THE GENRE OF THE family literary magazine—commonly referred to as the shilling monthly—emerged in England during the 1860s with great fanfare. With a premiere issue that sold nearly 110,000 copies, the Cornhill Magazine was the most popular and influential of these literary magazines. Nicola Diane Thompson claims that this was “a particularly vibrant period for the literary periodical” during which “over one thousand journals” related to literature were published (3). Many of these magazines hoped to ride the coattails of the new literary phenomenon begun by Harper’s a decade earlier in America and perfected in England by the Cornhill. Barbara Quinn Schmidt points out that “Most [British] publishing houses brought out a magazine during the 1860s and 1870s if they did not already have one,” and, despite the fact that not all of them could rake in high profits, they were considered a good investment. The proprietor of Tinsley’s Magazine was losing £25 a month but still vowed that there was no cheaper means of advertising a publisher’s name and products (“Novelists” 143). As Harper’s had already proven, the family literary magazine was a profitable business venture that could be marketed to readers hungry for prepackaged literary goods that were affordable and that signified their membership in or aspiration to join the ranks of the culturally competent middle class.

The Cornhill marked a new era in periodical publishing that signaled the decline of the old British quarterly reviews. The monthly literary format aimed at the entire family also stood apart from and

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Consolidating Middle-Class Power in the Cornhill Magazine, 1860–1864
outsold the newer elite organs of criticism such as the *Saturday Review*. As Merle Mowray Bevington notes, the “masculine world” of the *Saturday Review* “confined women to a secondary role” and “assumed as a fact that women were inferior to men” (116). The *Saturday Review* was generally condescending not only to women readers, but also to the culture of novel reading perpetuated by family magazines like the *Cornhill*. Despite the *Saturday’s* condescension, however, the fact that the *Cornhill* was intended to reach a mixed audience in part accounts for its initial, overwhelming success. *Cornhill* contributor Elizabeth Gaskell commented on women’s lack of access to most magazines of the day when she thanked George Smith for sending a supply of books and magazines directly to her: “With a struggle and a fight I can see all Quarters 3 months after they are published; till then they lie on the Portico table, for gentlemen to see. I think I will go in for Women’s Rights” (August 4, 1859. Chapple and Pollard 567). The *Cornhill* opposed the negative image of women readers presented in the critical reviews by emphasizing the positive effects of women’s reading practices that would make them not only better wives and mothers, but ultimately also better middle-class citizens. Thus, for Gaskell and others, the *Cornhill* provided a satisfying alternative delivered directly to the ladies, who were invited to imagine themselves as part of a serious reading audience.

The popularity of the *Cornhill Magazine* is usually attributed to its emphasis on entertainment over education and to its avoidance of controversial issues considered inappropriate for women readers. Schmidt describes magazines of the *Cornhill* genre as designed for the “comfortable, ill-educated middle-class who read for entertainment and easy instruction” in order to provide “superficial treatment of current topics in a pleasing manner with some attempt at education” (“Novelists” 143). Other critics have described the *Cornhill* as a magazine that strictly avoided offending “the ladies and their daughters” by omitting “political and religious controversy” (P. Smith 29). William Thackeray, the *Cornhill’s* editor from January 1860 until May 1862, says as much in his prospectus for the magazine: “There are points on which agreement is impossible, and on these we need not touch. At our social table we shall suppose the ladies and children always present; we shall not set rival politicians by the ears” (reprinted in G. Smith 7). Likewise, Mark W. Turner agrees that

The absence of overtly male subjects such as politics and religion, which were constructed as the domain of the great quarterlies, in
effect privileged women readers, and women’s reading regulated Cornhill contributions, in so far that anything deemed unsuitable for women would not be published. . . . Cornhill’s version of reality constructed female readers and female reading, and the content of each issue was regulated according to these constructions. . . . Cornhill, the most successful of the new monthlies, participated in creating a periodical literature that was gendered female. (“Gendered Issues” 229)

These typical accounts of the Cornhill as a magazine that was primarily lightweight, entertaining, and traditionally moralistic equate the feminization of the magazine’s audience with the elimination of all controversial issues and the lack of a serious agenda. However, despite Thackeray’s concern for the sensitivities of “the ladies,” the magazine did not completely ignore controversial topics and indeed made an effort to cover the important issues of the day as a part of its educational purpose.3

I contend that the Cornhill went beyond offering lightweight entertainment for its female readers to provide a more open forum for women, maintaining not only that women were educable, but also that they should be educated for the good of the middle-class family and the British nation. In fact, the Cornhill advocated women’s formal education—and, to a lesser degree, women’s movement into the professions—as a means of assisting the development of the newly defined “professional gentleman” who was emerging as the leader of the British nation. To keep potential wives occupied while upwardly mobile gentlemen established themselves financially, the Cornhill considered the benefits of educated and even professional women. Thus, the Cornhill’s proper woman reader would be intellectually engaged in order to support and strengthen her class and her nation. For women readers of the Cornhill, as for women readers of Harper’s, the act of reading itself was depicted as a nationalistic exercise. In contrast to Harper’s, though, the Cornhill urged women to physically move into the dangerous public realm and out of the safe world of private influence in order to lighten the burden of men’s financial responsibility for them. However, the magazine did not venture into the risky territory of delineating exactly what role the educated, public, or professional woman might eventually play in society beyond easing the pressures felt by middle-class men. Instead, the Cornhill maintained its popularity and widespread accessibility by stopping short of articulating how the public and intellectual woman it imagined would fit into society.
The Literary Event of the Year: The Cornhill Takes Off

The Cornhill's bold message concerning women readers seems particularly unusual for a periodical that achieved such a wide circulation. However, the magazine's message was defined by its promotion of all things middling: middle-brow culture, middle-class power, and a middle-of-the-road political stance. In order to understand how the Cornhill effectively appealed to these "middles," it is useful to see how the magazine evolved into a literary phenomenon in such a short period of time. George Smith of Smith, Elder, and Company launched the first issue of the Cornhill Magazine for January 1860 after determining that:

The existing magazines were few, and when not high-priced were narrow in literary range, and it seemed to me that a shilling magazine which contained, in addition to other first-class literary matter, a serial novel by Thackeray must command a large sale. Thackeray's name was one to conjure with, and according to the plan, as it shaped itself in my mind, the public would have a serial novel by Thackeray, and a good deal else worth reading, for the price they had been accustomed to pay for the monthly numbers of his novels alone. (G. Smith 4–5)

The choice of Thackeray as editor was crucial. He agreed to take the position for an astounding £1,000 per year, an amount that was doubled after the magazine's initial stunning success. As an established writer with an international reputation, he would guarantee that the magazine would command both respected contributors and a wide audience.

Thackeray and Smith paid close attention to choosing a name and cover design for the magazine that would make a positive first impression on readers and bolster the magazine's status as a symbol of middle-class taste. The name "Cornhill" came from the London street where the publishing house of Smith, Elder was located. While the magazine was synonymous with London culture, it also portrayed a romanticized pastoral image that would be attractive to busy Londoners caught up in the hustle and bustle of the city. Inspired by the association of "Cornhill" with wheat and the harvest, Leonard Huxley describes the "pleasing" cover design as an arrangement of "four medallions boldly printed in black on the familiar orange ground" surrounding the simplicity and vigor of "the ploughman, the sower, the reaper, and the thresher, representative of the seasons of the
year” (“Chronicles” 368). The cover was ornate and easily recognizable, and Thackeray maintained that it reflected the “jollity and abundance” of the name Cornhill (Eddy 14). The first issue of the magazine—with its impressive cover, its distinctive title, and its high-quality production value—appeared just in time for Christmas in December 1859.

The combination of respected publisher Smith and editor-novelist Thackeray was enough to make the magazine the talk of the town. Smith notes that “When the first number appeared . . . it was the literary event of the year. Along Cornhill nothing was to be seen but people carrying bundles of the orange-coloured magazine. Of the first number some 120,000 were sold, a number then without precedent in English serial literature” (G. Smith 9). The Cornhill’s popularity was confirmed by the enthusiastic praise of other magazines and newspapers, whose comments were included in an advertisement for the magazine printed, ironically, in the magazine that would become its biggest detractor, the Saturday Review. In this ad Smith, Elder touts its newest publication with a long list of quotations from periodicals including the Illustrated Times, which calls it “a marvel of elegance and cheapness”; the Sunday Times, which claims that “It is almost impossible to imagine any further developments, either in quality or quantity, of the periodical literature of this country”; and the Lady’s Newspaper, which declares that “If the editor can continue as he has begun, he will soon distance all competition, and reign supreme in the world of literature” (January 7, 1860, 32). The Cornhill was an immediate and smashing success, a fact that even its competitors recognized. The only difficulty was sustaining its popularity amid a steadily growing crowd of similar periodicals.

Smith’s strategy for outdoing the magazine’s competitors was to pay contributors, particularly well-known novelists, outlandish sums of money. According to his own glowing account, “No pains and no cost were spared to make the new magazine the best periodical yet known to English literature” (G. Smith 7). Smith, who was nicknamed “the prince of publishers” for his generosity toward writers, offered Anthony Trollope £1,000 to write Framley Parsonage (January–April 1861). This was the greatest payment ever offered to Trollope until Smith paid him £3,200 for The Small House at Allington (September–April 1864). As Smith recalls: “Trollope came to see me and naturally asked what was my scale of payment. I replied that we had no fixed scale for such works as his; would he mind telling me what was the largest sum he had ever received for a novel? When he mentioned £500, I offered him double the amount” (quoted in Huxley, Smith Elder 97). After witnessing the success of Wilkie Collins’s The Woman in White, Smith offered him
£5,000 for his next book, which, after a two-year delay, turned out to be *Armadale* (November 1864–June 1866). Collins wrote that “No living novelist (except Dickens) has had such an offer as this for one book” (quoted in Glynn 143). Doubling this sum, Smith proposed a £10,000 salary for George Eliot’s *Romola* (January 1862–August 1863). Because Eliot refused to write her novel in the specified number of monthly parts, however, the fee was reduced to £7,000. Nevertheless, this amount was still astounding to Eliot’s regular publisher, John Blackwood, who humbly wrote:

Hearing of the wild sums that were being offered to writers of a much inferior mark to you, I thought it highly probable that offers would be made to you, and I can readily imagine that you are to receive such a price as I could not make remunerative by any machinery that I could resort to. Rest assured that I feel satisfied of the extreme reluctance with which you decide upon leaving your old friend for any other publisher, however great the pecuniary consideration might be, and it would destroy my pleasure in business if I knew any friend was publishing with me when he thought he could do better for himself by going elsewhere. (May 20, 1862. Haight, 35–36)

For the August 1862 issue of the magazine alone, Smith paid nearly £2,000 to contributors, and for the first four years the total cost of paying writers and artists ran close to £37,000.

Smith declares in his memoirs that “Expenditure on this scale for literary work alone was, up to this time, unprecedented in magazine literature” (quoted in Huxley, *Smith Elder* 100). However, far from throwing money away, Smith spent it productively by choosing novelists who would generate the excitement of readers as well as the respect of critics. While the *Cornhill’s* featured novels did not always increase the magazine’s readership as dramatically as Smith hoped, they allowed the magazine to advertise itself as a signifier of middle-class taste and helped maintain its success as the most eminent magazine of its kind, regardless of slowly declining circulation figures, well into its first decade of publication. Smith’s strategy to consolidate his resources to pay “big name” novelists established the character of the *Cornhill*, but the magazine’s serial fiction was only one part of its focus. Under Thackeray’s leadership, the *Cornhill* also endeavored to provide high-quality nonfiction articles that would support its educational agenda, an agenda that was inextricably linked to women readers.
“Getting Out of Novel-Spinning and Back into the World”: The Educational Agenda of the Cornhill

Thackeray hoped to make the Cornhill educational by balancing novel reading with the contemplation of serious articles on science, law, history, biography, literature, culture, art, and social institutions. He proclaimed his intent to balance fact and fiction for general educational purposes in his public introduction to the Cornhill, “A Letter from the Editor to a Friend and Contributor.” In this letter he declares that “fiction of course must form a part, but only a part” of the magazine; “We want, on the other hand, as much reality as possible” (reprinted in G. Smith 6–7). In the first installment of his editorial Roundabout Papers (January 1860), Thackeray proposes that the Cornhill serve as an educational tool, in part to assist women readers who want to participate in conversations about the major issues of the day. Just as importantly, he dispels the notion that novels should be read primarily by women and factual articles primarily by men: “Novels are sweets. All people with healthy literary appetites love them—almost all women;—a vast number of clever, hard-headed men. . . . Judges, bishops, chancellors, mathematicians are notorious novel-readers; as well as young boys and sweet girls, and their kind, tender mothers” (“On a Lazy, Idle Boy” 127). Thackeray urges audience members of both sexes to read the entire magazine in order to ensure a balanced diet of reading. He argues that both will get sick if they have too many sweets; therefore, they must “mainly nourish themselves on roast” (128). Thackeray’s desire to provide “nourishment” is also exemplified in a letter in which he asks Trollope to contribute something other than a novel because “One of our chief objects in this magazine is the getting out of novel-spinning, and back into the world” (Harden 908). Richard Tiemersma’s page count suggesting that the amount of fiction steadily increased after Thackeray’s editorship, rising from less than half to almost 80 percent of the Cornhill’s contents (59), indicates the seriousness of Thackeray’s agenda to balance factual and fictional modes in the magazine. Within the context of the magazine, Thackeray conceived of fact as a high cultural mode and fiction as a low cultural mode. This division parallels Harper’s conception of British literature as high culture and American literature as low culture. Thackeray’s emphasis on “fact” in the Cornhill was intended to improve the status of women readers, just as Harper’s emphasis on British realism was supposed to allow women to participate in the creation of a more respectable national literature for the
United States. However, while Harper’s had clear financial motivations for its endorsement of British novelists, Thackeray may have had some very personal motivations for his emphasis on nonfiction.

First, Thackeray’s own fiction serials for the Cornhill, including Lovel the Widower and The Adventures of Philip, were not as well received as his factual Roundabout Papers. That Thackeray’s fiction paled in comparison with Trollope’s may have solidified his increasing interest in nonfiction. As Richard Oram claims, “Despite his elation over the success of the Cornhill . . . Thackeray was troubled by spells of depression and the feeling that he was ‘written out’ ” (157). Whatever his motivations were, Thackeray’s emphasis on fact over fiction created an atmosphere in which women readers were taken more seriously than in other magazine forums. Extending an invitation to women to read serious articles, even if they were often presented in an entertaining manner, made a powerful statement. As Barbara Sicherman points out, during the nineteenth century, reading “was the key to education, employment, and empowerment” for women (“Reading and Ambition” 75). The Cornhill ultimately gained the allegiance of its women readers by offering them access to educational and empowering information.

G. H. Lewes (who sporadically served as editor of the Cornhill after Thackeray’s resignation) carried on Thackeray’s message about the value of educational reading for women, but rather than focusing on the health of the readers themselves, he shifted his attention to the cultural health of the nation. In “Publishers before the Age of Printing” (January 1864), Lewes seems to provide a straightforward account of the important role books played in the cultural lives of Romans. However, it becomes clear that Lewes is writing more than a history lesson; he is arguing for a greater reverence for books and reading, particularly for women, in Victorian England. He points to women’s reading practices as a vital indicator of a nation’s level of cultural development and implies that England should not merely emulate the fallen civilization, but also surpass and outlast it. Lewes explains that although Roman women did not have Mudie’s Circulating Library, they did have extensive collections of books in their homes as well as free public libraries, which gave them better access to books, even in an age before the existence of the printing press. Thus, he concludes, “Stockings would have been as blue then as now only stockings had not been invented” (28). While he pokes fun at intellectual women by playfully referring to “bluestockings” and by stating that Roman “women were as well read in the current literature as our idle ladies who subscribe to Mudie’s,” he reassures male readers that intellectual women are not a
new and dangerous breed, but the byproduct of any advanced culture (ibid.). Lewes’s message is clear: Women readers—all readers for that matter—should be encouraged to take full advantage of the vast resources available to them as a result of the dominance of print culture. Accordingly, Lewes urges a revival of the “fashion” for books that he identifies in Roman times and calls on his readers to construct their own libraries as monuments to their nation’s superior culture (29). Presumably, the *Cornhill* itself would make a suitable start to such a collection of literary treasures for women.

Both Thackeray and Lewes focused on the contents of the *Cornhill* as the starting point for the development of women’s minds. While Lewes attempted to ease anxieties about “bluestockings” and to urge Victorian men to understand the importance of intellectual women to the greatness of civilization, Thackeray emphasized the crucial role nonfiction should play in women’s reading. Both of these concepts guided the *Cornhill*’s agenda and encouraged readers to draw distinctions between intellectually nourishing facts and emotionally gratifying fiction. However, just as *Harper’s* collapsed the divisions it had set up between realism and sentimentalism, the *Cornhill* collapsed the divisions between fact and fiction that Thackeray set forth to guide the magazine’s contents. By describing its own realistic novels as “factual fiction” and using fictional techniques such as dream sequences and dialogues within its factual articles, the magazine employed fact and fiction in dialogical ways. Within the pages of the magazine realist fiction was promoted for its educational qualities, and factual articles were made palatable by the incorporation of fictional elements that would entertain as well as instruct readers.

Realistic fictional characters and partially fictionalized representations of factual subjects were supposed to work together to serve as models of proper behavior for readers, though the line between the two was sometimes difficult to determine. By presenting characters that easily extended beyond the bounds of their novelistic settings to merge with real life, the magazine provided what Sicherman characterizes as “a common language and a medium of social exchange that helped women define themselves and formulate responses to the wider world. . . . [And] the continuum between fiction and reality gave considerable play to the imagination. Reading [novels] provided both the occasion for self-creation and the narrative form from which [women] might reconstruct themselves” (“Sense and Sensibility” 209–10). For example, Lord Lufton and Lucy Robarts, characters from Anthony Trollope’s *Framley Parsonage*, became exemplars of “true love” in a factual article.
And now, you dark and merry-eyed young lady, who have professed so great an interest in that dear Lucy Robarts, how can you leave the reading of those chapters in which we look to find that poor Lord Lufton has wooed once more and won? Quite so: you deferred that till you had more time, and thought you would but glance at what this paper said about—Exactly! and perhaps you also felt it might touch yourself more closely than a mere story of true lovers. (41)

In a very conversational style intended to engage women readers, Reddie suggests that fact and fiction work in tandem to educate the magazine’s audience about love, life, and society. Thus, readers were alerted to the fact that they should draw on both fact and fiction in order to have a full understanding of any subject. Even in matters of the heart, which the novel as a genre expertly explored, readers were encouraged to stay grounded in fact.

In *Trollope and the Magazines*, Mark W. Turner claims that the “real world” constructed within the *Cornhill’s* pages was “defined and regulated by a type of censorship” that excluded controversial subjects and thus presented a distorted view of reality (11). However, I think what is more significant than the magazine’s possible exclusion of certain subjects that could present an unrealistic view of the world is the way in which the subjects it did address combined factual and fictional approaches that challenged readers to decipher the relationship between the two forms of representation. The complex relationship between fact and fiction (and, ultimately, between high and low culture) is at the heart of the *Cornhill’s* educational editorial policy, a policy that pervaded the magazine regardless of how directly or indirectly it engaged with political and religious issues. That Thackeray’s emphasis on fact
and Lewes’s emphasis on women’s intellectual prowess left a lasting legacy is attested to by the magazine’s reputation for providing intellectually engaging material to its middle-class readers. In his brief history of the *Cornhill*, Spencer Eddy claims that “[t]he caliber of [the *Cornhill’s*] contributors and their work encouraged the support of an intelligent audience attentive to those currents—political, historical, social, scientific, literary—which shaped Victorian life in 1860, and cultured enough to find pleasure in the presentation of lucid narrative, stylized critical and familiar essays, and superior fiction” (45). With its combination of serialized fiction and serious articles, the *Cornhill* promoted women’s learning, and that learning would begin first and foremost with the monthly delivery of the magazine to the middle-class home, where it would stand as a symbol of cultural knowledge and authority. As for the magazine’s lasting educational value, E. T. Cook declared in 1910 that “Any collector of the *Cornhill* who treasured his or her 599 numbers in the original parts was well qualified, I dare aver, to graduate in *literis humanioribus*” (17). Moreover, as Peter Smith acknowledges in his 1963 article on the *Cornhill*, “it is now impossible . . . to find a magazine which offers the same opportunities to the intelligent non-specialist to become acquainted with current ideas, whether scientific, literary or sociological” (31). These comments stem from the *Cornhill’s* promotion of the raw ability of the ultimate Victorian non-specialist, the middle-class woman reader, to educate herself in a wide variety of fields by reading the magazine.

"We Shall Listen to Every Guest Who Has an Apt Word to Say": The *Cornhill’s* Invitation to Women Readers/Writers

It is clear that Thackeray hoped the magazine would be educational and open to women readers. Certainly, women were targeted because they constituted an untapped market that was perfect for the *Cornhill’s* literary and cultural focus and central to the creation of the family literary magazine as a genre. Thackeray, however, also sent a general invitation to women readers to participate actively in the discourse of the magazine. In his initial advertisement for the *Cornhill*, he calls on “pleasant and instructed gentlemen and ladies to contribute their share to the conversation. . . . [Because] the guests, whatever their rank, age, [or] sex . . . will be glad to be addressed by well-educated
gentlemen and women. . . . We shall listen to every guest who has an apt word to say” (reprinted in G. Smith 6–7). The *Cornhill’s* overt acceptance of women as a part of its primary audience and its concomitant validation of their voices created a situation in which women felt empowered to communicate personally with the editor by submitting their writing. As Janice H. Harris points out, “the very character of the magazine continually encouraged [women] to identify with key social issues of their own times” (389) and “allowed women writers to contribute material on topics reflecting their own genuine expertise and knowledge” (392).

To gain a fuller understanding of why Thackeray so openly invited women readers to contribute to the magazine, it is helpful to explore Thackeray’s personal engagement with the issues of women’s education and employment. His initial “open door” policy for women can be explained in part by his growing anxiety about the future of his daughters, Anne and Minnie, during his tenure as *Cornhill* editor. In fact, it was his anxiety about their financial futures that inspired him to accept the lucrative editorial position in the first place. Thackeray was particularly concerned about Anne, who he feared was “going to be a man of genius” rather than a proper wife (Ritchie 23). In her “Notes on Family History,” Anne explains that just before his death her father told her he was afraid she would have “a very dismal life” when he was gone (ibid., 129). In an 1852 letter to a friend, Anne expressed the tendencies that worried her father when she stated that she would

like a profession so much not to spend my life crocheting [sic] mending my clothes & reading novels—wh[ich] seems to be the employment of English ladies, unless they teach dirty little children what to read wh[ich] is well enough in its way but no work to the mind—& I don’t want to write poetry and flummery—. . . Papa says in a few years we shall have 200 £ a year to live upon & as my favorite Miss Martineau says it is far nobler to earn than to save I think I should like to earn very much and become celebrated like the aforesaid Harriet who is one of the only sensible women living. (quoted in Ray, *Age of Wisdom* 205)

With no marriage prospects on the horizon for a daughter who seemed to reject the traditional occupations of middle-class women, Thackeray decided to accept and nurture Anne’s intellectual ability by encouraging her not only to read but also to write for the *Cornhill*. Although he had previously discouraged Anne from her natural inclination toward
writing, soon after taking the helm of the *Cornhill* he implored her to do some investigative reporting and take up her pen for an article called “Little Scholars” to be printed in his own magazine (Ritchie 124). Thackeray’s change of heart corresponded with both his acknowledgement that he was nearing the end of his life and his desire to use his editorial power for the benefit of his family.9 Micael Clarke’s observation that Thackeray’s views of women grew increasingly progressive late in his life (13) may well reflect what has previously remained unacknowledged: that his desire to protect his daughters from the sorrows of the struggling women writers who distressed him as an editor influenced his personal views and the agenda of the *Cornhill*. Realizing the dismal prospects for his ambitious daughter, Anne, may have inspired Thackeray with generosity toward women readers who hoped to become writers. However, when faced with the reality of their desperation, Thackeray became overwhelmed and confused about his own editorial policies and personal hopes for his daughter.

According to Harris, women writers were responsible for an average of 20 percent of the *Cornhill*’s contents between 1860 and 1900 (385). However, during Thackeray’s reign, women’s contributions account for only about 12.5 percent of the magazine (or 37 of 297 contributions).10 So, while Thackeray laid the groundwork for the employment of women writers, his call for contributions from women and amateurs proved to be somewhat disingenuous. In reality, the magazine relied primarily on professional literary men like G. H. Lewes, G. A. Sala, and Fitzjames Stephen, who wrote the nonfiction articles that were so important to Thackeray. Despite his invitation to women to add “their share to the conversation,” it seems that Thackeray was more committed to having women as audience members than as contributors.

Significantly, the *Cornhill*’s most barren period for women writers occurred between July 1860 and April 1861. I do not think it is a coincidence that this ten-month period during which all fiction by women was excluded corresponds with Thackeray’s most vociferous protests against the alarming abundance of submissions from women in his *Roundabout Papers* “Thorns in the Cushion” (July 1860) and “On a Chalk-Mark on the Door” (April 1861).11 In these essays Thackeray responds to the disturbing collision of his family life with his stated editorial policy by directly reprimanding women writers for sending contributions to his home and disturbing his peace during dinner. He pleads with these contributors to stop flooding him with amateur submissions. In “Thorns in the Cushion,” Thackeray admits that “Last
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month we sang the song of glorification, and rode in the chariot of triumph... But now that the performance is over, my good sir, just step into my private room, and see that it is not all pleasure—this winning of success” (123). He bemoans the daily barrage of complaints, insults, unwelcome visitors, and “thorn letters” that beg with “true female logic”: “I am poor; I am good; I am ill; I work hard; I have a sick mother and hungry brothers and sisters dependent on me. You can help us if you will.”... Ah me! We wound where we never intended to strike; we create anger where we never meant harm; and these thoughts are the Thorns in our Cushion” (126). Just one month before resuming the publication of fiction by women, Thackeray sends a final warning that “in spite of prayers, entreaties, commands, and threats, authors, and ladies especially, will send their communications, although they won’t understand that they injure their own interests by so doing” (“On a Chalk-Mark on the Door” 504).

Yet, however frustrated Thackeray was by the flood of contributions from women, he seems to have been equally distressed about the evidence of women’s inability to earn an income by other means. His parody of a thorn letter not only censures women contributors, but also sympathetically highlights women’s financial dependence on men as the primary cause of their desperate persistence. His casting of the prototypical thorn-letter writer as a governess would have immediately alerted his readers to the fact that this woman’s circumstances were either the result of being inadequately provided for by her father or of being unable to find a husband. The governess was a powerful cultural icon whose appearance as his thorn-letter writer conveyed a sense of despair for the failures of patriarchal society. Thackeray’s moving mock letter reads as follows:

Sir—May I hope, may I entreat, that you will favour me by perusing the enclosed lines, and that they may be found worthy of the Crownhill Magazine? We have known better days. Sir, I have a sick and widowed mother to maintain, and little brothers and sisters who look to me. I do my utmost as a governess to support them. I toil at night while they are at rest, and my own hand and brain are alike tired. If I could add but a little to our means by my pen, many of my poor invalid’s wants might be supplied. . . . Heaven knows it is not for want of will or for want of energy on my part, that our little household [is] almost without bread. (“Thorns” 126)

Even as Thackeray dismisses the authoress, he draws attention to the
very real social dilemma that drives her to solicit his help: Her father is dead, her mother is ill, and it is up to her to support the family though there are few opportunities for her to do so.

Thackeray was clearly disturbed by his lack of power to help economically disenfranchised women writers: “Why is this poor lady to appeal to my pity and bring her poor little ones kneeling to my bedside, and calling for bread which I can give them if I choose[?] . . . Day and night that sad voice is crying out for help. Thrice it appealed to me yesterday. Twice this morning it cried to me” (ibid.). The conflict he expresses over his rejection of these thorny pleas reveals both his understanding of the negative societal effects of limiting the professional opportunities of middle-class women and his own sense of responsibility for the fate of his daughters. Though Thackeray berated women contributors and even barred them from the magazine, he simultaneously created public sympathy for them through his vivid dramatization of their unfortunate plight. His interest in easing the plight of unmarried women did not directly result in a campaign to increase the number of women writers for the magazine (though their numbers did eventually rise to a healthy level), but it did become integrated into the magazine’s support for the expansion of educational and professional opportunities as a crucial part of its agenda to consolidate middle-class cultural, social, and economic power.

“Keeping Up Appearances”: Defining the Professional Gentleman and Eradicating the Redundant Woman

Thackeray’s private ideology thus coincided with the Cornhill’s public concern for women’s education and professional development, both of which were justified by the emergence of two distinctly Victorian characters: the middle-class gentleman and that frightening personage W. R. Greg referred to in 1862 as the “redundant” woman.13 The magazine’s redefinition of the gentleman to include the middle-class professional necessitated a postponement of marriage to provide the up-and-coming gentleman with more time to make himself financially secure. In turn, middle-class women needed some occupation aside from being wives and mothers, roles that would require immediate marriage. As a result of the needs of the new gentleman, the Cornhill argued for women’s education and possible professionalization based on a three-fold rationale: (1) there was a surplus of women for whom husbands could not be
found and who needed to have some means of self-subsistence; (2) educated and even professional women would be more beneficial to upwardly mobile gentlemen than women who existed only to rush them into marriage before they could afford to maintain their gentlemanly status; and (3) working women could be successful wives and mothers. As the Cornhill rejected the born gentleman for a self-made species, new definitions of gentility for women became necessary. Thus, the Cornhill went beyond endorsing what Judith Rowbotham describes as the Victorian career of being “a professional good wife and mother,” which “in an age of growing professionalism” was “the ‘highest’ ambition for a good girl of any social class” (12). Instead, under the guidance of Smith, Thackeray, and Lewes, the magazine promoted women as professionals not only in the home, but also in the public sphere with no negative consequences for the Victorian family unit.

In The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, Robin Gilmour explains that the period corresponding to the Cornhill’s establishment was intensely focused on redefining the gentleman because it was “the period when the spirit of middle-class reform was making its challenge felt within the aristocratic framework of English institutions.” As a result, gentlemanliness was marked by “the drive for professional status and recognition, the challenge to patronage, the campaign for civil service reform, [and] the re-examination of the public schools” (92–93). All of these reform movements were crucial to the Cornhill’s discourse about gentlemanhood, but the magazine tended to emphasize proper middle-class behavior and professionalization as the most important signifiers of the new gentleman.

Thackeray’s early idea to call the Cornhill the New Gentleman’s Magazine (Harden 905) highlights his preoccupation with matters that concerned the emerging category of the middle-class gentleman. George Smith was equally concerned with the idea of gentlemanliness. According to Schmidt, Smith spent his life struggling to attain the status of the new gentleman: “Like other rising middle class entrepreneurs [Smith] had to surmount the negative impression that his family’s business was only a cut above the average shopkeeper. He, typically, sought status through behaving like a gentleman” (“The Cornhill” 54). These gentlemanly concerns of the Cornhill’s founders are reflected in many of its articles, including one of Thackeray’s own nonfiction serials, “The Four Georges.” In this series, placed as the opening feature of the magazine from July to October 1860, Thackeray explores the evolution of the gentleman. To do this, he claims that the nation’s kings, whose lives he outlines as examples of the dead breed of the aristo-
cratic and ostentatious “fine gentleman,” who has “almost vanished off the face of the earth” (September 1860, 259), have been replaced with a more common, but ironically more noble, gentleman: “What is it to be a gentleman? Is it to have lofty aims, to lead a pure life, to keep your honour virgin; to have the esteem of your fellow citizens, and the love of your fireside; to bear good fortune meekly; to suffer evil with constancy; and through evil or good to maintain truth always? Show me the happy man whose life exhibits these qualities, and him we will salute as a gentleman, whatever his rank may be” (October 1860, 406).

For Thackeray, the gentleman could now be identified by behavior rather than blood lines. Following Thackeray’s lead, Fitzjames Stephen’s “Gentlemen” (March 1862) explains that at one time gentlemen were defined as men from a few particular families, but the “new gentleman” is someone who combines a “certain” level of social rank and “certain” artistic, moral, and intellectual qualities. While he does not directly delineate what those “certain” qualities are, his main point is to emphasize that they are not innate but learned. Stephen gets more specific when he declares that “The fact that there is no essential difference between the characters of different sections of society, or, at any rate, no difference which is in favour of the higher classes, is nowhere more apparent than in respect of those qualities in which the spirit of gentlemen is supposed to display itself most fully—the qualities of generosity, self-sacrifice, and patriotism” (340). These particular gentlemanly traits are crucial to the *Cornhill*’s agenda since they were put to use in the magazine’s generous redefinition of acceptable roles for women, which would require some sacrifice of male dominance and would theoretically result in a patriotic end that benefited the nation by empowering the middle class as a whole.

One of the most famous and influential explorations of gentlemanliness during the period appeared in John Henry Newman’s *Idea of the University* (1852). Amidst his discussion of the value of a liberal-arts education, Newman articulated another quality of gentlemanliness that was crucial to the *Cornhill*’s agenda: sensitivity to the needs of others. Newman claims that “it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. . . . The true gentleman . . . carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or jolt . . . his great concern being to make every one at their ease. . . . He may be right or wrong in his opinion, but he is too clear-headed to be unjust. . . . Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration, indulgence” (145–46). While Thackeray’s responses to his thorn letter writers were, in fact, intended to be jarring and jolting in order to stop women from appealing to him,
they were also inspired by his sensitivity to the unfortunate plight of the women writers whose desperation assailed him. A healthy dose of gentlemanly sympathy, coupled with the magazine’s intention to reach an audience that included middle-class women, resulted in the magazine’s exhortation to its male readers to accept and even actively promote improved educational opportunities for women, opportunities that could lead some women toward professional activities themselves. Under the guidance of the magazine’s most influential leaders, the *Cornhill* argued that behaving like a gentleman included welcoming intellectual advancements for women. To make such advancements more palatable, however, the magazine insisted that the idea was not only a mark of gentlemanly empathy but also something that was in the new gentleman’s own best interests. Moreover, these interests were primarily linked to economic stability, since, as Trollope put it, “A man’s daily bread—his own and that of his wife and children,—must be his first consideration” (“Civil Service” 217).

Accordingly, the *Cornhill’s* guidelines for gentlemanhood also called for a professional career that would match the middle-class man’s proper behavior with economic advantages and a degree of social respectability. The *Cornhill’s* conception of the new gentleman brought “one scale of values—the gentleman’s—to bear upon another—the tradesman’s” (Reader 158–59), abandoning the aristocratic equation of gentlemanliness with leisure and instead fusing gentlemanliness with work. Of course, that work had to be of a particular kind that required education and training to legitimate the professional’s expertise. Trollope’s “Civil Service as a Profession” (February 1861) suggests that one way to become a new professional gentleman was to obtain a government post by excelling in competitive exams intended to ensure quality work: “[T]here is no profession by which a man can earn his bread in these realms, admitting of brighter honesty, a nobler purpose, or of an action more manly or independent” (215). Government work would also serve to bring the middle classes into visible positions of power that would strengthen their control over the nation’s affairs. Trollope maintains that it is unnecessary to raise the money required to enter the church or the law because government work carries an acceptable living wage and is an honorable and fulfilling profession that allows the new gentleman to serve the needs of the nation.

However, the rise of the middle class into the gentlemanly professions had costs that the *Cornhill* recognized and addressed. Despite Trollope’s optimistic view of government work, those who wished to enter other professions such as medicine or the law had to accept the
economic and social sacrifices of training. The work of professionalization resulted in prolonging men’s educations and therefore in postponing economic stability. The precarious economic status of many middle-class men rendered early marriage impractical. As a result, the average age of marriage for middle-class men between 1840 and 1870 was thirty, and about 20 percent of men postponed marriage until after their thirty-third year (Jalland 132). Further complicating expectations for marriage, the female population in England began to outgrow the male population. Census figures from 1851 recorded 104.2 females to every 100 males. In addition, between 1851 and 1901 the number of unmarried women over the age of twenty more than doubled, increasing from 1,444,556 to 2,941,733 (Katz 5). While the population of men decreased due to the higher survival rate among female babies, higher rates of male emigration to the colonies, and the deaths of men who served in the armed forces, Susan Katz argues that there was also an increasing “tendency among men to marry late in life to insure greater prosperity for their brides” (6). Thus, the emergence of professionalization along with other population shifts combined to create the problem of “surplus women” that received so much attention in the newspapers and periodicals of the 1850s and 1860s. Katz claims that:

Even if the numbers were exaggerated or misleading and the furor out of proportion to the problem, the conspicuousness of women of the middle classes and the alarm their situation caused can also be imputed to the ambiguous social position of the unmarried Victorian woman, which often made her appear to be a misfit. . . . Cultivated for the marriage market, deprived of substantive education or vocational training, and sheltered from financial concerns, the ordinary middle-class woman of the nineteenth century was insufficiently equipped to fend for herself in the public sphere. . . . [T]hey existed, therefore, in an undefined social stratum—a no man’s land that waivered somewhere between gentility and poverty. (7–8)

In order to create a role for these women that would not place a burden on the dwindling male population, to strengthen the middle class as a whole, and to express the proper amount of gentlemanly sympathy for the plight of middle-class women, the Cornhill advocated later marriages for its newly defined gentlemen and educational and professional opportunities for its single women.

The Cornhill’s advocacy of later marriages is suggested most clear-
ly in Stephen’s “Keeping Up Appearances” (September 1861), an article that points out that maintaining gentlemanly status and marrying are often incompatible (305). Stephen argues that many middle-class men are forced to forfeit their social rank when they marry and that a more acceptable decision for all concerned would be to stay single and keep up gentlemanly appearances, thus preventing miserable matches with low standards of living: “A married man must be prepared to meet [his family’s] expenses on a constantly increasing scale, or to cut them down at the expense of converting his wife into a drudge, and allowing his children to grow up in unwholesome and dirty habits” (310). Stephen maintains that financial considerations are a vital component of marriage for both women and men. As a result he urges middle-class gentlemen to postpone marriage until they are able to comfortably support the lifestyle that a respectable family required (including a decent salary and an adequate number of servants):

Unless a woman has extraordinary health and vigor, her husband will enjoy very little of her society if she is always looking after the children or the dinner; and if both he and she are forced to spend a great deal of time and thought in contriving ways to make their income cover expenses, their minds will be very apt to assume a petty cast, and to be fixed for the most part on small and somewhat sordid though important objects. The obscure difficulties and struggles of such a mode of life are, in plain truth, great enemies both to refinement and to high aims in life. (309–10)

According to Stephen, this situation results in more than a simple loss of “appearances.” It also brings about an irreversible loss in class status, which is significant to society at large because “A nation is nothing more than an aggregate of individuals, and it will be vigorous, independent, energetic and successful, in exact proportion to the number of individuals contained in it to whom such epithets can be properly applied” (314). Stephen’s call to postpone marriage leaves middle-class women with little choice but to live off of their families for longer periods or to find an alternative means of supporting themselves. Thus Stephen lays the groundwork for the middle-class acceptance of work for women until they can find well-established husbands—or in case those husbands never materialize. By mapping out the pitfalls of marrying before one has achieved financial stability, the *Cornhill* urged men to postpone marriage until they were professionally and finan-
cially secure and afforded women the freedom to interest themselves in endeavors other than marriage in order to energize the nation.

Despite its primary focus on increasing the power of middle-class men, the *Cornhill* also attempted to secure the economic independence of women within marriage, perhaps as a means of enticing the educated and/or professional woman back into the home once her gentleman was ready to be married. In “Marriage Settlements” (December 1863), Stephen emphasizes the productivity and practicality of French women who were able to maintain their own identities and finances upon marriage. He suggests that English women should have the same rights and opportunities. The *Cornhill*’s plea for reform in the marriage laws was ridiculed as excessively sentimental by Stephen’s former colleagues at the *Saturday Review*, and Stephen wrote a spirited response, defending both himself and English women, in the July 1864 article “Sentimentalism.” Here the author maintains that his claims about marriage are based on genuinely poor laws, not on sentimentality: “We are called sentimental for objecting to the common law by which women, upon marriage, lose their personalities” (67). Stephen suggests, then, not just that he is not sentimental, but also that sentiment can be the mark of the compassionate and forward-looking gentleman. While *Harper’s* incorporated sentimentality as a means of increasing women’s sensitivity to culture so that they would be empowered as private agents of public change, the *Cornhill* used the idea of gentlemanly sentiment to urge men to change their own attitudes toward women’s roles, allowing women greater access to the public sphere.

“Reading Books That I Had Never Heard Of, and Talking about Them Too”: Intellectual Women in the Domestic Realm

The *Cornhill* softened its rhetoric of gentlemanly sympathy for the expansion of women’s educational opportunities by emphasizing the ways such opportunities could enhance women’s traditional roles. While the *Cornhill*’s message implied a transformation of middle-class values, the magazine’s discussions of reading advocated women’s development of intellectual abilities that would improve their performance as proper wives and mothers. As with *Harper’s*, the most obvious way to accomplish this goal was to teach literary taste. The most famous of the *Cornhill*’s commentaries on literary taste, Matthew
Arnold’s “Literary Influence of Academies” (August 1864), can be seen as a foundation upon which the magazine builds its theory of reading, though it is a foundation that is obscured by the architecture it supports. Arnold’s influential essay praises the French academy’s ability to determine which literary works are worthy representations of the nation’s cultural achievement and should therefore be made available to the public. Arnold uses this foreign example to impress upon his fellow citizens the cultural benefits of a formal system of literary regulation. Like Lewes, Arnold promoted the idea that a nation’s literature, and thereby its reading, were lofty symbols of its power and status. However, Arnold’s glorification of the academic “culture police” was embraced by the Cornhill only insofar as an academy of culture would loosely serve as a model for the magazine itself. The Cornhill would do what Arnold suggests an academy should: “set standards” and “create . . . a force of educated opinion,” but it would stop short of “checking and rebuking those who fall below these standards” (Arnold 160–61).

Elizabeth T eare’s discussion of Arnold’s later serialization of Culture and Anarchy in the Cornhill articulates Arnold’s relationship to the magazine in a way that is relevant here. She argues that while the magazine “subtly reinforced Arnold’s image of an ideal English culture” and gave his work “the broadest possible appeal,” the Cornhill “endorsed a less rigorous definition” of culture that made Arnold seem pedantic or overly didactic (119–21). In other words, the Cornhill complicated the Arnoldian ideal of culture by urging readers to make their own choices about literary valuation within the parameters of the magazine’s offerings. The magazine was intended to guide its readers only to the point at which they would learn to properly guide themselves by internalizing the Arnoldian judge. Instead of merely choosing the proper texts for its women readers as Harper’s tried to do, the magazine would teach them to distinguish between high and low cultural texts on their own while permitting them to consume both. Of course, this philosophy also allowed the magazine to cash in on the popularity of sensation fiction, as it did with Wilkie Collins’s Armadale.

The fact that the magazine welcomed the consumption of both high and low cultural works was significant because in the elite press the dangers of obsessively reading periodicals were second only to the dangers of reading sensation novels. In fact, Deborah Wynne points out that critics were disturbed by the Cornhill’s inclusion of Armadale, which did not seem to them to suit the magazine’s generally high cultural standards (148).

Through Lewes’s editorial commentaries in “Our Survey of
Literature and Science,” the *Cornhill* tentatively drew boundaries between entertaining or sensational fiction such as *Armadale* and serious or realistic fiction such as *Romola*. However, the *Cornhill* maintained that reading for entertainment was an acceptable practice, as long as readers were aware of its purely recreational purpose. This point is made in Lewes’s defense of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, a novel that was widely attacked for its dangerous effect on readers:

Granting, as we must, that works of this class merely appeal to the curiosity—that they do nothing more than amuse the vacant or weariest mind, if they do that, it is something. They may be transitory as fireworks, and raise no loftier emotions. But a frivolous and wearied public demands amusement . . . and the public may be grateful when such amusement leaves behind it no unwholesome sympathy with crimes and criminals. . . . Its incidents are not simply violations of probability, but are without that congruity which, in a skillful romance, makes the improbable credible. (“Our Survey,” January 1863, 135–36)

Lewes acknowledges the low cultural status of the novel by highlighting its lack of realism but refutes the common critical assessment that the novel is dangerous. In her discussion of Lewes’s scientific articles for the *Cornhill*, Susan Bernstein argues that Lewes echoes Darwinian ideals by privileging “transmutation over fixity” and reminding “his readers that the terms of any taxonomic system are only relational, approximate ideas of resemblance” (“Ape Anxiety” 252). Similarly, Lewes assumes a taxonomy of fiction that is amenable to adaptation and that emphasizes the “unreliability of rigid lines of difference” (ibid.). This unreliability informs his refusal to reprimand women for reading sensational texts like *Lady Audley’s Secret* or *Armadale*. However, Lewes does suggest that the *Cornhill* expects readers to have an awareness of the imperfectly defined categories of literature to understand that sensation novels were suitable for frivolous entertainment, whereas realist novels were more likely to provide artistic enrichment and fulfill educational purposes. While sensation fiction was proclaimed to be acceptable if approached sensibly, the *Cornhill* continued to actively promote realistic fiction for its superior values. Thackeray’s preoccupation with fact, Lewes’s focus on women’s intellectual development, and Arnold’s call for cultural regulation worked together to promote realistic fiction as the embodiment of tasteful and proper read-
ing for women.

In a review of Trollope’s *Orley Farm* in another installment of “Our Survey of Literature and Science,” Lewes outlines the benefits of reading realist literature for women and their families. He claims that realism could improve women’s relationships with their fathers, husbands, and children by developing their powers of sympathy. For example, Trollope’s realistic presentation of “human beings, with good and evil strangely intermingled” rather than the black-and-white depiction of “angels and devils” might allow readers to gain a deeper understanding of the moral and psychological motivations of real people (November 1862, 702). To emphasize his point, Lewes focuses on one of Trollope’s female characters who has “sinned where a woman of a stronger nature would have resisted temptation, but [who] nevertheless . . . is pitiable and lovable” (704). Because Trollope’s fiction encourages “pity for the weakness out of which wickedness springs,” Lewes demonstrates that reading realist fiction increases sympathy and thus femininity (just as Stephen argues that sympathy increases gentlemanliness) (702–3). Lewes’s endorsement of Trollope’s realism focuses on the ways in which it encourages the melding of women’s feminine and emotional qualities that make them well suited for domesticity with their rational and intellectual abilities that allow them to serve as Arnoldian judges of literary quality. Instead of fearing the dangerous results of women’s reading practices, the *Cornhill* argued that women readers could discriminate between high and low cultural texts while linking such discrimination with their feminine powers of sympathy in order to read in ways that would benefit their families.

The *Cornhill*’s illustrations of women readers that accompany its realist serials made this domestic but intellectual woman reader visible. These serials and their images also eased men’s anxieties about intellectual women by cautiously subordinating women’s reading activities to their domestic duties, making the former valuable only insofar as it benefited the latter. Its illustrations typically depict women’s reading as a practice that occurs in a family setting overseen by men. However, despite attempting to appease men, the illustrations and novels assert the intellectual competence of women and depict men who refuse to support women’s intellectual development as weak and even dangerous.

“The Blind Scholar and His Daughter” (Figure 3) is an illustration by Frederic Leighton that accompanied the premier installment of Eliot’s *Romola* (July 1862–August 1863). Placed in its context within the novel and the magazine, the illustration casts the woman reader as
a devoted daughter whose intellectual abilities contribute to the success of the family. Leighton’s illustration depicts Romola, a fifteenth-century Italian woman, conducting academic work in the service of her father, who sits clutching a book as she stands patiently by his side reading to him. Romola stands majestically over her father with a lantern in her hand, shining light on his permanent darkness. Romola is in a position of power; however, her placid facial expression and outstretched arm, placed on the back of her father’s chair, indicate that her task is a daughterly duty undertaken to assist her beloved father. In the text we learn that Romola selflessly serves her father by applying the education he has provided for her to meet his ambitions and desires rather than her own. Her father rather unappreciatively describes her as “endowed beyond the measure of women . . . filling up to the best

FIGURE 3. “The Blind Scholar and His Daughter.”
Cornhill Magazine (July 1862): 1.
of her power the place of a son,” though he marvels at her capricious memory, which “grasps certain objects with tenacity, and lets fall all those minutiae whereon depends accuracy, the very soul of scholarship” (August 1862, 153, 149). Though she may not find the details her father values worth remembering and feels inadequate as a result, Romola takes pleasure in her intellectual activities and in her ability to further her father’s academic pursuits. She is, however, equally ready to give up her scholarly role if asked.

In fact, Romola does just that to marry Tito, a mysterious wanderer who displaces her as her father’s primary assistant. Though Tito distances Romola from her identity as a scholar, he does not completely displace her intellectual life. In fact, he is unable to attend to her father as consistently and devotedly as she did. In Tito’s increasing absences, she continues her work: “It was not Tito’s fault, Romola had continually reassured herself. . . . [I]t was in the nature of things that no one but herself could go on month after month, and year after year, fulfilling patiently all her father’s monotonous exacting demands” (December 1862, 722). When Romola’s father dies without having completed his scholarly goals, Tito betrays her by dividing and selling her dead father’s library to make some quick cash. Even after her father’s death, Romola wishes to serve him by granting his dying wish, which was that his library be donated to the community. Tito’s violation of her life’s mission, along with his adulterous relationship with a peasant and his shady political activities, cause Romola to seek an independent life. When she discovers that Tito has been murdered by his own father (whom he also savagely betrayed), she uses both her intellectual abilities and her innate sense of duty to serve others by seeking out Tito’s mistress and children in order to take on a new role as teacher and guide for this makeshift family. Serving as a sort of father figure to this new family, she guides Tito’s son toward a life that is more humane than the one his father lived. Romola’s real power, then, lies in her ability to both intellectually and morally transform the next generation. Within the context of the Cornhill, it is vital that Romola’s intellect and domesticity be compatible even if a decidedly ungentlemanly man like Tito is unable to recognize that fact. 

Romola sets a pattern that other Cornhill novels and illustrations follow and expand on: While it is clear that fathers can benefit from their daughters’ intellectual engagement, the Cornhill’s reading women have a more difficult time convincing potential husbands—even if they seem to be new gentlemen—that they will not be distracted from their wifely roles by undertaking literary endeavors. In George Du Maurier’s illus-
CHAPTER 2

**Figure 4.** “Cousin Phillis and Her Book.” *Cornhill Magazine* (December 1863): 688.

Illustration for Elizabeth Gaskell’s November 1863–February 1864 *Cornhill* serial “Cousin Phillis,” the lead character, whose reading is also encouraged by her father, is shown seated in the corner of her kitchen studying Dante’s *Inferno* (Figure 4). Phillis Holman has taken time out from her domestic duties to steal a peek at her beloved book, but she still holds a kitchen utensil as she reads, indicating that she is able to shift quickly from one activity to another and that she must soon return to her “real” work.

Peter Manning, Phillis’s cousin, peers over her shoulder to monitor her attempts at scholarly activity. In the illustration he appears to be in a position of power over her. However, in the story when she asks him to help her translate the text, he cannot even identify the language in
which the text is written, let alone translate it into English. Though Phillis assures him that she “can generally puzzle a thing out in time” and can do without his help, Peter maintains his vigil (December 1862, 689). While surveilling an intellectual activity he doesn’t comprehend, Peter arrives at a new realization about Phillis: “A great tall girl in a pinafore, half a head taller than I was, reading books that I had never heard of, and talking about them too, as of far more interest than any mere personal subjects, that was the last day on which I ever thought of my dear cousin Phillis as the possible mistress of my heart and life” (ibid.).

The illustration of Phillis and Peter captures this moment of rejection; even though Phillis is depicted in a kitchen and as dutifully domestic, her books make her seem to him unfit for traditional womanly activities. Later Peter introduces his boss, Mr. Holdsworth, to Phillis as someone who can serve as a Greek and Latin tutor. While Holdsworth is initially attracted to Phillis’s mind and leads her to believe he will marry her, he eventually deserts her as well. Although Romola’s husband Tito more drastically dramatizes the critique of men who cannot appreciate intelligent women, Peter and Holdsworth are in the same general category of undeveloped gentlemen. Neither Peter nor Holdsworth can imagine how to fit a smart woman into his life because neither is convinced that intellectual activity coincides with domesticity or that it could serve his own interests; however, the *Cornhill* argued for the efficacy of both. These men reveal their anxieties about intellectual women, but both Romola’s and Phillis’s otherwise angelic demeanors cast aspersion on the unsympathetic and even cowardly gentlemen who reject them rather than on the reading women themselves.

The *Cornhill* offers a striking portrayal of the misguided male desire to regulate and control women’s reading in “Bessy’s Spectacles,” one of Thackeray’s own illustrations for his *Cornhill* serial *Lovel the Widower* (January 1860–June 1860). This picture portrays a governess named Bessy Prior standing beside her friend, Charles Batchelor, with a book dangling in front of her that she cannot read until he returns her glasses (Figure 5). Batchelor attempts to maintain authority over Bessy’s reading by literally controlling her ability to see the words on the page. As we learn from Batchelor, who humorously narrates the story, he takes her glasses so that he can gaze into her beautiful blue eyes in hopes of capturing her heart. Unfortunately for Batchelor, Bessy is not so easily conquered. While Thackeray’s illustration indicates that Bessy is eager to return to her book, in the text she does not have a book at all. In fact, in Thackeray’s novel she is minding her
young charges as she fulfills her role as governess. So why are the children she is supposedly watching replaced with a book that she wants to read in the illustration? Though her reading is not a key element in the novel, the illustration emphasizes the importance of her interest in books as a symbol of her power, intellect, and unconventionality—she was once a stage performer, after all! Bessy’s book is a sign of her unsuitability for the submissive wifely role, but not of her unsuitability for wifehood.

When Batchelor fails in his brief attempt to woo Bessy by holding her glasses hostage, he gives up on pursuing a relationship with such a strong-minded woman, much like Peter and Mr. Holdsworth give up on Phillis. The traits symbolized by the book she holds in the illustration explain both Batchelor’s failure to control her and her success in controlling Lovel, the man she eventually marries. Some gossiping
members of Lovel’s circle see Bessy as cold and calculating in her attempts to win a husband and as an inappropriate wife because of her untraditional past and her class status. However, Lovel appreciates her ability to make a living and her loyalty to her siblings, whom she supports with her earnings. Regardless of her subtle domination over him, Lovel is willing to submit to her because, as even the jealous Batchelor admits, she “has practised frugality all her life, and been a good daughter and a good sister” and “will prove a good wife . . . [and] a good mother” (May 1860, 592). Despite the fact that Lovel is a somewhat comic figure whose passivity complements his wife’s activity, Bessy’s triumph is a happy one for both the new gentleman and the smart woman as she rises in class status and guides her husband toward new middle-class values.

George Du Maurier’s illustration for Elizabeth Gaskell’s Wives and
Daughters (August 1864–January 1866) is unusual for the Cornhill in that it depicts a woman reading alone without the presence of men—almost (Figure 6). In “Vae Victis!” (or “The Woes of the Vanquished”), named for the title of the chapter the illustration accompanies, Molly Gibson is seen reading by herself in a window seat. However, she is more interested in the men who pass by outside her window than she is in the words on the page. In the novel, Gaskell describes Molly as whiling away the days in the library during a visit to the Hamley household. She reads “old English classics” and the young Osborne Hamley’s poetry, which make “the summer days . . . very short to this happy girl of seventeen” (October 1864, 391). When Roger Hamley returns with news of his brother Osborne’s poor performance on his university exams, Molly is displaced from the library, which Roger dominates. Molly escapes to her room to read, thus avoiding Roger and the turmoil he brings with his visit. The illustration, however, collapses the scene of Molly’s reading in her room with a later one in which she watches (without a book in her hand) Roger and Squire Hamley walk the grounds outside her window. This visual combination of two separate events diverts Molly’s (and the reader’s) attention from her enjoyment of Osborne’s poetry and her resultant crush on him to the overtly scientific brother, with whom she eventually falls in love. Not only does the illustration foreshadow future events in the novel, it also shows how Roger’s return to the family banishes women from the library and distracts Molly from her own literary pursuits.

At one point, however, Molly sneaks back to the library and encounters a disturbing situation. As she quietly reads a book in the dark corner of the room, Roger and Osborne enter without seeing her and accidentally reveal that Osborne is secretly married. While Molly thus obtains forbidden knowledge in the library, she is also better able to support Roger and the Hamley family as they face the problems Osborne’s deception causes. Molly’s independent reading, then, is not dangerous precisely because it does not threaten the male sphere or injure her proper womanly interests even though it has the potential at first to lead her toward a romance with the less responsible but more romantic Hamley brother and later to embroil her in Osborne’s sexual secrets.

Molly’s reading practices are also greatly influenced by Roger’s guidance. In contrast to Dr. Gibson’s view that his daughter should not be too well educated, Roger directs her toward more “steady” and focused reading akin to his scientific examination of specimens under a microscope. Molly’s intellectual insights, however, also influence Roger: “Sometimes her remarks had probed into his mind, and exci-
The Education and Professionalization of the Woman Reader

ed him to the deep thought in which he delighted” (December 1864, 703). Molly’s ability to share in the knowledge of Roger’s profession makes her a more suitable wife for him than Cynthia, who takes no interest in his scientific endeavors. Far from being intimidated by Molly’s intellect, Roger encourages her educational improvement and is inspired by her engagement with science. Not only does Roger represent the new generation of professional gentlemen, but Roger and Molly together become the new middle-class couple suggested by the Cornhill. Unfortunately, we never see evidence of this as a result of Gaskell’s untimely death before the novel was completed, which meant that the couple’s marriage would be left unwritten. Only Gaskell’s notes and Frederick Greenwood’s editorial explanation printed in the Cornhill in place of a conclusion reveal that this reading woman triumphs in affairs of both the heart and the mind.

The physical proximity that women readers have to men in the Cornhill’s illustrations graphically depicts the magazine’s focus on the benefits educated women could have for men, even though the male characters often express their ambivalence toward women readers in the accompanying texts. Above all, these heroines imply that, for most women, improved educational opportunities are valuable not necessarily because they provide individual fulfillment but because educated women can better serve the interests of the middle classes. In order to change the status of women, the magazine set out to change the minds of its male readers. In case not all of its readers were as progressive as Roger Hamley, the magazine provided more explicit arguments for improving women’s educational opportunities in its nonfiction articles. The Cornhill even imagined how those opportunities might extend beyond the bounds of the home.

“What Women Are Capable Of”: Creating Educational and Professional Opportunities for Women

The Cornhill is well known for its participation in debates over the status of middle-class boys’ education, as it devoted numerous articles to a subject that coincided with its interest in the development of the new gentleman. These articles, which were aimed at improving the ability of middle-class boys to succeed in the professional world, include a series of anonymous letters from “Paterfamilias to the Editor of the Cornhill Magazine” written by M. J. Higgins (May 1860, December
1860, and March 1861), as well as “On Some Points of the Eton Report” (July 1864) by the same author; “Schoolmasters” by J. F. Boyes (June 1861); and “Middle-Class and Primary Education in England Past and Present” by John Sutcliffe (July 1861). These selections advocated changes in middle-class schools to coincide with improvements made to the educational system for the upper and lower classes. Fitzjames Stephen cited the lack of training for teachers and the supposed promotion of mediocrity caused by the examination system as two serious problems facing the middle classes (“Competitive Examinations,” December 1861, 698). As Robin Gilmour points out, “Reform of the public schools went hand in hand with Civil Service and administrative reform” as a means of improving the training and reputation of middle-class professionals and consolidating their power (93). Gilmour argues that by the 1880s public-school reform had “solved the problem of defining gentility for the middle and upper classes, and helped to forge a new elite by exposing their children to a common, shaping ritual of education.” Furthermore, middle-class civil service and school-reform movements precipitated the decreasing potency of the idea of the gentleman later in the century because it “ceased to be problematic, and no longer had to carry the freight of the middle-class challenge to aristocracy” (182–83). While the Cornhill has been recognized as a major force in these public debates to consolidate middle-class power, what has continued to be neglected is the Cornhill’s attention to women’s formal education and professionalization as a necessary and complementary subject for reform that, if taken seriously, would also contribute to the ascendance of middle-class gentility.

Though few actual professions had been available to women (teaching, writing, and acting among them), the opening of women’s colleges such as Queen’s College (1848), Bedford College (1849), the North London Collegiate School (1850), and the Ladies’ College (1853) allowed women to prove that they could pass competitive examinations. According to W. J. Reader, one result of these educational advancements for women was that with the 1861 census, professionals began to be separated by sex, although the actual number of female professionals remained low (172). Martha Vicinus notes that by 1901 a modest 12.1 percent of unmarried women over twenty—238,510 total women—were involved in professions, holding jobs as teachers, doctors, nurses, scientists, and government employees (28). The Cornhill helped make these gradual changes in women’s roles more acceptable to its readers by shifting away from an emphasis on the education and professionalization of married or marriageable women in its criticism.
and illustrations to so-called surplus women, whose need for educational and professional training was less questionable.

This shift in emphasis is most notable in Harriet Martineau’s “Middle-Class Education in England—Girls” (November 1864). Like Thackeray’s “thorn letter” commentaries, Martineau’s article reveals the difficulties that unmarried, middle-class women faced. She argues that government funding for education should be equally divided between boys and girls since there were so many unmarried women who remained helplessly unable to take care of themselves due to inadequate educations: “[T]here must be tens of thousands of middle-class women dependent on their own industry: and it can hardly be doubtful, even to the most reluctant eyes, that the workers ought to be properly trained to the business of their lives” (554). Martineau’s later article, “Nurses Wanted” (April 1865), echoes this claim and, unlike Thackeray’s *Roundabout Papers*, asserts that the nation can no longer see the entrance of middle-class women into the workforce as distasteful because it is an undeniable necessity: “Any pretense of horror or disgust at women having to work, is a mere affectation in a country and time when half the women must work in order to live” (409). Rather than advocating specific job training for women, Martineau calls for a well-rounded education that would include not only basic reading, writing, and womanly “accomplishments,” but also Greek, Latin, and other serious subjects, for which, she argues, girls are actually better pupils than boys (552). In other words, her ideal education for girls would be equivalent to the education received by middle-class boys because, like their male counterparts, “a considerable proportion of the girls will not marry; and these may prepare to be self-supporting” for the good of the entire middle class and the nation (563).

To deter potential detractors who might disagree with her contention that education was the best solution to the problem of “surplus women,” Martineau acknowledges that a balance between serious scholarship and domestic training will produce superior wives and mothers among those who are destined for marriage. Building this argument on nationalistic grounds, Martineau reverses Harper’s use of British literary models to improve American culture by advocating the use of American models to improve the education of women in England. Martineau implores the English nation to see the education of its girls as a patriotic responsibility. England, she proclaims, must produce women who will be at least as well informed as those “[i]n the United States,” a country in which “the individual goes for more than with us; and it is felt to be desirable that the mothers of the next gen-

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eration should have a large intelligence and rich culture” (ibid.).

Finally, Martineau asserts the inevitability of progress for women in order to discourage resistance and glorify the potential of the English middle classes:

[N]ot all the ignorance, the jealousy, the meanness, the prudery, or the profligate selfishness which is to be found from end to end of the middle class, can now reverse the destiny of the English girl, or retard that ennobling of the sex which is a natural consequence of its becoming wiser and more independent, while more accomplished, gracious, and companionable. The briars and brambles are cleared away from women’s avenue to the temple of knowledge. Now they have only to knock, and it will be opened to them. (567)

Here Martineau reveals the ugly side of the middle classes (their jealousy, meanness, and selfishness) to argue that their generosity and gentlemanliness must triumph and allow progress for women. Deirdre David, discussing Martineau’s writing in another context, suggests that her arguments are suitable to the middle-class public because she reconciles “her strong-minded sexual politics” with “her legitimating functions for the English middle class” and “engineers her feminism so that it serves the ideological aims of that same social class for whom she performs her legitimating role” (32). This approach is compatible with other Cornhill contributors who forged the magazine’s agenda by urging the advancement of women into intellectual and professional areas as a means of supporting the new gentleman.

Articles such as R. Ashe King’s “A Tête-à-Tête Social Science Discussion” (November 1864), Anne Thackeray’s “Toilers and Spinsters” (March 1861), and E. S. Dixon’s “A Vision of Animal Existences” (March 1862) became a part of the Cornhill’s central message by advancing the consolidation of middle-class power, redefining proper roles for women, and merging fact with fiction in an attempt to ease the potentially jarring nature of the magazine’s cautious protofeminist rhetoric. The use of techniques such as humor, dream sequences, and fictionalized dialogues in these serious articles buffer controversial points of view about women’s proper roles in society and teach without preaching. Just as the presentation of the magazine’s fiction as a healthy part of one’s reading diet was predicated upon its “factual” nature, the use of fiction in these factual articles made their arguments more palatable. Therefore, the magazine’s use of “fact” as a signifier of the high cultural value of its fiction is complemented by the use of “fiction” as another tool to per-
suade resisting readers to accept the necessity of educated and professional women.

R. Ashe King’s “A Tête-à-Tête Social Science Discussion,” which directly follows Martineau’s essay on education for girls, opens with the musings of a gentleman on the day of his ninth daughter’s birth. He feels his home is so overrun by his wife and daughters that he begins to fantasize about how he might combat the alarming increase in women (both in his home and in society). While pondering this topic, the narrator drifts into a deep sleep. Thus begins an outrageous dream sequence in which he envisions a mob of “monstrously crinolined women” throwing babies at him instead of serving his dinner. When he is left starving with nine screaming babies, his friend Croaker comes to the rescue with a penknife: “[T]he fattest baby’s head was thrown back. I turned away in suspense and horror, only to hear one terrible scream, which woke me” (570). Upon awakening, he is struck not so much by the horror of the dream as by the realization that he is not alone in his feeling of being surrounded by women. It is not his personal plight, but the plight of the nation: “[S]uddenly flashed upon me some hateful statistics proving the extraordinary numerical predominance of the sex. . . . For hours I lay calculating all the evils of a nation of old maids. I watched in thought the tide of women steadily and inevitably setting in; first creeping under the doors of our printing offices, then our dissecting rooms, then sweeping over the bar, and at last, submerging the pulpit” (ibid.). In a satirical dialogue with Croaker (who is obviously not a proper new gentleman), the misogynist bachelor suggests everything from human sacrifice to polygamy to reduce the female population. After initially being enticed by Croaker’s ideas, the narrator comes to his senses, sympathetically considers his own daughters, and decides that a better solution is to “make women more independent—more capable of self-support . . . train them by a wider and more bracing education; strengthen their mind, enlarge their ideas, and perhaps . . . awake some power of reasoning” so that they will be better equipped to play a part in the public sphere (574). Even more importantly, while he encourages women’s education and professional status, King maintains that educated and professional women would not be “a whit less eligible as wives” (576). Typical of the *Cornhill*, this article encourages increasing women’s options in order to both relieve the problems of the financially strapped gentleman and express proper gentlemanly sympathy for women’s needs. The article’s incorporation of the misogynist dream entices and reassures its doubtful male readers who, like Croaker, “don’t know what women are capable of—the depth of their
character, the breadth of their mind, the strength of their intellect” (ibid.). King works to bring these readers over to his side with the satirical but pedagogical form of the dialogue in which Croaker is taught to set aside his prejudices. In a sense this becomes a conversion narrative in which the wrong-headedness of the narrator and his friend are finally corrected just as, hopefully, the resistant reader is reformed.

Anne Thackeray’s “Toilers and Spinsters” also links women’s education to the issue of surplus women. However, she argues that the main problem for women is a lack of financial security, not a lack of husbands. For Thackeray, the expansion of women’s educational and professional opportunities is the only viable solution to the financial woes that her father recognized in his thorn letters.21 Echoing her father’s dramatization of his thorn-letter writer, she creates a fictional monologue for the old maid that coincides with a stereotypical and unflattering depiction of a gloomy, self-pitying, helpless, and broken-hearted woman who is past her prime: “Oh, alas, alas! what a sad, dull, solitary, useless, unhappy, unoccupied life is mine! I can only see a tombstone at the end of my path” (318). By countering the fictionalized image of this self-pitying and contemptible spinster with a series of rhetorical questions, Thackeray pulls the unsuspecting reader into compliance with her ultimately progressive message that single women should rely on their intellectual abilities to gain employment that could bring them both happiness and financial independence:

What possible reason can there be to prevent unmarried, any more than married people from being happy? . . . Are unmarried people shut out from all theatres, concerts, picture-galleries, parks, and gardens? . . . May not spinsters, as well as bachelors, give their opinions on every subject? . . . publish their experiences . . . write articles in the Saturday Review? . . . They have been doctors, lawyers, clergy-women, squires . . . been brave as men when their courage came to be tried. . . . [T]hey have farmed land, kept accounts, opened shops, inherited fortunes, played a part in the world. . . . Then surely it is the want of money, and not of husbands, which brings them to this pass. Husbands, the statistics tell us, it is impossible to provide; money, however, is more easily obtained. (319–20)

With this more inspirational view of single-women’s possibilities, Thackeray still highlights the fact that money could be made only if women were educated and employed.

To facilitate women’s employment, Thackeray encourages women
to attend the Ladies’ Reading Room at 19 Langham Place (which provided inexpensive food, stimulating conversation, and useful reading material including free copies of the *Cornhill*), to join the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, and to use as role models the group of working women at Emily Faithfull’s Victoria Press. Thackeray praises the contributions these organizations make to finding jobs for women such as “Miss A,” who was reduced to poverty by her father’s business failure; “Miss F,” whose husband ran off to America; and “Miss G,” whose husband is ill and cannot work (323). With this alphabetical list of women, she more explicitly reveals what her father agonized about but only hinted at in his *Roundabout Papers*: that it is the failures of men that necessitate the opening of professions to women. After investigating these organizations, Thackeray surmises that “It must be less annoying and degrading to be occupied by work, however humble, than to contemplate narrower stints and economies every day—economies that are incompatible with the very existence of cultivation and refinement” (326). Thackeray’s argument is reminiscent of fellow *Cornhill* contributor Elizabeth Gaskell’s claims in *Cranford*—published serially in *Household Words* from December 1851 to May 1853. The old maids of Cranford revise their conceptions of women and work to allow Miss Matty, one member of a community of old maids, to work for a living after a financial disaster. Like the women of Cranford, Thackeray develops a new definition of feminine gentility that coincides with the concept of the professional gentleman and is not compromised by work, but by changes in living standards. In fact, gentility for women, just as for men, comes to coincide with the possibility of work since, as Martineau also points out, only a very small minority of women can be considered genteel if gentility “consists in doing nothing appreciable” (“Nurses Wanted” 409).

Thackeray’s acceptance of middle-class women workers lends legitimacy to them and pushes them into the mainstream, while emphasizing the positive influence of “what some good women can do with great hearts and small means, how bravely they can work for others and themselves” (321). Craftily inserting women into the public sphere, Thackeray concludes, “I seem to be wandering all about London . . . and have drifted away ever so far from the Spinsters in whose company I began my paper. But is it so? I think it is they who have been chiefly at work, and taking us along with them all this time; I think it is mostly to their kindly sympathy and honest endeavors that these places owe their existence” (331). Almost without realizing it, the reader has taken a sympathetic and even genteel turn through the pub-
lic—but still feminine—life of educated and professional women.

E. S. Dixon’s “A Vision of Animal Existences” explores the middle-class gentleman’s acceptance of the elimination of single-women’s redundancy through education and work. At first, such acceptance seems unlikely in a “sci-fi” depiction of a Darwinist future that holds only intellectual and self-sufficient women who have presumably surpassed men intellectually. Dixon’s fictional dramatization of factual issues considers what happens to the educated and working woman who eventually marries an economically stable, middle-class man and concludes that such women continue to balance work and family life effectively without completely destroying their femininity or the social order. Once again, these societal changes are depicted as the unavoidable wave of the future that men must accept or else continue to fight futilely.

The narrative begins at the local zoo, where the narrator’s daydream is influenced by the sight of a middle-aged woman, whose countenance he identifies as that of a professional authoress, reading a volume of Darwin as she rests on a park bench. As the man begins dreaming, the woman is transformed into “Natural Selection, Originator of Species”—the name and title printed on her calling card (313). Joined by her son “Struggle-for-Life,” she begins to lecture on the evolution and classification of species, proving that she can be both a competent professional and an attentive mother. The dreamer protests against her lesson about competition among species and the triumph of brute strength. He despairs at the loss of the finer (read feminine) qualities of weakness, modesty, and self-denial (which are lacking not only in her speech, but also in her). She responds by proclaiming that nature cannot yield “her laws to the caprices, the blunders, and the follies of men. . . . If the whole human race were to . . . obstinately defy the laws of nature, the rising tide would relentlessly swallow the whole human race” (317). The inevitable failure of any meager male resistance to the feminine world of nature reinforces the necessity of a change in the dominant masculine worldview.

This dramatic dialogue between a weak man and a strong woman suggests that an irreversible evolutionary change in gender roles is imminent. When the narrator awakens, he turns to the real woman reader sitting next to him on the bench to ask her opinion of Darwin. In a well-reasoned manner she responds, “Here we are offered a rational and a logical explanation. . . . [I]t is conscientiously reasoned and has been patiently written. If it be not the truth, I cannot help respect—
ing it as a sincere effort after truth” (318). In contrast to the scene of science-fiction horror presented in the role-reversing dream, the calm response to Darwin supplied by the real woman is quite comforting. Dixon, then, exaggerates the fear of the manly woman who might result from education and public work in order to promote a new gentlewoman who can improve her own and her family’s position in society by participating in the important conversations of the day and even by being independent and self-supporting if it is required to preserve the status of the new gentlemen around her. Pairing the controversial topics of evolution and women’s intellect, this article proposes that the educated and professional woman is an unavoidable part of the future of the English nation. Dixon makes clear that it is better for men to welcome this newly evolving generation of women than to defy it and be left behind by an unstoppable evolutionary force. The choice between Thackeray’s desperate thorn-letter writer and Dixon’s confident authoress seems to be a clear one. Dixon proposes that the evolution of society requires the second woman to supplant the first, and Thackeray’s editorial choices, as well as the choices of his successors, reflect the same conviction.

In opposition to the growing class of specialized literary reviews that excluded women readers, the Cornhill combined the literary and cultural instruction of the middle classes with a more controversial agenda promoting women’s education and entry into the professions. As George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and William Thackeray create intellectual women who successfully fulfill domestic roles, Harriet Martineau and Anne Thackeray provide glimpses of women engaged in professional work as nurses, writers, and printers, and R. Ashe King (comically) depicts women overtaking the fields of medicine, law, and religion, the Cornhill uses both fact and fiction to show that women’s traditional roles must be expanded in order to maintain the strength of the middle class. However, the magazine remains equivocal about the exact ways in which women are supposed to carry out their new roles. The only clear message is that, for the cultural health of the nation and the power of the middle-class gentleman, women must be educated properly, and a proper education should begin with a subscription to the Cornhill Magazine.