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Instructor: Leila S. May
THE GOVERNESS IS A FAMILIAR FIGURE TO THE READER OF VICTORIAN NOVELS. Immortalized in *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*, she has made frequent appearances as the heroine of many lesser-known novels. And innumerable governesses appear as little more than a standard furnishing in many a fictional Victorian home. While twentieth-century acquaintance with the governess may come purely from the novel, the Victorians themselves found her situation and prospects widely discussed, frivolously in *Punch*, and more seriously in many leading journals of the time, so often in fact that one author on the subject of female labor in Great Britain suggested that readers were "wearied... with the incessant repetition of the dreary story of spirit-broken governesses." The governess's life is described in what seem today to be over-dramatized accounts of pauperized gentle-women, "drifted waifs and strays from 'the upper and middle classes,'" who find their way to the workhouse and insane asylum. And there are condemnations of these accounts as "comic pathos" and "a perfectly preposterous quantity of nonsense." Books on the subject of women as workers, published in growing numbers throughout the Victorian period, devote a large amount of space to the governess.

The Victorians' interest in the governess went beyond that of entertainment or economic analysis. She was the subject of charitable endeavors, and at least one appeal reveals the sense that the dilemma of the governess was a problem that was expected to touch donors personally: "There is probably no one who has not some relative or cherished friend either actually engaged in teaching, or having formerly been so engaged." Lady Eastlake spoke of "the cause of governesses..."
and urged in 1848 their "earnest and judicious befriending." In London the Governesses' Benevolent Institution and Queen's College were founded to provide several sorts of assistance.

In terms of numbers alone, this attention to the governess seems somewhat excessive. There were about 25,000 governesses in England in 1851, but there were over 750,000 female domestic servants, not to mention women employed in industry. And when one moves from simple statistics to the conditions of employment of women in this period, the suffering of the governess seems pale and singularly undramatic when compared with that of women in factories and mines. Victorian interest in the governess could not have stemmed from her political importance, for she had none. As militant as women may have been by the turn of the century, there is no trace of militance in the ranks of mid-nineteenth-century governesses. Moreover, the governess had no social position worthy of attention. She was at best unenvied and at worst the object of mild scorn, and all she sought was survival in genteel obscurity.

Modern treatment of the Victorian governess, when it is not set in the framework of literary analysis, takes two forms: either it is a study of the occupation itself without reference to the larger social scene, or the role of the governess is considered within the context of the movement for women's education and women's rights. In our interest in later historical developments, we tend to ignore the immediate social context of the governess's occupation and the ways in which the dilemmas and contradictions of her employment may have helped to drive women's education and women's employment out of the home. By examining the governess's situation within the Victorian family, we may approach a better understanding of how the family functioned and of the values, problems, and fears of the Victorian middle class.

In mid-nineteenth century usage, the term "governess" could refer to a woman who taught in a school, a woman who lived at home and travelled to her employer's house to teach (called a "daily governess"), or a woman who lived in her employer's home and who taught the children and served as a companion to them. The subject of this study is the governess who lived with the family, sometimes referred to as the "private governess." In considering her intimate position within the family, we may see most clearly the problems of the governess's place in Victorian society.

The employment of a gentlewoman as a governess in a middle-class family served to reinforce and perpetuate certain Victorian values.
But inherent in the employment of a lady was a contradiction of the very values she was hired to fulfill. The result was a situation of conflict and incongruity for both the governess and the family, a conflict which called forth a variety of responses from governess, family, and society.

From at least Tudor times the governess had been part of the households of the upper classes. In the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of governesses were employed by the English middle classes. The governess was a testimony to the economic power of the Victorian middle-class father, as were servants, carriages, and the other "paraphernalia of gentility." Although the governess was often behind the scenes and not as conspicuous as other items of genteel equipage, there were ways in which the family could indicate her presence in the home and display her as a symbol of economic power, breeding, and station. Drawing room conversations about the governess served to bring her into public "view." If she was foreign, her exotic history might be discussed. Even complaining about a governess was a way of "showing her off."

The governess was also an indicator of the extent to which a man's wife was truly a lady of leisure. The function of the mother had traditionally been, in addition to housewifely duties, that of educator of the children. Both boys and girls in the middle-class family began their education with their mother. Boys were later sent to school or a tutor was hired for them, but girls continued to learn their roles as women from their mothers. Unlike cooking, cleaning, and scrubbing, the education of children was hardly classifiable as manual labor. For this reason the employment of a governess was even more a symbol of the movement of wives and mothers from domestic to ornamental functions.

Victorian parents sought a woman who could teach their daughters the genteel accomplishments which were the aims of female education. More important, they sought a gentlewoman. But the new ethos of the ideal woman was that of a woman of leisure and, no matter how occupied a lady might have been at home, an outside career was another matter—in Frances Power Cobbe's words "a deplorable dereliction." If work in the home was thought to "pervert women's sympathies, detract from their charms," work for pay brought down the judgment of society and testified to the inferior position of both the wage-earner and her family. Sophia Jex-Blake's father told her that if she accepted a salary she "would be considered mean and illiberal, . . . accepting wages that belonged to a class beneath you in social rank." Others put it more strongly: "Society has thought fit to assert that the woman who works for herself loses her social position." The women of

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the middle classes were very consistent in their attitude toward being
paid: "they would shrink from it as an insult." The image of the lady as
a creature of leisure, enclosed within a private circle of family and
friends and completely supported by father or husband, was reinforced
by the ban on paid employment — a ban so strong that many who wrote
for publication, even though writing at home, did so under pseudonyms,
or signed their work simply "By a Lady."

The availability of "ladies" to teach the children of the middle
classes depended on the one exception to the rule that a well-bred
woman did not earn her own living — if a woman of birth and education
found herself in financial distress, and had no relatives who could
support her or give her a home, she was justified in seeking the only
employment that would not cause her to lose her status. She could find
work as a governess.

The position of governess seems to have been appropriate be-
cause, while it was paid employment, it was within the home. The
governess was doing something she might have done as a wife under
better circumstances. She avoided the immodest and unladylike
position of public occupation. The literature of the 1840's suggests
that there was a sudden increase in the number of gentlewomen with-
out financial support in the years following the Napoleonic wars.
Middle-class writers attributed the flood of distressed gentlewomen to
"the accidents of commercial and professional life" to which the middle
classes were subject. From the research of twentieth-century historians
it is clear that the number of single middle-class women in need of
employment was a product not only of the unstable conditions of
business in those years but also arose out of the emigration of single
men from England to the colonies, from the differential mortality rate
which favored women, and from the tendency for men in the middle
classes to marry later. But the Victorians' belief that economic distress
had led to the declining position of these women suggests that problems
of social and economic uncertainty were of more immediate concern
to them. The Victorian stereotype of the governess, which explained
why a lady sought employment, was of a woman who was born and bred
in comfort and gentility and who, through the death of her father or
his subjection to financial ruin, was robbed of the support of her
family and was driven to earn her own living.

A word should perhaps be included here about the possibility
of upward social mobility through occupation as a governess. There
are a few suggestions in the literature of the period that such attempts

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at social climbing were in fact taking place. Harriet Martineau, in an Edinburgh Review article in 1859, noted the practice of "tradesmen and farmers who educate their daughters for governesses" in the hope of raising their station in society. There is no way of assessing the extent to which this took place, but it is clear that the Victorian middle class regarded such mobility as undesirable. In the fiction of the period the governesses who were figures of evil or immorality were women of humble origins. Thackeray's Becky Sharp, for example, was the daughter of a poor artist and a French "opera-girl" who, in order to find employment, claimed origins in the French nobility. The wicked Miss Gwilt, in Wilkie Collins' Armadale, was an abandoned child whose origins were unknown and who was reared by a "quack" doctor and his wife. As will become clear later in this essay, the possibility of real upward mobility was a chimera. Indeed, employment as a governess was only of very limited use even in maintaining gentle status. It is sufficient here to note that however educated a girl from the "lower ranks" might be, she was still "ill-bred" in the eyes of those who made themselves judges of governesses. Conversely, however destitute a lady might be, she continued to be a lady.

We have been looking at the governess from the point of view of the family that employed her. Her own viewpoint was very different, of course. Once it was clear that she had to seek a post as governess, the task of finding a situation was taken up through a variety of channels. The first source of aid was the help of relatives and friends who might know of a family seeking a governess. If such help was not available or effective, a woman was forced to turn to public agencies - newspaper advertisements or a placement service. Newspaper advertising was disliked, partly because of its public nature and partly because reputable employers were unlikely to utilize such a source. Experience with the falsification of letters of reference among servants obtained through newspapers had brought public advertising under suspicion. The Governesses' Benevolent Institution, established in 1843, provided a registry for governesses seeking employment, and many seem to have used the service.

Pay was notoriously low. Governesses were, of course, housed and fed, but they were expected to pay for such expenses as laundry, travel, and medical care. They had to dress appropriately, and it was wise for them to make their own provisions for unemployment and old age. A governess often tried to support a parent or a dependent sister or brother as well. According to some estimates, pay ranged from £15
to £100 a year. The larger sum would only be applicable to the "highly educated lady" who could find a position in a very well-to-do family. The average salary probably fell between £20 and £45 a year. To give some meaning to these figures it will be useful to compare them with typical salaries of other groups. The fairest comparison is probably with that of other domestic employees since they were also paid partly by maintenance:

<table>
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<th>Job</th>
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<th>Martineau, 1859</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>£40-£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>£15-£16</td>
<td>£12-£18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housemaid</td>
<td>£11-£11/13</td>
<td>£10-£14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursemaid</td>
<td>£11-£12</td>
<td>£5-£10</td>
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Mrs. Sewell, writing in 1865, equated the salary of nursery governess with that of lady's maid, that of an informed but not accomplished governess with that of footman, and that of a highly educated governess with that of a coachman or butler. If board was worth £30 per year, then governesses were earning £50 to £95 a year (not including the cost of housing). A minimum income for a genteel style of life may be estimated at £150-£200 for a single person. It would seem that, under the best of circumstances, a governess's income left her on the very edge of gentility, with no margin for illness or unemployment. Many governesses, between jobs, ill, or too old to work, turned to the "temporary assistance . . . afforded privately and delicately" through the Governesses' Benevolent Institution.

The duties of a governess in a household were as varied as the salary she was paid. In some families, like those of Frances Power Cobbe and Edmund Gosse, the governess had set hours for lessons and her remaining time was free. The Thackerays' governess acted as a chaperone, accompanying her pupil to French class. Often governesses of adolescent girls would accompany them shopping, read aloud to them while they did fancy sewing, or simply sit in the background to watch over their social activities. Constant supervision of pupils seems to have been a common duty of governesses, and would have kept them busy all day, leaving little time for a life of their own. The constant supervision of children and young women resulted from the belief of many parents that indolence and lack of supervision might lead to "immorality."

The difficulties which governesses had with their young charges were a well-known occupational hazard. A frequent theme of novels is the mistreatment and disrespect directed toward the governess by
children, and her lack of authority over them and the failure of the
mother to cooperate in discipline. Evidence about the problems of
non-fictional governesses, though sparse, suggests that the novelistic
theme was not unrealistic. In the Stanley family's correspondence, for
example, there is a casual reference to the scratches and bruises which
one of the children inflicted on the governess and the nurse.36

Occupational problems did not end with finding a position
and coming to terms with the duties and the children. A governess
always faced the danger of unemployment, either because her work
with the children was finished or because her employers were dis-
satisfied with her. Inadequate preparation for teaching and faulty
placement practices were often to blame for the frequent hiring and
firing of governesses.37 The aristocratic practice of continuing to support
domestic servants who had outlived their usefulness after long service
was not often extended to aged governesses in middle-class families.
Long service was much less the rule, and paternalism was expensive.
In the event of illness or old age and inability to work, the governess
faced the prospect of charity, such as that provided by the Governesses'
Benevolent Institution in the form of small annuities for retired gov-
ernesses. The number was limited, however, and reports of goveresses
in workhouses or asylums were not uncommon.38

In many ways the situation of a domestic servant in the nine-
teenth century differed very little from that of a governess. But there
were no crusades for nursemoids or domestic servants. And in spite of
similar work situations, the stereotype of the down-trodden, pathetic
governess stands in sharp distinction to that of the warm, jolly nanny
who won the affection of her charges and often the sincere regard of
her employers.

Occupational conditions seem not to have been the fundamental
source of anxiety for the governess and her middle-class employers.
The difficulty seems to have been rooted in her special social position
rather than in the material facts. An examination of the social circum-
cstances of a governess's life and the way that life fitted into the middle-
class social structure and system of values reveals a tension that cannot
be explained in terms of hours or wages.

One sensitive observer of the Victorian social scene made the
following assessment of a governess's situation: "the real discomfort
of a governess's position in a private family arises from the fact that it

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is undefined. She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant—but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her."

The observation is an acute one because it defines the problem as one of status and role. But one can go further and suggest that the real discomfort arose not from lack of definition but from the existence of contradictory definitions of the governess's place in society. In every aspect of the governess's occupational situation these contradictions in her social status are apparent.

As we have seen, the sine qua non of a governess's employment in the Victorian family was her social status as a lady. To quote Elizabeth Eastlake:

the real definition of a governess, in the English sense, is a being who is our equal in birth, manners, and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth. Take a lady, in every meaning of the word, born and bred, and let her father pass through the gazette [bankruptcy], and she wants nothing more to suit our highest beau ideal of a guide and instructress to our children."

The governess is described here as an exception to the rule that ladies did not work for a living and, in spite of her loss of financial resources (and leisure), she retains a "lady's" status. But paid employment did bring a "lady" down in the world.

The Victorian "leisured classes" were, in part, defined in opposition to the "working classes," not because of the work or leisure of the men—for almost all of them worked—but by the leisure of the women. As one fictional uncle said (in Wilkie Collins' No Name) about his two well-bred, genteel, but technically illegitimate nieces, as he robbed them of their inheritance: "Let them, as becomes their birth, gain their bread in situations." And, as Mrs. Ellis put it: "It is scarcely necessary in the present state of society to point out... the loss of character and influence occasioned by living below our station." Victorians continued to insist that the work of governess was an exception to the "theory of civilised life in this and all other countries... that the women of the upper and middle classes are supported by their male relatives: daughters by their fathers, wives by their husbands. If a lady has to work for her livelihood, it is universally considered to be a misfortune, an exception to the ordinary rule." But their own definitions were too potent, and too important to them.

In the paragraph quoted earlier Elizabeth Eastlake says that the truly important components of a woman's social status are those related

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to birth and education and that the question of wealth is only minor. But in the same article she seems to reverse her position when she says: "There is no other class which so cruelly requires its members to be, in birth, mind, and manners, above their station, in order to fit them for their station." And, later, Lady Eastlake reverts to her earlier position and states emphatically that the governess is "a needy lady." This contradiction, stated, or implied, is very evident in mid-century writing about the governess's social position. Mrs. Sewell, for example, quotes a governess who says, "My friends think I am lowered in social position and they are correct." But Mrs. Sewell continues to call the governesses "ladies" and to discuss their gentility and social position in terms that suggest no loss of status. Sociologists call this conflict in the assessment of a person's social characteristics "status incongruence." The status incongruence of the Victorian governess was more than a matter of conflicting notions about the propriety of paid employment for a "lady." It reached into the operations of everyday life.

Earlier it was suggested that the home was the ideal place for a gentlewoman to be employed because she remained in her proper environment — but such employment was, in fact, an aggravation of her incongruent status. While employment in a middle-class home was intended to provide a second home for the governess, her presence there was evidence of the failure of her own middle-class family to provide the protection and support she needed. The structure of the household, too, pointed to the governess's anomalous position. She was a lady, and therefore not a servant, but she was an employee, and therefore not of equal status with the wife and daughters of the house. The purposes of her employment contributed further to the incongruence of her position. She was hired to provide the children, and particularly the young women of the family, with an education to prepare them for leisurely gentility. But she had been educated in the same way, and for the same purpose, and her employment became a prostitution of her education, of the values underlying it, and of her family's intentions in providing it. Her function as a status symbol of middle-class gentility also perverted her own upbringing. She was educated to be a "nosegay" to adorn her "papa's drawing room," and as a governess she had sold herself as an ornament to display her employer's prestige.

An individual's social position is intimately related to patterns of action — to the way others behave toward him and the behavior expected of him — what social scientists call "roles." Incongruent social status results in confused and often contradictory behavior, both from
the individual and his or her associates. As Mrs. Sewell said of the governess, "No one knows exactly how to treat her." If we look at the behavior of the members of the family toward the governess from the perspective of her incongruent position, it becomes comprehensible as a statement-in-action of the contradictions they sensed.

The parents' treatment of the governess was characterized by great variability from family to family, and from day to day within a single family. In one breath, the mistress of the house might invite her to participate in some social event, and in the next would order her to work. Some families, like the senior Ruskins, included the governess in their circle when they entertained. Others required that she eat with the children unless it served their convenience to have her present at the dinner table. John Ruskin scolded his readers for their behavior toward their governesses:

what reverence do you show to the teachers you have chosen? Is a girl likely to think her own conduct, or her own intellect, of much importance, when you trust the entire formation of her character, moral and intellectual, to a person whom you let your servants treat with less respect than they do your housekeeper (as if the soul of your child were a less charge than jams and groceries), and whom you yourself think you confer an honour upon by letting her sometimes sit in the drawing-room in the evening?

It is hardly surprising that "According to general report, the position of an upper servant in England . . . is infinitely preferable to that of a governess." The servant had the advantage of an unambiguous position, and there was apparently no small comfort in "knowing one's place."

The behavior of the children tended to reveal and reflect the attitude of their parents. There was sometimes respect and affection, but more often there was disobedience, snobbery, and sometimes physical cruelty. A frequent theme of governess-novels was the triangle of governess, parents, and children, in which the unruly children pitted mother against governess and escaped the discipline due them. It is hazardous to assess from novelists' descriptions alone the extent to which these "trials of the governess" were a real problem, but the frequency with which articles and books dealt with the matter of how a governess should be treated, and urged parents to support her authority, suggests that the domestic dramas of the Victorian era had a firm foundation in English social life.

As Ruskin says, servants, no less than parents and children, responded to the incongruity of a lady-employee in the house. Lady
Eastlake observed that "The servants invariably detest her, for she is a dependant like themselves, and yet, for all that, as much their superior in other respects as the family they both serve." The governess usually had little power over the servants, and yet she was to be served by them. They resented her for acting like a lady, but would have criticized her for any other manner.

Her relationships with the world outside the family are a further extension of the conflicts within the family. She could expect to lose touch with the friends of her leisureed days, because she no longer had either the money or the time for them. Her relations with men and women alike were strained by her position:

She is a bore to almost any gentleman, as a tabooed woman, to whom he is interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex, and yet who is perpetually crossing his path. She is a bore to most ladies by the same rule, and a reproach too — for her dull, fagging, bread-and-water life is perpetually putting their pampered listlessness to shame.5

Particularly revealing here is the conflict between the gentleman's conduct toward ladies and toward governesses. There was no easy courtesy, attraction, or flirtation between a gentleman and a governess, because she was not his social equal. The pattern of relations between gentlemen and their female domestics was not fitting either, because the governess was not entirely an inferior,"

Reared and educated with the same values as her employers and their guests, the governess was the first to be aware of the incongruities of her social position. She tended to judge herself by prevailing social standards and was often uncertain about how she should behave. Two modes of response stand out. One was self-pity, what Frances Power Cobbe calls the "I-have-seen-better-days airs," and an appeal for the pity of those around her. The other was for the governess to present herself to the world with an over-supply of pride, to compensate for the fear of slight or rebuff which she felt. If a governess sought pity, she was a bore; if she was proud, she was criticized for a "morbid worldliness" which made her over-sensitive to neglect and disrespect.47

Given the inconsistent behavior of others toward her and her own confused self-estimate, it would not be surprising if Harriet Martineau was correct when she said that the governesses formed one of the largest single occupational groups to be found in insane asylums.48

What look like normal occupational hazards embellished with a Victorian taste for melodrama turn out to be products of conflict within

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a more complex social structure. The governess was caught in the crossfire of conflicting social definitions and roles. She and her employers alike sought, in a variety of ways, to solve the dilemma that faced them.

One way of escaping the contradiction of the "employed gentlewoman" was to deny, or at least minimize, the fact of employment. The governess often viewed her position this way. The central features of advertisements in the London Times, for example, were not the occupational dimensions of the work sought—qualifications, pay and the like—but the personal position involved. In the words of one advertisement, it was "a comfortable home, the first consideration" (1 January, 1847). The loss of a governess's home, where she should have had not only maintenance, but protection, led her to seek a surrogate home in her employer's house. For both governess and employer this constituted what can be called a retreat to a traditional mode of relationship. The governess entered the economic market-place, but the employer tried, in his home, to preserve her gentlewoman's position, traditionally defined in terms of personal and familial relationships and not in the contractual terms of modern employment. In the situation of incongruence, rejecting the realities of the modern role was a means, artificial perhaps, of reducing the dissonance of family and employee. Mrs. Sewell captured this attitude when she wrote: "A situation is offered them: a home, in which they are to be quite happy. They will be so well treated, and made entirely one of the family." In endorsing the attitude of friendliness and respect for governesses by employers, she warned that the alternative was that the governess would become a disinterested paid employee. 

The denial of a governess's womanliness—her sexuality—was another mode of reducing conflict. The sexual dimension of the relationship of governesses and men in the household is so rarely mentioned in Victorian literature that it is worthwhile quoting a lengthy and rather circuitous description of it from Governess Life. In the passage from which this excerpt is taken the author has been discussing a variety of serious breaches of conduct on the part of the governess:

Frightful instances have been discovered in which she, to whom the care of the young has been entrusted, instead of guarding their minds in innocence and purity, has become their corrupter—she has been the first to lead and to initiate into sin, to suggest and carry on intrigues, and finally to be the instrument of destroying the peace of families. . . .

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These are the grosser forms of sin which have been generally concealed from public notice... but none of the cases are imaginary ones, and they are but too well known in the circles amongst which they occurred. In some instances again, the love of admiration has led the governess to try and make herself necessary to the comfort of the father of the family in which she resided, and by delicate and unnoticed flattery gradually to gain her point, to the disparagement of the mother, and the destruction of mutual happiness. When the latter was homely, or occupied with domestic cares, opportunity was found to bring forward attractive accomplishments, or by sedulous attentions to supply her lack of them; or the sons were in some instances objects of notice and flirtation, or when occasion offered, visitors at the house.

This kind of conduct has led to the inquiry which is frequently made before engaging an instructress, "Is she handsome or attractive?" If so, it is conclusive against her [i.e., she is not employed].

Thus one of the stereotypes of the ideal governess came to be a homely, severe, unfeminine type of woman, and this is the image often conveyed in Punch. The trustworthy Miss Garth, in Wilkie Collins' No Name, had a hard-featured face, a lean, angular physique, and was known for her "masculine readiness and decision of movement." By contrast, Becky Sharp was an example of what havoc could be wrought by an attractive and unscrupulous governess in a family.

These efforts at adjustment through denial of a governess's employment or her femininity were, in large measure, unsatisfactory. A better solution was to avoid the issue of status-assessment by employing a foreign governess. Part of the popularity of foreign governesses was, of course, due to the superior training they had had on the continent and the advantage all of them had in teaching a foreign language. But their foreign origins also avoided the incongruence which existed when an English gentlewoman was a paid employee in an English home. As Elizabeth Sewell said:

As a general rule, foreign governesses are much more agreeable inmates of a house than English ones. Something of this may be owing to the interest excited by difference of manner, dress, and tone; something, also, to the imposing influence of a foreign tongue... A good Parisian accent will always command a certain amount of respect. But most important, foreigners are less tenacious of their dignity... largely because of their ignorance of English customs.

The difficulties of treating a governess both as a lady and as an employee were reduced by importing a woman who was less familiar with English manners and therefore less likely to recognize, and be offended at, a family's failure to treat her properly.

Another mode of coping with the dilemmas of incongruent status was, simply, escape. This might take the form of a governess's day-to-

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day isolation from the family circle, either by her choice or theirs, in order to avoid for the moment the stresses of conflicting roles. The more permanent way of escape for the governess was to leave the occupation entirely. But for a woman without means, the only way out was marriage. It is difficult to assess how frequently governesses married and succeeded in resolving permanently their status conflicts. Occasionally, Victorian memoirs refer to governesses marrying out of their occupation. But these sources are, by virtue of being memoirs, likely to reflect the mores of a more stable group of upper-middle and upper-class Englishmen, who, although they might have considered it imprudent, would not have seen their status endangered by such a marriage. A more typical attitude is that described by Florence Nightingale and repeated frequently in writing of the time. "The governess is to have every one of God's gifts; she is to do that which the mother herself is incapable of doing; but our son must not degrade himself by marrying the governess..." Since one of the functions of marriage was to extend the connections of the family and to add, through the marriage settlement, additional income to the young family, the attractions of an orphaned, poverty-stricken girl would be very limited.

Just as foreign governesses in England served to reduce the problem of status incongruence for the Victorian employer, emigration of the English governess served to reduce conflict for her. She might choose to go to another part of England or, like the foreign governess who came to England, she might, if more adventurous or more desperate, go abroad. Lady Eastlake recognized the advantages of escaping the society and definitions which made a governess's life uncomfortable: "foreign life is far more favourable to a governess's happiness. In its less stringent domestic habits, the company of a teacher, for she is nothing more abroad, is no interruption -- often an acquisition." Such a move, however, would require that an Englishwoman admit the realities of her status as a paid employee and resign herself to the loss of her place in English society.

Between 1849 and 1862 several organizations were established which, among other activities, promoted the emigration of governesses to the colonies, where there were few women and better chances for employment. The organizations involved were the National Benevolent Emigration Society, the Society for the Employment of Women, and the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society. These agencies have been treated as part of the movement for improving the employment situation for all single women of the middle classes. But it seems likely that two
other motives were involved. The escape was to a place where status would be less ambiguous and less painful and where there was more chance of marriage and a permanent resolution to incongruence. The other purpose of the female emigration societies was to lure out of England the "half-educated daughters of poor professional men, and . . . the children of subordinate government officers, petty shopkeepers"—those daughters from the lower ranks of the middle class whose fathers had been educating them as governesses in order to raise their station in life—and failing emigration, they were urged to become shop assistants, telegraphists, and nurses.

These attempts to resolve conflicts all involved an effort to maintain the traditional place of the woman in family and society. The middle of the nineteenth century saw the beginnings, ambiguous to be sure, of the shift toward professional, market-oriented women's employment. The first institutional symbol of this was the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, already mentioned, which was founded in 1843. Its purpose was to provide placement service, temporary housing for unemployed governesses, insurance, and annuities to aging governesses—services clearly oriented toward the market aspect of governesses' employment. But the flavor, and often the substance, of the traditional view of the governess is apparent in the activities of the Institution which still spoke of "homes" for governesses, when referring to jobs. The C.B.I. did not agitate for the wider employment of gentlewomen and, in fact, attempted to narrow the profession by including only those women "with character." The institution further reinforced the differences between governesses and working women of lower status by giving governesses a separate source of charity in time of distress. In providing a home for ill and aged governesses, these charitable Englishmen believed they could keep at least a portion of them out of the workhouse which, bad as it was for the "lower orders," was supposed to cause even greater suffering to a woman of refinement and cultivation. Such genteel charity went some way toward maintaining the fiction that members of the gentle classes were not sinking into the class beneath.

Queen's College, in London, was established in 1848 to provide education for governesses. The founders' purpose was to give governesses a training that would elevate their self-esteem, make them better teachers, and increase respect for them. The school was also open to ladies who were not governesses, but there was no intention to overload an already crowded occupation. It was thought that "every lady is and

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must be a teacher—of some person or other, of children, sisters, the poor." And Queen's College was to prepare future wives and mothers for a better performance of their traditional role. The other reason for admitting them was related to that social and economic instability which was so often a topic of early and mid-Victorian discussion: "Those who had no dream of entering upon such work [i.e., governessing] this year, might be forced by some reverse of fortune to think of it next year."

The author of *Governess Life* saw another benefit arising from the improved education of lady-governesses at Queen's College: "The public will reap this great benefit from the improved mode of instruction, that the ignorant and unqualified will no longer be able to compete with the wise and good, and will therefore have to seek for other means of subsistence."

Along with the market orientation of professional training for teachers, the establishment of Queen's College was to widen the gap between those "true gentlewomen" who were driven downward into paid employment and the ill-bred, upwardly mobile daughters of tradesmen and clerks who were trying to rise through the governess's occupation.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a movement to broaden opportunities for employment of women. Prominent women such as Harriet Martineau argued for increasing of such opportunities, and the *English Woman's Journal* began what amounted to a crusade for this kind of reform. But neither Miss Martineau's call for new jobs nor the EWJ campaign were intended simply to give new alternatives to unemployed, needy ladies. The need for more jobs for women, it was argued, arose from the fact that, in the closed market, many "incompetent" women were drawn into governess's work, resulting in "injury to the qualified governesses."

The EWJ was quite explicit in the matter: if other occupations were opened to women, "surely then the daughters of our flourishing tradesmen, our small merchants and manufacturers, who remain single for a few...years, may find some occupation more healthy, more exciting, and more profitable than the under ranks of governessing." Such girls might help their fathers and brothers in the shop or business, an alternative preferable to "rigidly confining themselves to what they deem the gentilities of private life, and selling themselves to a family but little above their own station for £25 a year." Mrs. Sewell saw that if girls from cultivated, comfortable
homes took up occupations without the pressure of poverty, it would help to break down "our English prejudices" against jobs other than governessing as suitable work for ladies. But such change would not take place until the pressures of female militance, war, and the tensions inherent in the idea of woman as ornament, drove the middle classes to resign the leisured lady as a banner and bulwark of their gentility.