 edition of 1691 the editors clearly felt that their detractors required a response:

We have received several Rebukes from some stoical Gentlemen, who we guess very old, as we are sure they are very ill-natured, on the account of this poor Love-paper, which it seems those grave Dons are very angry with, as well as at us forsooth, for troubling them and the World with such frivolous matter, or taking any notice of the impertinencies of Women as they are pleased to call ‘em, with let [sic] the rest of ‘em alone to mind their Sore-legs and Spectacles, and think it is a very Natural, as well as an innocent attempt in us, by this paper to please the Young and Fair.106

This response, as far as it goes, although effective is not in fact serious. By deploying the image of dyspeptic old men impotently raging against the youth of their day, while clearly articulating their audience as consisting of women and the young, the paper effectively defends itself by implying that its aim is primarily to entertain rather than seriously inform, and those Dons who are offended by such ‘frivolity’ had best stay in their studies. However, the editors are not content to leave it there:

[We intend to] render the Ladies at least propitious [sic] to that, if not to its Authors being very well satisfied that our Enemies and theirs are the same; for which reason we hope may by way of Prologue bespeak their continued favour, and Patronage, as we have hitherto found it. And that we mayn’t seem altogether unworthy on’t, we protest in their defense, as well as our own, that we have receiv’d [sic] Questions of

106 Athenian Mercury, 8 December 1691.
as great weight and concern from their Sex, as from any of ours; nay some which we must acknowledge have carried so much difficulty in ‘em, that we have been hard put to’t to answer ‘em even to our own satisfaction. 107

This is almost as stark and shocking a statement as that made by Francois Poullain de la Barre when he argued in 1673 that the minds of men and women are naturally equal in ability, and that if there is a difference the evidence would suggest that women are slightly superior. 108 In a similar way the editors are here claiming that the concerns and questions of women are not, as the Dons believe, inherently trivial and foolish but rather are as important, serious and thought out, if not more so, than those submitted by men. If the preceding paragraph simply mocked the grumpiness of age, the use of the term ‘Enemies’ and the linking of the old men’s attack on the paper to attacks on women generally casts the ‘ill nature’ of the paper’s adversaries in a different and far less lighthearted light. Such attacks are not only mean-spirited and begrudging of innocent pleasures, but they are also wrong in their basic assumption of female inferiority.

This theme can be seen in later papers as well. Despite their great age the Dons that criticised the Athenian Mercury in 1691 seemed to survive with their dislike of seeing frivolous and womanly subjects discussed and circulated in print until at least 1736. A regular female correspondent of The Weekly Miscellany in 1736 also felt the need to defend herself from the claims of ‘honest Gentlemen’ that as a woman she was unfit to contribute to print and that her subjects were nonsensical, “that the Dignity of the Miscellany should be debas’d by the low prattle of an idle Girl” and used a very similar formula to that of the earlier paper. 109 Like the editors of the Mercury she rebuts her critics both by reference to the audience of the paper and by defending the importance of her topics:

107 Athenian Mercury, 8 December 1691.
But your Paper is a Miscellany and your Readers are Miscellaneous. If they would keep their Temper, and wait the Issue, perhaps they would find my correspondence less trifling and insignificant than they expect.  

The first letter the editors of the Athenian Mercury produce to demonstrate their point regarding the seriousness of women’s concerns is from:

A Lady not learned, but having Children, and being desirous her self to enter ‘em early into the knowledge of things, desires the Athenian Society to answer these following Queries…

The lady’s questions to this newspaper were concerned with both curriculum, the subjects appropriate and important for young children to learn, and pedagogy. She asks what the best way of building her children’s understanding of topics they have previously been taught by linking the observations they make in their daily life to the subjects being considered. For a lady who was not learned she had put considerable thought in to how to best approach systematic instruction. The editors’ response is equally practical. They begin by advising her not to attempt the instruction of her young children if her family was large, as she would not have the time to properly prepare herself or them, and it would be better attempted by a tutor. This pragmatic advice demonstrates the recognition that teaching young children is time consuming and requires a degree of skill.

Despite recommending a tutor over an overworked mother, the writers go on to assure their correspondent that, given enough, leisure a mother is the best possible instructor of young children “being better aquainted with their Tempers and Dispositions, and having nothing of that Magisterial sourness which sticks so close to most Pedagogues, and frights more learning out of children then e’re they can whip into ’em.” This presents a clear view of the proper way to engage children and motivate learning; instruction must be tailored to the

\[110\] *The Weekly Miscellany*, 17 July 1736.
\[111\] *Athenian Mercury*, 8 December 1691.
individual child and the close and caring relationship between pupil and teacher ensure compliance. The distant teacher concerned only with imparting the subject matter and controlling behavior with fear and punishment is rejected as comparatively ineffective.

The subjects which it is appropriate for young children to learn and a mother to teach are largely conventional, but also demonstrate a concern with ensuring learning is enjoyable. Religion and morality are central to the program and take up the majority of the article’s discussion, a well taught child has a love of God, feels a deep sense of love and duty to his parents, the king and the nation, “if you can but be so happy to make ‘em love God, ‘twill be a firm Foundation for all the rest.”113 The editors are clear that only approaching this task “sweetly and mildly” will ensure success. Some of the other suggestions are somewhat more original. The editors suggest children would enjoy and benefit from a study of Heraldry, both since it could be used as a way of teaching valour and service to the king and because it is suited to the interests and abilities of the very young. Certainly the visual nature of Heraldry would make it appropriate for children who could not yet read or write easily. History is included although with caution as it is “too voluminous a study for their Mothers to instruct them in; only she should be careful to let ‘em begin with such Histories as give fair Characters of Virtue and Honour, especially Plutarch’s Lives (as lately translated).”114

Dancing and music are dealt with summarily as not requiring an explanation as to how best to instruct. They are not, however, dismissed as either frivolous or potentially dangerous to the essential program of forming the children’s morality, the “one necessary, and a little o’t’other convenient.”115 The editors assure the readers that there is likewise no need to formally instruct children in Poetry, as they are certain to take up a study of it themselves whether their parents wish them to or not.116 Clearly, the male writer has some direct experience of children.

113 Athenian Mercury, 8 December 1691.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
The very young children of this Lady are not listed as being either girls or boys. At the early stage there is no need to separate the sexes during instruction. An example of a female letter writer specifically raising the issue of the corrupt state of female education and its social consequences for the position of women in society appears in the *Universal Spectator* of 1729. In this case it is fair to say that the charges of frivolity and impertinence leveled at young women come not from the Old Dons or Honest Gentlemen but from a grumpy Old Maid upset both at the treatment she receives as a spinster and the way in which the conduct of fashionable girls are causing men to desert the institution of marriage. Her letter does not, however, indicate that she holds men in any particular respect to be naturally superior to women:

> I am an Old Maid, nor do I care who knows it; for I an’t so because I ne’er was ask’d but purely out of Choice and Inclination… Husbands have such odd Humours which they expect a Body should submit to…I’m not complaining however against the Men or Matrimony….[but] …these giddy Creatures whose whole Business in Life may be reduced to the Articles of Dress, Visiting, Gaming and Impertinence, without either Thought or Shame… In my Remembrance Girls were educated in quite another Manner.\(^\text{117}\)

In his response the male editor states that it ought to be clear that the souls of men and women are naturally equal, and it is the gross neglect of the education of girls that causes the problems described by his correspondent. That this was not obvious to at least some of the papers readers is demonstrated by the fact that the writer needed to put that statement first, before going to outline a program of study for girls. The letter to the Weekly Oracle of 1737 already discussed also shows that the natural equality of capacity between men and women was still not a matter obvious enough to go without saying eight years later. The

\(^{\text{117}}\) *Universal Spectator*, 1 March 1729.
way the statement is framed here, however, indicates that it is perhaps not as controversial as it had been. The writer expects most readers to accept the statement.

Not only the intelligence of girls, but the quality of their moral fibre and the way in which education could either weaken or strengthen honor were causes for deep anxiety and discussion. Often descriptions of the education available to girls and the consequences of inadequate attention are revealed in the context of discussions of marriage and courtship and the terrible personal and social tragedies caused by inadequate training when young. A lax and insufficient education for girls was portrayed as having both moral and physical effects on the student. An example of an exaggerated comedic portrayal of the terrible impact on the body of a young girl who was not strictly or properly taught appeared in the *Spectator* of July 1712. The supposed correspondent to the editor is Sabina Green, a newly married young wife who almost died from the Greensickness while under the care of a governess at a boarding school. She writes, having been saved from near starvation (caused by her compulsion to eat such things as coals, stones, pipes and a garden wall) by the happy event of her marriage to a handsome young man, out of a wish to “[e]ndevour to prevent (by exposing) this unaccountable Folly so prevailing among the young ones of our Sex, who may not meet with such sudden good Luck.”

Although the portrayal of the course of her illness is clearly not intended to be taken entirely seriously, the underlying point of the article is in fact to demonstrate dangerous and opposite extremes parents go to in the education of their children. While boys suffer under too much regimented strictness and close observation girls are treated with equally damaging laxity and lack of supervision. Both these approaches have dire consequences. Sabina Green’s letter is prefaced and introduced by one from her husband, Richard Rentfree, who also describes his education. His schooling consisted of private instruction at home till he was ten, with his father so concerned he not be morally corrupted he “never let me see any Thing that he thought could give me the least Pleasure.”

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118 *The Spectator*, 15 July 1712.
continued at boarding school with the Grammar School Master instructed to treat him “severely.”\textsuperscript{120} When Richard attended University his Father deliberately gave inadequate money for living expenses, leaving him “in scandalous Poverty and Want.”\textsuperscript{121} This treatment leads him to run headlong into marriage with Sabina.

Sabina, in contrast to her husband, was brought up by her widowed Mother, ominously described as “gay” and was “tall and wild” as a girl.\textsuperscript{122} The reader is left to infer that under this government she received no meaningful instruction, moral or academic. Her Uncle eventually intervened and sent her to a boarding school, instructing them “to contradict me in nothing, for I had been misused enough already.”\textsuperscript{123} This, we are told, is when she started chewing the stems of pipes and eating chalk. Sabina was able to keep her honor, simply because gay as her mother was, and as carelessly as her governess instructed her, she was kept away from all men and boys of marriageable age. Given how acutely she suffered from a disease unique to young virgins, and only curable by marriage the reader is clearly directed to wonder what would have been the case had she not been so secluded, and the joy expressed by Richard at his marriage is felt by the reader to be premature. His stated reasons for his hasty marriage (the pair met and married within a month) are simply that now he is an adult and free of his father’s harsh management, “[m]y Father says I am now a Man, and may speak to him like another Gentleman.”\textsuperscript{124}

This is not the only article which draws a link between ill heath in daughters and a poor education as a child. Richard Steele writing in the Tatler in 1710, under the pseudonym of Isaac Bickerstaff, argued that girls required regular physical exercise, such as horse-riding and walking and that the lack of this and other forms of suitable employment sapped girls both of their health and beauty.\textsuperscript{125} The cause of the sickliness and indolence of the society

\textsuperscript{120} The Spectator, 15 July 1712.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
women of his time he blames mainly on their neglect as students. He indignantly describes the way in which some families of his acquaintance educated their daughters:

I am apt to believe there are some Parents imagine their Daughters will be accomplished enough, if nothing interrupts their Growth or their Shape. According to this Method of Education, I could name you Twenty Families where all the Girls hear of in this Life is, that it is Time to rise, and to come to Dinner; as if they were so insignificant as to be wholly provided for when they are fed and clothed.\(^{126}\) [Emphasis added]

There is an explicit link drawn here between the neglect of girls’ education and a lack of respect for the importance of their role within society, as well as their health. Women here are the companions of men, their role as Mothers is not mentioned except in passing. His key concern is that the wives produced by this method of education could only be part of miserable marriages, as no reasonable man could bear with the laziness and melancholy of women with no means to occupy themselves.

Steele’s point, and the point of all the writers I have examined here, is that education for women, however narrowly constructed, was crucial to the harmony of the family and society and deserved more attention, and by extension, respect, than it received. Steele goes on to offer a concrete proposal to counter this neglect, a *Female Library* consisting of worthy books that would allow women to use their time innocently while entertaining themselves and improving their knowledge. In the process of acknowledging the disadvantages and suffering caused by a poor or non-existent education to both individual women and the broader society, and putting forward practical suggestions to improve the situation, these authors opened up possibilities for a richer and more substantial schooling for girls.

\(^{126}\) *The Tatler*, 7-9 November 1710.
Chapter Two

Women Teaching Women

And I hope most of both young and old Ladies in this Age, have too great a Value for the Education of their Heads, than to spend all of their Time in the instruction of their Heels.¹²⁷

Marlene LeGates comments on how any study of women in the past uncovers the “intensity of their desire for learning” a desire which in her view was largely unmet.¹²⁸ The ways in which women expressed, argued for and worked to satisfy this intense desire, is the focus of this chapter. LeGates focuses on the lack of access to formal institutions of learning, arguing that the rise of universities was a set back for women as they “eclipsed” the work of nunneries in educating women.¹²⁹ However, as Mary Ann Dzuback has commented, that “[i]f the historiography of education has fallen short in the treatment of gender, it has been in the assumption that gender is merely an important concept primarily for understanding access.”¹³⁰ Certainly lack of access to formal and informal instruction, and to particular subjects, languages and texts was a defining part of women’s experience in this period, however, the lack of access is not the whole picture. Women wrote about their frustrations with what they were not taught; with the nature of what they were expected to learn, which limited them to ‘educated heels and hands’ rather than heads, and with the quality of instruction provided.

As Michele Cohen has pointed out, it is worth remembering that the assumption that formal structures of education in schools and universities, as accessed by boys, was inevitably of a higher quality than that available through informal or unstructured home schooling was

based on the idea that the masculine form is automatically more rigorous. Writers such as Aschram talked about the number of inattentive and badly taught boys who emerged from years of studying in school and university with only a poor grasp of Latin, while we have examples such as Mary Astell and Sarah Fielding whose tutoring at home produced high quality and self-confident scholars. Hannah Woolley’s trenchant comment in 1675 hardly shows a woman who envies or admires the knowledge and skills gained by men in the universities “[I condemn] the negligence of parents, in letting the fertile ground of their daughters lie fallow, yet send the barren noddles of their sons to university, where they stay for no other purpose than to fill their empty sconces with idle notions to make a noise in the country.”

Was an accomplished girl of the period who spoke French and perhaps Italian fluently and who had read many of the classics in translation really poorly educated when compared with her brother who read Latin and Greek and could ‘make a noise in the country’? The women whose work I shall examine in this chapter were not pleading for access to male institutions, power, or even traditional male subjects necessarily, but for a richer and better quality instruction in interesting and demanding subjects. What is clear in their writings is the belief that as women they were not intellectually incapable, or inferior to men, and they demanded recognition of this in the education they were provided. This stands in contrast to some of the male writers examined in the first chapter, such as Fenelon, who argued that the weakness of women was a reason to pay more attention to their education, not less.

There are many continuities in the history of education, one of which is that the process of teaching and learning is time consuming and usually expensive. It requires a significant monetary investment and personal effort, and so, like all significant investments, needs justification. A letter of 1647 from Lady Dering to Henry Oxinden recommending a tutor for his daughters sets out the cost of a traditional education:

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131 Cohen, ‘Gender and method,’ 590.
133 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 3.
[B]eside the qualities of music both for the virginals and singing (if they have voices) and writing (and to cast account, which will be useful for them hereafter) he will be careful also that their behaviour be modest…and that they grow in knowledge and understanding of God and their duty to him… I presume you will think thirty pounds a year for both reasonable, when you consider the hardness of the times and that there is more trouble with girls than boys.\(^{134}\) [emphasis added]

Why should a father in this period pay for his daughters to read Latin if the few accepted subjects along with the greater need for supervision and modification of the behaviour of girls meant that the cost of their education was already high? A son could use the language as a means of earning a living or gaining a reputation in the public sphere. But a girl? What exactly was the ‘value’ of educating them? What return could the Oxinden family get on that thirty pounds a year? Learning to sing and play well was a social skill which could lead to a good match for a daughter, helping family finances and ensuring the girl’s own future. The cost of the music master can be rationalised as one which will pay dividends. But why pay, or invest time in teaching any more intellectual subjects? The Marchioness’s answer, and the answer of many female educational theorists of this time is increasingly staked on the view that women have rational minds, and that only deep misery to themselves and ultimately their families can result from failing to properly train and develop them.

If anything, female authors are more tolerant toward the reality of the social need for accomplishments and the economic advantages of being able to skillfully fulfil their delineated social role. The Marchioness in the above quote goes on to make it very clear that she is not against girls learning to dance, “only begging, that they that use it, may not abuse it, by spending too much Time, either in learning it or pursuing it when learned.”\(^{135}\)

However, there is with this, a plea for recognition of women’s abilities and often

\(^{135}\) Lambert, *Letters to her Son and Daughter*, 192.
impassioned descriptions of the frustration intelligent women who were stymied in their education experienced:

There are some manly Studies, only fit for Males; but why ingenious Females should be abridg’d of any Sort of Learning, Languages or Philosophy, I cannot see any great Reason can be alleged for it, save only an ill Custom. Have not they the same rational Souls, as good natural Parts, and as quick Understandings as most of Men?¹³⁶

The mainly male theorists and writers on the education of girls I have examined in the previous chapter were deeply concerned with the way in which education could either create or destroy a virtuous character in the individual girl. It was a debate that was not resolved by the end of the eighteenth century. As Stephen Howard has said “[m]ale suspicion of female learning and writing was to persist, alongside the evolution of more enlightened opinions.”¹³⁷ The primary relationships which these theorists were concerned to nurture and strengthen were first between the girl and God, and secondly her future husband. A basic assumption was that a skilled and honest wife would create a stable and happy family, and that only a state made up of stable families would prosper and survive. Education was an area where the private realm of the household met the public realm.

Marlene LeGates discusses how the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’ conception of women as dangerously lustful, and marriage as inherently troublesome to men shifted in the eighteenth century to a view of women as essentially virtuous, while writers such as Steele and Addison among others campaigned to lift the perception of the married state.¹³⁸ Socialisation was key to this shift. A mother who failed in her duty to properly educate her children failed her society as much as her family. As LeGates says “[t]he image of chaste

¹³⁶ Lambert, Letters to her Son and Daughter, 192.
Womanhood represents a fantasy about what could be done with women in terms of social conditioning.”139 In the later texts, from Ascram onwards, there was an increasing recognition of the intellectual needs of the child, the pleasure that came from learning and the deep misery of boredom. The need to stretch those girls who were particularly bright was also increasingly recognised.140 However, for male authors in this period, the essential point of education remained essentially a moral rather than an intellectual or economic one.

This moral imperative is also clearly present in the writings of those women of the period who bent their minds to the proper ways and means to pass on knowledge; but I argue in this chapter that in the writing of many women of the period there is also an often intense emotional understanding of the frustration, boredom and disadvantage a shallow and limited education created in girls. In these writings there is also a less idealised, more pragmatic awareness of how education shaped and was shaped by the economic position and social relationships between teachers, students and parents. Teaching in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as now, was not a profession whose practitioners expected to become wealthy, however, it was one of the few respectable positions available to a woman in which, as a single woman, or as in the case of Bathsua Makin and later Mrs Weeton, a widow, she could support herself in a semi-professional, respectable role. Also, the costs of being ignorant of basic information about subjects like accounting was recognised by authors such as Hannah Wooley, who in her defense of the need to teach girls accounting as well as needle and housework pointed out “there is not that danger of a family’s overthrow by the sauce wanting its right relish…as by a widow’s ignorance of her concern as to her estate.”141

139 Ibid., 33.
140 Hicks, trans. Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, 190-191.
141 Hannah Wooley, Advice to the Women and Maidens of London. Showing, that Instead of their Usual Pastime, and Education in Needlework, Lace, and Pointmaking, It Were Far More Necessary and Profitable to Apply Themselves to the Right Understanding and Practice of the Method of Keeping Books of Account: Whereby, Either Single, or Married, They May Know Their Estates, Carry On Their Trades, and Avoid the Dangers of a Helpless and Forlorn Condition, Incident to Widows, (London, 1678) in ed. Goreau, The Whole Duty of a Woman, 236.
Although many of the female authors in this chapter articulated an awareness and antipathy towards their subjected position as women, it would be inaccurate to describe them as feminists in the sense that they were not directly challenging the power structures of their society. All stated their acceptance of the rights of husbands over wives and fathers over children, at the same time as they argued for improvements in the training of daughters. As William Stafford has commented, although in principal “any writer who explicitly or implicitly complained about the lot of women as a class, or called for improvement in their lot might be classified as a feminist…but in practice there are dangers of anachronism and misinterpretation.”

Although Ruth Perry argues that Astell’s strongly held positions on the equality of men and women’s ability and souls, along with her analysis of the way in which her society oppressed women makes her “the first English feminist,” she rightly points out that Astell herself would have “been horrified by the implied radicalism of the label ‘feminist.’” It is important to recognise the way in which writers like Astell were building the early foundations of a feminist awareness without either expecting them to hold, or reading into their work modern feminist ideas. In Karen O’Brien’s words they “created a framework and language for understanding the gendered structures of society.”

As Rosemary Ruether points out, Astell was arguing for the inherent religious and intellectual equality of men and women while supporting the political superiority of men as justified by God. In working to establish a better educational system for women Astell was anticipating the reforms of the later eighteenth century, when the social order was seen as a product of human creation rather than divine dispensation. Monica Peruga has described the debate around the education of women as being at the “center of early

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144 Ibid., 13.
modern debates on gender.”

Although in her summary of the general opinion of writers on women’s education in the seventeenth and eighteenth century she is overly pessimistic about the depth of knowledge generally proposed as proper for girls, she points out that women writers on education often highlighted the way in education could provide a degree of “emotional and intellectual autonomy.”

The converse, of course, was also true. Even intelligent women of high status felt keenly the disadvantage of a bad education, and were discouraged from publishing their own work as a result. The Duchess of Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish wrote in 1664:

In your last letter you advised me to write a book of orations, but how should I write orations who know no rules in rhetoric, nor never went to school, but only learned to read and write at home, taught by ancient decayed gentlewoman whom my mother kept for that purpose – which my ill hand (as the phrase is) may sufficiently witness; yet howsoever… I did try to write orations, but find I want wit, eloquence and learning for such a work.

It is significant that a keen awareness of the deficiencies of her early education did not stop the Duchess from at least attempting to write in a form she was unfamiliar with. If she is critical of her own efforts, she is also directing those efforts towards improving her abilities and expressing her own ideas.

Education and teaching as a means to the end of shaping a life that was separate from the authority of the male head of household can be seen early in the period in the writings of Mary Astell. Astell accepted as God-given and natural the absolute authority of husband over wife and defended it as necessary to the protection of the state, but she also saw the potential of a rigorous education, and strong educational institutions to create a legitimate

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148 Peruga, Women Gender and Enlightenment, 191.
150 Astell, Serious Proposal to the Ladies, 40.
alternative to those gentle women who would not, or could not marry. Perry in her biography of Astell examines the way in which Astell herself was unusually independent from any form of male supervision or control.\footnote{Perry, \textit{The Celebrated Mary Astell}, 58-59.}

Astell was born in Newcastle into a gentry family who had long been associated with the coal trade. She seems to have been educated mainly by her Uncle Ralph, a curate at St Nicolas Church who introduced her to the work of Hobbs and the Platonists. After the death of her father when she was twelve she lived with her mother and aunt until she moved to London as an adult. Perry points out that as a gentry woman with no dowry to speak of, Astell would have had great trouble finding a husband of her own status. She also grew up through her adolescence without the authority of a father or any other male family member.\footnote{Ibid.} As such, she was a true ‘single’ woman with no male guardian with all the freedom and vulnerability that entailed.

When she first moved to London, Astell had to appeal to the Bishop for assistance, as she had no money or any place to go for support. Over the course of her life she was mainly supported financially and socially by a fairly stable and close group of female friends including Lady Elizabeth Hastings. \textit{A Serious Proposal to the Ladies} did make an impact in her time, as A.R Humphreys notes, eliciting both admiration and ridicule. Defoe in his 1697 \textit{Essay Upon Projects} described his esteem, while Swift dismissed her ideas in the \textit{Tatler} in 1709.\footnote{A. R. Humphreys, ‘The ‘Rights of Women’ in the Age of Reason,’ \textit{The Modern Language Review} vol 41. no.3 (July 1946): 256-269 at 259.} Perry teases out the stark contrast between the relatively radical critique of women’s submissive relationship to men offered in \textit{A Serious Proposal to the Ladies}, her work on education, and her staunch and lifelong support of the traditional social hierarchy of High Church Anglicanism and loyalty to the ‘true’ monarchy.

The tension between Astell’s conservative, Tory, defense of the traditional power structures of her society, with her critique of the way those structures oppressed women
runs through commentary on her work. O’Brien has criticised Perry’s view of Astell as being basically part of Enlightenment thought, on the basis that she believed in the rationality of the Universe, and the equal rationality of men and women. O’Brien sees the political ideas developed by Whiggism as ultimately being of most use to the improvement of women’s social and political position, and she argues that “Astell may be seen to have stood outside the tide which ran from earlier debates about the rights of Dissenters and their membership of the political community to late eighteenth century assertions about the civil rights of women.”

Astell’s writings regarding women, like those of the male pedagogical writers, focus to a large extent on the authority a husband holds over a wife, which she regarded as legitimate and ordained by God; but Astell’s writings also reveal a keen awareness of the potential threats to the wife inherent in this relationship. A woman’s physical and social well being could be ruined by a bad marriage, but more importantly to Astell, so could her spiritual standing. For Astell, properly understood service and submission to God was the only end of life, and her tone when discussing a wife’s duty to her husband in comparison to this end is far from reverent:

The Service she at any time becomes oblig’d to pay to a Man, is only a Business by the Bye. Just as it may be any Man’s Business and Duty to keep Hogs; he was not Made for this, but if he hires himself out to such an Employment, he ought conscientiously to perform it.

There is none of the assurance of happiness so blithely given by male advisors to young girls starting out in marriage through the later periodicals. In Astell’s view marriage is risky and hard for women and extreme care should be taken in entering in to it.

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154 Perry, The Celebrated Mary Astell, 326.
155 O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment, 36.
In *A Serious Proposal*, Astell offers a deeply thought out alternative to this potentially dangerous course which is centered around the creation of all female institutions where adult single women would support themselves and each other in their individual studies, while also educating young girls. Education in this scheme is primarily a means to fuel intellectual and spiritual growth but also a practical social and economic solution for those single women who found themselves dependent on their extended families without means of their own.\(^{157}\) Of course, it was not just the adult women who had need of a workable alternative to the family and household as means of education and support. Michele Cohen has analysed the way in which the private, and to contemporaries ‘unsystematic’ nature of girls’ education when compared to the public system of schools and universities available to boys, served to diminish both opportunities and recognition of success.\(^{158}\) For many young girls the view of their education as being essentially private and home based was simply unworkable for a range of reasons.

The combination of a clearly stated belief in the rightness of male authority conveyed in a tone and language which is highly critical of actual men, and deeply skeptical of their supposed natural superiority which is found in Astell’s writings can also be heard in those of Hannah Wooley, whose conduct works were extremely popular in the late seventeenth century.

> Vain man is apt to think we are merely intended for the worlds propagation, and to keep its humane inhabitants sweet and clean; but, by their leaves, had we the same literature, he would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies. Hence I am induced to believe, we are debarred from the knowledge of humane learning, lest our pregnant wits should rival the towering conceits of our insulting Lords and Masters. Pardon the severity of this expression, since I intend not thereby to infuse bitter rebellion

into the sweet blood of females; for know I would have all ... to be loyal and loving subjects to their lawful (though lording) husbands.\textsuperscript{159}

Hannah Wooley and Mary Astell knew, from their own lived experience that the trope of female incapacity was false. While both are deeply concerned with not encroaching on male authority in the state or home, which was based on both law and religion, in insisting on the equal, if not superior intelligence of women and an education to match it, they were undermining one of the basic cultural beliefs which underpinned that authority. It is a very strictly confined rebellion, but a rebellion nonetheless.

A good education, apart from providing personal growth and satisfaction, could also be a means to an independent income. Hannah Wooley is an early example of a woman who was able to use her education, and skill in teaching to maintain herself. Despite being afflicted by the “death of parents when very young, by loss of husband, children, friends, estate,” Wooley was able to respectably earn her own living.\textsuperscript{160} According to her own account, Wooley began her career at fifteen by keeping a small school. She was subsequently noticed at the age of seventeen by a great lady who employed her as a governess for her own children. After her first employer’s death Wooley worked in another noble house, first as a governess, then as her employer’s secretary and stewardess. Although she was barred from the ‘humane learning’ of men, her skills and knowledge were considerable.

Wooley writes her abridged autobiography partly in order to assure her readers that her skills in managing a household and advising on manners are sound, and the information contained in her book can be trusted. It is notable that the skills she lists first and “pretend[s] greatest skill in” are the despised useless accomplishments, such as “all transparent works...shell work... pretty toys for closets.”\textsuperscript{161} It was these works which brought her to the notice of her first employer, who “praising my works...was infinitely optimistical.”

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\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Ibid.}, 236.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Ibid.}, 233-234.
\end{flushright}
pleased.” As a woman required to earn a living she could not perhaps easily afford to moralise about the need for serious religious training to replace time spent on these works. When keeping a school she had already learned how to play several instruments and speak Italian, as well as knowing how to sing and dance well. The more practical skills of cooking and preserving, account keeping, medical knowledge, the management of servants and the “setting out of banquets” she gained while employed as a governess and stewardess.

Wooley is careful to assure readers that the household skills she learned as a servant were of great use to her as a wife, and in fact her ability seems to have been what attracted her husband:

In short time I became skillful…and gained so great an esteem among the nobility and gentry … that I was necessitated to yield to the importunity of one I dearly loved…In the time I was a wife, I had frequent occasion to make use of all, or most of my aforementioned qualities, and what I exercised not within my own roof, I used among my neighbours, friends and acquaintances.

The ability to successfully manage a large household well was one which Wooley had to study and work to perfect. It allowed her to be of help to her neighbours, support herself and fulfil her role of wife successfully. Her education was recognised as a real asset, of some worth, by herself, her family and her community.

The view that the role of education, and specifically education within the context of a school, could play as a safety net for both students and their female teachers was clearly present in one of the first fictional depictions of English girls’ schools. Sarah Fielding published *The Governess* in 1749. Fielding was an accomplished writer and scholar of the period who had herself received part of her education at a girls’ school. Among her

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published works is a translation of Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates* from the Greek and her eight novels were widely read.\(^{165}\) Although *Governess* in many ways presents a strictly conventional schema of morality and accepted gender roles, there is also a recognition of the difficulties these roles raised for women and imagined ways around them. As Sarah Gadeken said of another of Fielding’s novels “[w]ithout directly attacking the conventions of her culture, then, Fielding explores the ways by which women can exploit the contradictions within it in order to find ways to increase their economic security and chances of happiness.”\(^{166}\)

The *Governess* tells the story of Mrs Teachum, a widow who, we are told in the introduction, set up the school to support herself after the deaths of her husband and children and the loss of all her wealth.\(^ {167}\) The author is careful to emphasise that the primary purpose of the school is not to make profit, but to honorably educate. Mrs Teachum never takes more students than she can personally and carefully instruct. We are assured, however, that the practical benefit of it to her is that of an independent and respectable station in life. For the students as well, the school represents a safe and productive alternative to a stable home life. For all the students have either received no instruction or bad instruction at the hands of servants, who do not possess the knowledge necessary for them if they are to be successful in their social role as adults. It is in fact this social knowledge Mrs Teachum promises to impart. The school’s curriculum consists of reading, writing and needlecraft, naturally, but the real emphasis is on, to paraphrase ‘behavior, neatness in dress and gentility in person.’\(^ {168}\)

The book presents these social skills as deeply linked with moral and religious education. The plot begins with a bitter argument between the nine students in the school. By the end

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the argument is resolved and the reader can see how each student has overcome the personal faults which lead to the conflict. Although didactic, the text is entertaining, consisting of the personal histories of each student along with fairy tales to illustrate the moral points. The personal histories, while fictional, would have spoken to the reality of life for many families and demonstrates an awareness that simply cultivating virtuous and accomplished mothers is not the panacea for social ills and guarantee of quality education for the young imagined by most male authors. Put simply, mother’s die, or are overwhelmed. Only two of Mrs Teachum’s students came from households where living mothers simply chose not to provide their primary education personally. Of the nine students, two had mothers who had died, one had a mother too ill to care for her, one came from a overlarge family and had been sent to her grandmother to be raised before being sent to school, two had been sent to school immediately after a sibling died, and one was too young to remember life before school.169

Later in the eighteenth century it is possible to read accounts of non-aristocratic female teachers who were actively engaged in the practice of teaching. Miss Weeton’s letters and journals were discovered in 1925 by Edward Hall, and first published in 1936.170 Nelly Weeton was born in 1776, her parents married in 1770.171 Although much of her work related to the second half of the eighteenth-century, and the beginning of the nineteenth, which is outside the scope of this thesis, her description of her mother’s education as well as the education she received herself, and her reflections on the manner in which it was conducted can illuminate the ways in which the practice and theory of education for girls intersected with economic and social issues in the eighteenth-century.

Miss Weeton describes her early life for the benefit of her young daughter from whom she was parted at the time of writing and unlikely to see again due to the bitter separation between herself and her husband. Nelly Weeton is an example of a woman who,

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economically, was in fact much better off as a single woman supporting herself on a small wage than as a married woman. Weeton was able to manage a small inheritance while also supporting herself through teaching. She married late and lost the capital and her independence after separating from her husband.\textsuperscript{172} The history was written when she was fifty and in it she goes in to some detail as to how she herself was educated as well as sketching out briefly the extent to which her mother was educated. Before her marriage Weeton had, like her mother, supported herself by keeping a school. She was raised to regard her education not only as an exercise in building virtue and faith, but as an essential set of skills and knowledge which would allow her to support herself.

As a daughter she was taught to read and write, some grammar, arithmetic, sewing and Geography as well as the ‘social graces’ of conversation. Religious instruction was a centerpiece of her childhood instruction, and the one area in which both she and her brother shared the same learning experience given by her mother and the local priest. Her mother started a village school in 1788. This was essentially a business whose prime function was to keep her family financially stable after the death of her husband who had left them in some debt and catered for young children, both boys and girls. The curriculum was fairly limited, with the local Grammar Schools usher being responsible for delivering many of the subjects. Weeton’s family seem to have been in the process of climbing the social ladder. Her maternal grandfather was a butcher by trade and her grandmother came from a brewer’s family. Her mother’s two sisters also married tradesmen, one a silk draper and one a solicitor. After she was widowed this sister was then married to a saddler. Her father was a sea captain.

Miss Weeton comments in her Retrospect that her mother and sisters were well educated for their station in life and “considering the period of time they lived in.”\textsuperscript{173} A very large part of this education was in the social graces. Apparently, their family was successful

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid.}, 189. Weeton had through the management of a small inheritance from her mother as well as her own teaching and saving amassed a small amount of capital which gave her seventy pounds a year in income. Once married the capital belong to her husband and she was given only the income to live on.

enough, and her mother and aunts “being all remarkably handsome” were able to “[associate] much with their superiors.” Miss Weeton later mentions that her mother was never at a loss for polite conversation in company and describes in details the agonies she went through when her mother tried to give her the benefit of the conversation of those higher in the social scale than herself.

Although Miss Weeton does not give any detail of the formal instruction her mother may have received it is clear she was taught to read and given access to books, as “[m]y mother had a great desire to improve her mind and manners, and read much.” Her mother engaged herself to work as a Lady’s maid for a year and was able to travel to an extent, continue her interest in reading and to polish her manners. In fact her social knowledge would have enabled her to gain this post in the first place.

Miss Weeton’s work also demonstrates the need to not take statements about the inadequate and limited education given to girls at face value. For although Miss Weeton tells us she felt frustrated at the lack of opportunities she received as a child to learn interesting subjects in depth, her letters are witty and beautifully written. Weeton was taught her writing skills as a child, and cultivated them throughout her life through her personal correspondence. She knew herself to have a talent, one which was not valued as anything other than an accomplishment, of ‘no useful purpose.’

I shewed so strong a predilection for reading and scribbling lines, that my mother, who had for some time been much delighted with what she considered my striking talents, and encouraged me with unbounded praises, began to think that I should entirely ruined for any useful purpose in life if my inclination for literature was indulged, and treated all my efforts this way with a decided discouragement; so much as to damp my spirit forever. Oh! How I have burned to learn Latin, French,

\[\text{174} \text{ Weeton, } \text{Journal of a Governess, vol. I, 5.}\]
\[\text{175} \text{ Ibid.}\]
the Arts, the Sciences, anything rather than the dog trot way sewing, teaching, writing copies and washing dishes every day.\footnote{176}

Of course it was her skills in sewing, teaching and keeping house which supported Weeton in adulthood, but the lack of recognition of the worth of her education in the English language is not one we need to share. The work draws a portrait of a family in which education for girls was highly valued even as it was strictly limited, as much for the social mobility and security it offered as for the pleasure it clearly gave. The question of whether it was nature or custom which dictated the limited scope of subjects available to her as a girl is here answered not through philosophical reasoning and references to the achievements of historic women, but through the felt experience of being capable of learning more than others were willing to teach. Weeton in articulating the deep frustration with the limited curriculum she was offered clearly believes that her lack of knowledge was due to lack of opportunity, not ability. In keeping copies of her correspondence and in continuing to inform herself through her reading throughout her adult life Weeton never entirely accepted just what she was offered. Despite her mother, her spirits were not so damped she could not use her pen to justify and express herself.

The male authors discussed in chapter one were primarily concerned with the education of girls as a means to strengthen the family. While the suffering and disadvantage caused by a poor education to bright girls was acknowledged, it was not their main focus. In contrast, the female writers examined here were deeply aware of the toll being denied a quality education took on themselves and other women. Eliza Haywood, writing about the education of women in the mid-eighteenth century commented, “[t]he Ladies themselves, methinks begin to seem sensible of the Injustice which has long been done to them, and find a Vacuum in their Minds.”\footnote{177} This is a crucial development in women’s history. As Katherine Rogers has elegantly said, “[t]hese early writers…laid the groundwork for the

\footnote{177} Haywood, \textit{Selections from the Female Spectator}, 133.
feminist awareness we take for granted today." The entry of women themselves into the public discussion of girls’ education was a new and positive change.

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Chapter Three

Learning to Spell

As the preceding chapter has shown, women such as Astell, Fielding and Weeton actively worked to fill the gaps in their own knowledge, and to improve the education offered to the next generation of girls. Women were involved in providing education to children throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but most commonly they were expected to teach the fundamentals of literacy. As has been seen in chapter one, teaching her children to read the Bible and pray well was regarded as one of the primary duties of a mother, or her paid governess. Changes in practices and beliefs in this area, then, are central to the history of women’s education.

In this chapter the texts used to support mothers and schoolmistresses to teach their students to read will be examined along with the kind of reading material children increasingly had access to in the period. One of the reasons to focus on Spelling Books in a thesis on the history of women’s education is that they were one of the few texts where the term ‘children’ applied relatively equally to boys and girls, who would have struggled over the same spelling texts with the same teacher for the first and probably only time in their lives before their respective educations sharply diverged. The ability to read was also one of the few granted to be useful for all girls, whether poor or well born. Absent any formal institution path to higher learning, independent reading and study such as undertaken by Fielding and Weeton was essentially the only route curious girls could take to further their knowledge. Hannah Wolley said of her own education “that which most of all increased my knowledge was my daily reading to my Lady.”

Neither the learned tomes of Vives, Ascham or Fennelon, the witty articles of Richard Steele’s Tatler, or indeed the writings of women examined in the second chapter go in to

much detail about the way in which mothers and instructors were expected to proceed in
this task. Although the focus in this chapter is on the published primers, which were all
written by men, often schoolmasters, and are addressed to children in general, the
importance of the early acquisition of literacy for a history of women’s education makes an
analysis of the specific teaching practices, and beliefs which informed those practices, an
essential element of this thesis.

Female educators, pedagogical theorists and students, whatever differences they had with
their male contemporaries, all shared a focus on the strengthening the moral fiber of their
pupils, for the good of both the individual and society. This focus is especially present in
the earliest stages of teaching basic literacy, where children were expected to learn to read
using biblical chapters. Writers such as Ruth Macdonald in her survey of the periods texts
have seen a gradual shift from schooling which aimed to “control the child and to force
upon him as soon as possible the rudiments of learning and adult behavior” to an awareness
of the need to entertain and make learning interesting to the child.¹⁸⁰ In fact, as has been
discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, writers and practitioners of education, such as
Queen Elizabeth’s tutor Roger Ascham had been bemoaning the brutality and ineffective
nature of a rigid curriculum learnt by rote and not understood by the student since the
sixteenth century. Arguably, there were theorists and practitioners of both the harsher,
dominant and traditional form of instruction and a much smaller number who tried to make
school fun and learning delightful throughout this period. The texts in this chapter show an
ongoing debate between those two approaches. While it is possible that the focus on the
child’s enjoyment became a more widely held and accepted belief towards the end of this
period, in this area there is far more continuity than change. Daughters and sons learned to
read in essentially the same way as their grandmothers and grandfathers had done for
generations.

¹⁸⁰Ruth MacDonald, Literature for Children in England and America from 1646 to 1774 (New York:
Whitston Publishing Company, 1982), 45. See also, Mary Thwaite, From Primer to Pleasure in Reading, 2nd
ed. (London: The Library Association, 1972), 21. Thwaite sees the more open and positive attitude to the
pleasure of poetry and love of learning articulated by Sir Philip Sydney and Ascham in the sixteenth century
yielding to the more Puritan ideas of the seventeenth.
Boys were expected to know how to read English before entering school, although schoolmasters were often disappointed in the standard they had achieved, and were either taught by their mothers or schoolmistress. A text which addresses this situation directly is *The London Spelling Book Being a More Easy and Regular Method of Teaching to Spell Read and Write True English* by John Urmston. This text is significant when trying to reconstruct the actual practices of the schoolroom and nursery, in that one of the attractions it advertises is the author’s qualifications as a school teacher at Kensington. It seems safe to presume that Urmston at least used his own method in his own classroom. This and the fact that it went through four editions by 1710 suggests that the method outlined in the text was applied by teachers and mothers in practice. The text is aimed at those parents to whom expense is an object, as it assures the purchaser that this book and this book alone will be sufficient to teach a child to read “without the unnecessary Charge of other Book.”

Acquiring literacy as a very young child was not only a brief moment when boys and girls learnt together, but one where both boys and girls were likely to be taught by a woman. Teaching children to read was one of the accepted duties of mothers, but families often paid to have a mistress take the children. This situation, and its pitfalls is commented on in the *London Spelling Book*’s introduction, which is worth quoting at length:

> It is commonly thought so tiresome an Undertaking, to teach Children to Spell and Read English, that a peevish Schoolmaster is not judged to have Patience enough to do it. And therefore they are sent to a Mistress, supposing she may be fit to deal with them in their tender Years; where, partly through the Ignorance of many such Teachers, and partly Neglect, the Children may spend whole years to little advantage; inasmuch, that their Parents may with Reason say, that they send their Children to such Schools, on no other Account, but merely to keep them out of Danger and be rid of their Company at home: So that Children, if Boys are left after all, to be Taught by a Master, and the Girls too often Untaught; or at least, are so

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imperfect in their English, that they do scarce ever attain to write or read intelligently. ¹⁸²

The author’s comment highlights one of the key differences between the education of girls and boys in this period. Over the course of their whole education boys would have almost certainly been taught by a greater variety of teachers in formal institutions where there were systems in place to chart student progress. It was more likely that their failure to learn would attract attention. For example, the school run by the London Brewers Company in Hertfordshire tested the boys who entered their institution on their ability to read in 1689, 1695 and 1708. These records reveal that ten per cent of the four year olds, a third of the five year old boys and half of the six year olds could read, taught either by their mothers or a schooldame. ¹⁸³ The school then had to ensure that those who could not read were taught to do so before beginning the Grammar school curriculum proper. John Urmston’s complaint in the quote above that boys were too often left to be taught reading by their Masters had some basis in fact. Most children did come to school unable to read, despite the general expectation that they should be able to do so before entering.

For girls in contrast, meeting with a poor quality governess, or overwhelmed and under skilled Schoolmistress in their early years may indeed have left them in Urmston’s words “so imperfect in their English.”¹⁸⁴ For poorer girls in particular it was much less likely that they would enter an institution like the Brewers school after a period spent with a schooldame or their mother, be tested on their literacy level, and then taught to read well if it was found they could not. The contrast between the number of teachers, and the level of qualifications held by those teachers between boys and girls held true in very wealthy households and throughout the century. The governess Agnes Porter taught the youngest son of the Earl of Ilchester the basics of literacy and numeracy, along with his two sisters. The boy, however, had in addition to Miss Porter a tutor, the Revd Griffith, to teach

¹⁸³ Margaret Spufford, ‘Women Teaching Reading to Poor Children,’ in Opening the Nursery Door: Reading Writing and Childhood 1600-1900, eds. Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.
Latin. Although her diaries which detail the care and planning she put in to the lessons she taught demonstrate that the daughters of the Earl had in Agnes Porter a competent and committed teacher, no doubt many otherwise privileged girls of the period were not so fortunate, leading to the constant complaints about the dreadful ignorance and superficiality of women seen in the first chapter.

The general quality of schoolmistresses of this period is impossible to evaluate. Weeton and Porter in their writings demonstrate both their skill in English language, their awareness of the limited nature of their own education and knowledge and determination to improve. On the other hand, of six schoolteachers in London for whom we have records, as Peter Earle has shown, while all could read, at least one had a signature which suggested writing was not a common or easy thing for her to do. Despite the highly disparaging tone regarding female teachers, it is important to note that this text, and implicitly, others like it were intended to improve the abilities of those women who undertook the very early education of children on the basis that children really should be able to read and spell in English before entering Grammar School where they would be further educated by men, hence “[f]or this Reason, I supposes, so many Masters have endeavored to make that task more easie, and to enable Women to Teach not only their own Sex, but Boys also.” Girls perhaps stood to benefit far more from this endeavor than their brothers. Of course the writer of the text stood to gain the most at least financially, and he is a good sales man. After assuring the reader that children will have perfected their English at the conclusion of his course of study he recommends for the boys to be started in the Latin Grammar he himself has written.

In fact the writer seems to have a clearly thought out pedagogical theory behind his plan. The child is expected to do more than simply memorise syllables and words lists, and even when learning letters the writer provides aids to assist the child to learn by reasoning as

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much as by drilling. The first two pages after the preface contain two alphabets in a grid
with crude but effective wood cuts. The letters are given first in their lower case, then the
word is started with a capital, for example a is for Ass, with a recognisable image of the
same. What is significant about these two alphabets is that the child reading them would
not only be able to work out what the word was from the picture, but would also hear two
different sounding a’s, the short ‘a’ in Ass and the longer ‘ar’ sound in Archer in the
second alphabet.

The text is set out as a series of rules with questions and answers following on grammar.
This Socratic method of teaching is meant to develop understanding as much as rote
knowledge, although given the age of the target audience it is doubtful how developed that
understanding could be even for the most able students. A sample rule and question section
for example:

‘When vowels come together in the Middle of a word of two or more syllables they
must be parted.
M – Must they always be parted?
S – No
M-When must they not be parted?
S- When they are Diphthongs.\(^{189}\)

The text here does seem to be a little confused as to the age of the children being taught, or
perhaps the chapters on grammar are designed for older children, for previously before
launching in lists of one syllable word the author advises the teacher in a note it “would not
be amiss to make him understand the Meaning of the Word; and if he doth not remember,
to hint at the Thing signified: as for Hand to touch the same.”\(^{190}\) The words listed are fairly
simple everyday vocabulary with which all but toddlers would be familiar. It is difficult to
picture a toddler talking intelligently about diphthongs.

\(^{189}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{190}\) Ibid., 8.
After the word lists and grammar exercises there is a standard and fairly rigorous grounding in morality and practical religion based on bible texts. The language and prayers were ones the child would have heard and been expected to say regularly, specifically, the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, Grace before and After Meat are helpfully included. The biblical texts that provide practice reading material include the Sermon on the Mount, and several biblical chapters dealing with injunctions against anger, calling your brother a fool, adultery and turning the other cheek. For a teacher or mother this text would have provided a comprehensive plan and set of materials to follow and use when teaching children to read. If the instructor was successful in ensuring the child’s attention it would most likely have been an effective plan as well.

In this period reading was practically the only subject taught to poor girls in the charity schools, along with sewing, knitting and religious instruction. The formation of hardworking, devout and obedient servants was the primary aim of these schools. As Kenneth Charlton has commented in his book *Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern England*, “reading the Bible for oneself continued to be regarded as an essential part of religious education.”191 A detailed method is laid out in *Lessons for children historical and practical*, the fifth edition of which was published in 1734 and which gives insight in to both the skills and values charity schools were attempting to cultivate in their students. 192 The language, although aimed at primary school children of poor backgrounds is relatively sophisticated, sentences are long and the vocabulary is wide. For example in retelling the story of Noah, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, although the aim is clearly to simplify the biblical language words such as ‘prevailed’ and ‘interceded’ are used.193 The moral or lesson of the story is clearly spelt out to the child so that there is no possibility of either confusion or potentially subversive independent analysis.

192 Francis Fox, *Lessons for Children Historical and Practical; to which are added, some prayers, and the chief rules for spelling and dividing words*, 5th ed. (London, 1734).
193 Ibid., 24-25.
Charlton discusses how the reformed Protestant belief that the scriptures were both true and plain in their meaning to all believers inevitably caused problems when the serving maid’s ‘clear’ understanding of a passage conflicted with the ministers. He points out that Mary Astell’s complaint that because women were not taught to read scripture in the original languages they had no way of knowing when translation and commentaries were distorting the message, is an example of the way in which women were increasingly becoming critical of the way in which they were taught and allowed to practice their faith. Lessons stringently points out the moral, perhaps to guard against this possibility. In discussing the story of Joseph and his brothers the moral is, young readers are informed, that parents should not favour particular children. For although, “[p]arents no doubt may, and it is reasonable that they should, love those children best who by their towardly and virtuous behavior deserve best; but great care must be taken not to give any outward and visible marks and tokens of this love.”

The text includes a series of lesson plans followed by suitable material for children to practice on. In the preface the author mentions a debate currently running about whether children would be better able to read English if they were not kept to the Bible but allowed to read a wider range of books in their mother tongue. It is a view the author apparently endorses, since to encourage students’ wider reading he includes a catalogue of books, most religious, aimed at poor adults which presumably he considered simple enough for children to understand.

The lesson plans are designed to progressively teach children, phonetically, how to read and spell in English. Implicit in the lesson plans is the assumption that children’s entertainment or interest is not essential to their learning, showing that for many teachers John Locke’s exhortations that pleasure for essential for children if they were to truly master a subject, which translates today to the focus of engaging student interest, was then,

194 Charlton, Women Religion and Education, 88.
195 Fox, Lessons for Children Historical and Practical, 32.
as now, as often ignored in practice as lauded in theory. In this scheme of study, children first learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet. Following this is a complete list of English syllables, broken up into several lessons, where children memorised the separate sounds which made up the English language and the written combination of letters which corresponded to those sounds. Following several weeks of repeating essentially meaningless syllables, came learning to read similar one syllable words grouped together, for example saw and maw. It is only after this very thorough grounding in phonetics that the actual meaning of language becomes important, with a set of lessons consisting of more difficult single syllable words grouped according to subject. The first subject is the ‘world’, for example children had to sound out the words ‘ground’ and ‘earth’.  

It is hard to believe that a group of six to twelve year olds, the usual age for charity schools, would have found this introduction to the joys of reading particularly joyful. It would, however, have been a swift and effective means to enable them to learn to read quickly. It is worth noting that many governments and educators advocate a return to literacy teaching based more on phonetics and less on the much more enjoyable for student and teacher, whole language method. Essentially this method assumes children can and should learn to read in a similar way children learn to talk, by absorbing language for a rich range of texts and deciphering the meanings of words and symbols from illustrations, context and repetition. This method leads, it is argued, to fluent readers who read easily and for pleasure, and it is, as Jajdelska argues only in this period that it became possible, after the growth of cheap and attractive print. It is generally considered possible, however, only if there truly is a rich range of suitable texts for students to be exposed to and as the introduction to Lessons for Children indicate for most of the poor in the

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196 Seth Lerer, *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 25. The actual form of these kind of early primers seems to have remained remarkably constant. Seth Lerer describes a Greek scroll from the third century BC which seems to be essentially similar in basic structure to the primers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. This scroll had alphabets, word lists organised into syllable groups followed by short texts students could practice reading.


eighteenth century, the Bible, along with perhaps one or two devotional works or practical almanacs were the only texts likely to be owned.

Even in a text such as this which explicitly aims to broaden the reading matter available to the young and poor the Bible is still essentially the only content being taught, the only content considered suitable or safe. The emphasis on inculcating correct reverence for God is firmly linked to the goal of shaping good servants who knew their place and duties in the social hierarchy. After the lessons consisting of monosyllable words there is a truncated, simplified retelling of Genesis, how God created the world and Adam and Eve in paradise, without the details of the days of creation but with an emphatic moral at the end aimed squarely at a charity school audience, “[h]ence may we learn that no one ought to be idle since God appointed Work for our first parents before the fall.”

The plan set out *Lessons for Children* seems to be a fairly conservative and typical example of what a text aimed at teaching children to read looked like. It is in all senses a teacher’s aid and text book imposed upon students rather than a text children could pick up and engage with themselves. An earlier work, published in 1694 expresses frustration with the way texts designed for children seem to be so dense and lacking in pleasure:

I am not ignorant of the swarms of books for children already printed... Yet could I never find one, that for both Matter and Method was wholly suited to that Tender Age. I have sufficiently experienced the effects of large leaves, close stuff with things not understood by children, and many times in a black print as if the design had been to frighten them from rather than allure them to learning.

Even the title of this text, *A Playbook for Children* seeks to break the mould of the difficult struggle to learn to read by being drilled in spelling, and promises to be a delight as much

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200 Anon. *A Play-book for children to allure them to read assoon [sic] as they can speak plain composed of small pages on purpose not to tire children, and printed with a fair and pleasant letter, the matter and method plainer and easier than any yet extant* (London, 1694), preface.
as an education. Despite this, *A Play-book for Children* follows essentially the same set of lesson plans as *Lessons for Children*, a clear example of how conservative educational change can be. *Playbook* begins with two alphabets, one capital and one lower case. Following this are vowels and simple syllables, for example, ab ac ad, then diphthongs, ai au ei eu oi ou, and improper diphthongs. Then, like the more dourly religious *Lessons* are words of one, two and three, four and five syllables helpfully broken up, for example chari-ty and trans-sub-stan-ci-ated.  

What marks this text apart from *Lessons* is not then the pedagogy, which is essentially the same, but the approach taken with the reading matter and format of the text itself. After the standard lessons in spelling there follows a set of alphabets arranged around topics of genuine interest to children then and now. The first is about food, ‘A’ promises earthly and immediate rewards to children who learn to read well, ‘Apples are for children who know their letters’, along with useful information, ‘lemons are sour but good to eat with sugar.’ After food comes a bird alphabet which likewise imparts knowledge of the natural world while providing reading practice ‘Vulture is a great bird …that eats smaller birds.’ The last alphabet deals with beasts, ‘A Cow is a tame beast that is milked twice a day to feed children that h’ant any teeth.’ Unlike the very adult tone of *Lessons* the focus is on children themselves, things they would be familiar with and interested in. The text is short and does not contain any biblical passages, as the preface shows it aimed to be a book children would not be intimidated by. Unlike *Lessons*, it is aimed at a wealthier segment of society, children who would know what sugar actually tasted like and who were not being trained for a life of hard and constant work.

It is worth noting that women also created their own teaching aids. Sadly, few of such collections survive but one example created by Jane Johnson for her children in the early

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202 Charlton, *Women Religion and Education*, 82. Hans Holbein was the first to popularise illustrated alphabets in the 1530s, often however the subject was religious in nature as in Benjamen Harris’s *Prodestant Tutor* of 1679, where the couplet for A is ‘In Adams fall we sinned all.’
half of the eighteenth century, described by Shirley Brice Heath, demonstrates how mothers took the basic structure set out in the primers and created their own texts and aids to help them teach their children their letters. The Johnson collection includes ten sets of alphabet cards, word and verse cards organised around syllables and a book signed and dated by Jane Johnson in 1745 with word lists arranged around syllables and religious lessons. A separate book contains an alphabet and syllable lists. While it would seem that the essential method Johnson was using was similar to that of the Spelling books, Johnson’s books and cards were much more beautifully made with cut out illustrations and backed with gilt paper. Also, there are cards in the collection which are specific to the location in which the Johnson children live, for example a picture of swans has the description, “[t]wo tame swans swimming in the River, they are the property of George Wrighte Esquire.” Heath suggests the cards were made with the intention of not only providing early reading material but the basis of storytelling games and mementoes for the family as they grew up.

These kind of aids show the amount of time, thought and skill put in to the early education of their children by mothers. Here also is further evidence establishing morality and teaching literacy are inseparable, the final page of the book dated 1745 addresses her son directly:

My son, so as you live never forget the following Rule, Always do unto every One as You would they should do Unto You. Remember this when I am dead and gone.

It is probable that children were as likely then as they are now to fully follow these kind of moral strictures. However, this kind of direct maternal instruction in the basis of Christian

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206 Heath, ‘Child’s Play,’ in eds. Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Wilson, Opening the Nursery Door, 22.
207 Ibid., 28.
208 Ibid., 22.
religion, mixed with charming ‘toys’ and ‘books’ written particularly for one child, would be a much more powerful and effective instructional aid than the dry list, chapters and general interpretations of the Bible outlined in texts such as in *Lessons*. Like those published texts, Jane Johnson was just as intent on shaping character and faith along with teaching reading. As Heath writes, “Jane Johnson like others of her time and station, linked the ability to read with increases in judgment, rationality, will-power and knowledge. These qualities of character derived from access to accumulated wisdom from the past as well as the sharpened insight gained through reading and writing.”

Luckily for the children, not all reading material aimed at young children who had only just mastered their letters was as dreary as that provided in the primers. *The Death and Burial of Cock Robin* is an example of a ‘penny history,’ a style of text which luminaries such as Richard Steele described seeing children read and enjoy early in the century, and which were far more suited to and engaging for beginning readers. It is cheerfully gruesome, includes pictures which show the action and characters and has simple, repetitive and poetic language. The narrative builds gradually and follows the rites of a funeral, something children would already be familiar with, and so would be able to guess words and remember the action over several readings. Importantly words are repeated so that children would be more likely to memorise and recognise particular words, such as ‘Robin’:

*Who kill’d Cock Robin?*
*I, says the Sparrow,*
*With my bow and arrow,*
*And I killed Cock Robin.*

The growth of a literature specifically written for children, either for education or entertainment, particularly for the education and entertainment of girls, was a significant

aspect of the period.\textsuperscript{212} In fact there was practically no educational and entertaining literature directly aimed at young girls until the publication of Sarah Fielding’s \textit{The Governess}.\textsuperscript{213} In combining instruction and entertainment in fiction aimed at young girls Fielding was attempting something new. Before the eighteenth century there was very little literature specifically written for children, either with a view to assist them in gaining reading skills or for their pleasure. This did not mean that there was not a type of literature more likely to be found ‘in the hands’ of children.\textsuperscript{214} Autobiographies such as that of John Bunyan, describe how chapbook romances such as \textit{Bevis of Southampton} were read by children for pleasure along with \textit{The Seven Champions of Christendom} which dealt with the acts of St George, \textit{Jack the Giant Killer, Robin Hood}, and ballad reading, all of which fiction reading the writer looked back on with horror.\textsuperscript{215}

Elspeth Jajdelska argues convincingly that the growth in texts which children had available to read privately for pleasure or instruction over this period lead to a great increase in fluent literacy.\textsuperscript{216} As Kenneth Charlton had pointed out in his earlier work, however, this shift was gradual and even for highly literate people hearing sermons and having ‘good’ books and the bible read aloud at home was a key element of their religious schooling. “Even for the literate minority, listening remained a major means of acquiring religious knowledge”\textsuperscript{217}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ruth MacDonald writing in 1982 comments on the lack of notice given to children’s literature in late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the perversity of this given that the period “is the basis for the literature which follows in later centuries and because there are so many “firsts” during this period.” MacDonald, \textit{Literature for Children}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Lerer, \textit{Children’s Literature}, 2. Seth Lerer points out that it is always important to distinguish between a definition of children’s literature as literature written for children, and one that defines children’s literature as literature read by children. Although it is useful to examine the kinds of texts children read themselves, even if those texts were not intended for them, in a study on the history of reading, since this thesis is concerned essentially with the way in which the changing beliefs and teaching practices of adults affected girls, I have focused on texts explicitly intended for the young.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Jajdelska, \textit{Silent Reading}, 21-23.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Charlton, \textit{Women Religion and Education}, 77.
\end{itemize}
Any writer on education in this period felt the need to be specific about the kinds of books girls should be allowed and encouraged to read. Personal and purposeful reading for learning, particularly religious learning, was expected of women throughout their lives. More to Bunyan’s later taste were works such A Token for Children, whose opening address to parents is anything but sentimental about the innocence of its audience “they are not too little to go to hell.”218 The didactic purpose of this work shines through in every sentence. The stories in this volume revolve around thirteen Godly children who experience a spiritual conversion early in life, usually by hearing a sermon. Their holiness is demonstrated by the way in which they become exceedingly aware of their sinful nature and their palpable fear of being out of God’s grace. These children all die young, the first girl after a protracted and painful sickness at the age of fifteen, yet they are all confident of heaven and happy to be leaving this world for the next.

Perhaps the content that is most shocking to the modern reader is the way in which the reality of death and likelihood of dying in childhood is urged upon the small reader as a motivation to pray and be good. The child is told there is every likelihood they might be the next child to grow sick and die and that if they are not in a state of Grace they will surely burn in hell for all eternity. The second thing that strikes the modern reader is the way in which each story is so formulaic and repetitive. The language is relatively simple for a young reader to follow, but compared to the adventure of Bevis it is little wonder why as a child Bunyan was more likely to be found with a chapbook than a devotional work. This devotional work specifically written with a small child in mind as reader was rare in the period. More commonly children were expected to read or have read to them the religious tracts of their parents. A Little Book for Little Children published around 1671 recommended for further reading, along with others, the Plain Mans Pathway to Heaven, the works of Baxter and Foxes’ Book of Martyrs.219 While it is clear how the dramatic and

218 James Janeway, A Token for Children: being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives and joyful deaths of several young children (London, 1676), 4.
219 Charlton, Women Religion and Education, 81-82. Charlton discusses how the detailed illustrations in works such as Foxes Book of Martyrs helped to supplement and support the oral sermons and bible readers in forming the understanding and knowledge of the majority illiterate adherents of the Protestant faith.
relatively simple narrative structure of the *Martyrs* would be accessible and potentially enjoyable *Plain Mans Pathway* and Baxter are far less accessible or comprehensible.

Before the growth of a literature specifically designed for them, the texts gentry children read for pleasure were the same chapbook romances of that of their mothers and their social inferiors. The opening of the 1724, seventh edition of *Parismus* recommends itself to two key audiences, “[a] History it is that has found acceptance with Persons of all Degrees, whose Pages have many times been Drowned with Ladies Tears” and “cannot, for anything I conceive miss of a kind Entertainment, especially with the Younger Sort.” There is none of the deep suspicion of the corroding effects of fiction on morality here that is seen in the recommendations of the Puritan authors. Likewise the adventures of *Bevis*, which in the 1630 edition is written in somewhat clunky rhyme, opens with the knight’s father battling to the death alone in the forest against a sinister and cowardly Prince, who as the lover of his much younger wife, has been summoned by her “that my Lord be there beheaded/ and send it me for a present.”

The ballad of St George for England, dated 1693 although not specifically aimed at children has the adventurous and imaginative narrative combined with simple and easily remembered language that would have made it an excellent text for children learning to read. What attraction these texts offered for young boys is still clear today. Arguments were made that these romances taught boys the values of courage and knightly honor by some educational and conduct writers, including Hannah Wooley, but in general they were viewed with scepticism.

One fictional text which retained its status as a particularly suitable and safe work for young scholars from the medieval period onwards and across religious and political lines was Aesop’s *Fables*. First translated into English in 1484 by Caxton and progressively added to and altered, by the late seventeenth and eighteenth century these fables were moulded to fit the changing political sensibilities of parents. Roger L’Estrange, who was a

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member of the Tory party, had his version which included 500 stories come under attack in 1722 when Samuel Croxall, a Whig published *Fables of Aesop and Others* to ensure proper feeling in the young. Moral fables were generally considered much safer and of greater use than the simple entertainment and dubious virtues of the romances. Plutarch’s *Lives* was also widely read and given to children in the expectation that it would both entertain and form character. Often what we would consider text books included moral fables as teaching aids, as for example Mary Cooper’s spelling book *The Childs New Plaything* published in 1743 included some ancient stories.

There were attempts to make learning easy and pleasant for children, along with a recognition that the traditional structure of the primer and spelling book, with its rote learning of syllables and dry reading matter was as likely to confuse children as instruct. A key work of the late seventeenth century *Orbis Sensualim* was written by Johann Comenius in Dutch and translated into English by Charles Hoole, a grammar school teacher in 1659. Its aim was to both guide the student in learning to read well in English, and provide an introduction to Latin. The text is written in both. This text is a work full of pictures, all the words and ideas are clearly and simply illustrated on the basis that children must understand truly and concretely what is meant by a written word, ‘tree’ for example, before they can learn to read well. The more traditional primers simply trained children in recognising the letters and sounds that made up the word. The second aim of the text, however, “[t]o entice witty children to it, that they may not conceit it a torment to be in the School but dainty –fair” is a further example of a push towards a more child focused and practical view of what worked in the education of the very young.

\[225\] “For to pack up many words in memory, of things not conceived in the mind is to fill the head with empty imaginations, and to make the learner more to admire their multitude, and variety (and thereby to become discouraged) then to care to treasure them up, in hopes to gain more knowledge of what they mean.” Johann Comenius, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, trans. Charles Hoole (London,1659), 9-10.
\[227\] Macdonald, *Literature for Children*, 49. Macdonald notes that this aim anticipated the ideas of John Locke by over thirty years.
Just as teaching to read was a central aspect of women’s roles as teachers, learning to read well and widely as students was an ability crucial to girls’ education. Literacy, then as now, is a skill which is valuable mainly because it allows, to a certain extent, a person to continue to educate and inform themselves throughout their lives. As such, the ability to read was one which enabled women, both as students and educators to inform and improve themselves. As has been shown in the previous chapter, for Nelly Weeton, her ability to read and write well was a crucial source of pleasure, and the main skill with which she supported herself.

Mothers, schooldames and governesses were deeply involved in education at the level of teaching children to read. This thesis attempts to deal with pedagogical practice as much as theory and ideology, and the texts examined in this chapter are perhaps the clearest window into the actual teaching practices of the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries. They were used by mothers and governesses to teach children to read within the family, and in schools. As can be seen in the example of teaching aids left by Jane Johnson, mothers took these basic techniques and actively adapted them to the interests and abilities of their own children. Although it is in some ways remarkable how stable the basic techniques of teaching reading through spelling out syllables and learning Bible verses remained throughout the period, there was an increasing recognition that in order to be effective, children must enjoy their lessons. This was a small, but significant, shift towards a more engaging pedagogy.
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the changes which took place from the mid seventeenth to mid eighteenth century in the education of girls by examining a wide range of texts. In looking at the early spelling books, schemes of study such as that written by Fennelon and more philosophical works such as written by Astell and Vives, as well as records left by women of their individual experiences as students and teachers, this thesis highlights, as much as possible, both the ideological debates taking place in the period and actual pedagogical practices. Overall, I have argued that these texts taken together show that over this period there was both an increase of interest in and serious attention paid to the education of girls, with women participating in the debate. Most importantly, the conception of women as being inherently less intellectually able than men was challenged.

Using these texts together would seem to support the more positive and nuanced view of education for girls in the period which has been developed by historians such as Michele Cohen, Kenneth Charlton and Susan Sked.228 For although the sources show there was considerable continuity in the period in terms of curriculum and teaching practices, two important developments occurred in the period. First the topic of girls’ education became one which serious writers began to attend to. The work of Fennelon, Steele and Rollin all demonstrate an opening up of the discussion surrounding education for girls. In the spelling books, writers like John Urmston demonstrated an awareness both of the practical needs of mothers in their role as early educators for good teaching aids, and also of the greater vulnerability of girls to meeting bad teachers and consequently being left, “too often Untaught; or at least, are so imperfect in their English, that they do scarce ever attain to write or read intelligently.”229

Second, there was increasingly a sense that the traditional curriculum of reading, history, housekeeping, French, music, dancing and most importantly religion, should be taught with more vigour, depth and seriousness than they had previously been granted, in order to ensure that girls were not bored at school or idle at home, and that women would have internal resources to fall back on in adulthood. While this was not an attempt to change or expand the basic role of women, or their economic and legal position in society, arguably it was an attempt to raise the importance of women’s traditional roles as wives, mothers and housekeepers by insisting that these roles required skill and knowledge to fulfill well. Crucially, the insistence that girls be taught interesting subjects thoroughly was a recognition of the basic intellectual needs and abilities of women. As has been seen across the texts examined here, those who argued for the improvement of girls’ schooling usually also argued for the basic equality of the sexes in terms of intelligence.

In the first chapter of this thesis I focused on examining texts written by men, beginning with Jeromes' letter to Laeta. I argued that while the protection of chastity remained the central aim of education, from the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century there was an increasing emphasis on ensuring girls had the skills they would need to run households effectively. Along with this there emerged a new concern that bright girls be stimulated by and interested in what they learned. The existence of sources written by women stating their own ideas on the subject in this period allowed comparisons to be drawn between male ideas about female education and the views of women themselves. In chapter two the frustrations and boredom experienced by those bright girls who had not had access to a rigorous schooling, along with the ways in which they sought to educate themselves and argue for a better education for the next generation were examined. These documents showed that women were acutely aware of the injustice and harm caused to themselves and other women by their limited schooling and the falsity of the belief that they were inherently less intelligent than men. In the third chapter I focus on the earliest level of education when very young children were taught to read. This was an area of education dominated by women as teachers, and the only one where they generally learned alongside their brothers as students.
Throughout this thesis, and especially in the last chapter, as far as possible actual teaching practices have been examined. The diaries of later eighteenth century teachers such as Weeton and Porter, and the ephemera which has been left by Jane Johnson show how women were deeply involved in the careful planning and execution of lessons with clearly thought through ideas about how best to teach children to read. Memorisation was key to learning, particularly in regard to learning how to read, with most of the Spelling Books essentially setting out chronological lessons for students to learn by rote. Despite this focus, the importance of ensuring a genuine love of learning be fostered in students was increasingly recognised in many texts, from Ashram’s description of the Lady Jane Grey to Fennelon’s insistence that girls truly understand their catechism, and be read suitable Bible stories as treats rather than be forced to read through long passages.

As the first person to write a comprehensive history of the education of women, Dorothy Gardner has pointed out that a most important development in the seventeenth century from a historian’s point of view, is the appearance of sources written by women on this topic. Women began themselves to write about and argue for particular kinds of institutions, curriculum and methods to address the needs of girls and adult women to have access to learning. Some of the strongest voices in this were women who, while emphatically not wanting to overturn established power structures, did feel and express a sense of their own need and desire for a proper, and interesting education.

Most of the writers I have examined in this thesis, both male and female, were arguing from traditional moral and religious viewpoints. At every point they were careful to emphasise the propriety of wives’ submission to husbands. Nonetheless, in arguing for a more rigorous and careful schooling for girls these authors conceptualised a sense of the intellectual equality and needs of women. The sources show that from the mid seventeenth to mid eighteenth centuries in England a discussion around the proper way to school girls began to open up, a discussion in which women actively participated, and new ideas and

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practices were considered while old ideologies were questioned. For girls with considerable intelligence and curiosity, this shift increased the possibility that they might, like their brothers, be taught to “ripen that Wit into Wisdom.”

Haywood, *Selections from the Female Spectator*, 122.