

EDUCATION IS A WOMAN'S ASSET IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S COUSIN PHILLIS

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RESUMO: O período vitoriano caracterizou-se pelo seu marco na rápida mudança dos códigos morais e sociais, deixando um impacto no estatuto da mulher que suscitou reflexões nos pensadores e autores. A romancista Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), quebrou novos fundamentos ao chamar a atenção para a educação estratégica que ajuda as mulheres a construir identidade de gênero. Como tal, a educação que melhora as concretizações práticas para as mulheres representa um bem empoderador, que serve para revisitar as normas convencionais prevalecentes na formação de mulheres meramente relacionadas com a realização de tarefas domésticas. Este argumento é sustentado por dados fornecidos pelo método de análise baseada em texto aplicado. Ao contrário das leituras de *Cousin Phillis* (1864) que mostram o resultado educacional de uma mulher como limitado a uma experiência romântica falhada, uma leitura profunda do texto de Gaskell proporciona uma compreensão substancial do impacto da educação de uma mulher que ilumina a sua mente a desenvolver-se da ignorância ao conhecimento, e da "loucura" à sabedoria no cenário simbólico da Quinta da Esperança. Por conseguinte, a experiência do caso de amor não alcançado é reescrita para fazer dela uma experiência cultural feminina que alarga o conhecimento de si própria e das suas necessidades práticas num ambiente pastoral. Tornar-se conhecedora das línguas e literatura latina e italiana ajuda a mente da personagem a transcender a limitada dimensão romântica na promoção do processo de construção da identidade feminina, que está organicamente conectada com a identidade nacional.

Palavras-chave: Cultura vitoriana, Alfabetização, Feminilidade, Empoderamento, Gênero, Construção de identidade

ABSTRACT: The Victorian period was characterised by its landmark on the swift change of moral and social codes leaving an impact on the status of women which prompted reflections by thinkers and authors. The novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), breaks new grounds by drawing attention to strategic education which helps women to construct gender identity. As such, education that enhances practical achievements for women stands for an empowering asset that serves to revisit the prevalent conventional norms of training women merely for the accomplishment of domestic tasks. This argument is backed up by supporting details provided through the applied text-based analysis method. Unlike readings of *Cousin Phillis* (1864) showing a woman's educational outcome as limited to a failed romantic experience, a deep reading of Gaskell's text provides a substantial understanding of the impact of a woman's education which enlightens a woman's mind to develop from ignorance to knowledge, and from 'foolishness' to wisdom in the symbolic setting of Hope Farm. Therefore, the experience of the unaccomplished love affair is rewritten in terms of making it a womanly cultural experience that broadens her knowledge of herself and her practical needs in a pastoral environment. Becoming acquainted with the Latin and Italian languages and literature helps the character's mind

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to transcend the limited romantic dimension in the promotion of the female identity construction process that is organically connected with the national identity.

Keywords: Victorian culture, Literacy, Femininity, Empowerment, Gender, Identity construction

INTRODUCTION: Background of the study

While the early publications by Elizabeth Gaskell, namely *Mary Barton*² and *North and South*,³ are testimony to survival issues within the trend of writing Social Problem Novels,⁴ her late publications, such as *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66)⁵ and *Cousin Phillis*⁶ shift lenses of interest to highlight education as a pathway to elevate women's status, especially in the countryside. Gaskell's aim is plausible given that the evolution of literacy among country people, including women, was inconsistent with the economic progress in Victorian society (Schwartz, p. 671). Sharing Alan Shelston's view, the nature of Gaskell's background was inspiring to orient the author's interest in education as evidenced in the biographical short story "My French Master" (1853). Gaskell's handling of the issue of women's education celebrates the supremacy of literacy during a period of technological progress to develop the faculties of critical thinking and decision-making within the trend of revisiting the status of Victorian women.

As put by Shelston, *Cousin Phillis* poses "the issue of education [...] in a wider cultural context" (p. 66). To elucidate his idea, he further adds that "[t]he idea of a common culture which Gaskell proposes in her construction of Hope Farm is not invalidated by the fragility that is suggested by Phillis's broken love affair with Holdsworth, and by the movement of the story towards the outside world" (p. 66). Informed by insightful readings of *Cousin Phillis*, this paper sets forth to examine the core question of education that extends to

² Henceforth it will be referred to as *MB*

³ Henceforth it will be referred to as *NS*

⁴ The phrase "Social Problem Novels" or "industrial Novels" was first coined by Louis Cazamian in his seminal work, *The Social Novel in England 1830-1850*, Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley. (Routledge, 1973). Cazamian defines throughout three pages (10-12) how the industrial novels, namely, Dickens's *Hard Times*, G. Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical*, C. Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, B. Disraeli's *Sybil or the Two Nations*, E. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), present realistic depiction of the misery of the working and idle members of the poor regions in the British society where education of the workers was a controversial issue as regards its utility.

⁵ Henceforth it will be referred to as *WD*

⁶ Henceforth it will be referred to as *CP*

culture-based issues rather than focusing on the illusory love story (despite its significance as a literary motif in the novella).

Gaskell's scholarship shows scant interest in education in pastoral literature. The theme of compulsory education for women does not take up enough space in literary criticism. In line with this requirement, teaching women what they need to learn rather than what society needs to teach them is not taken into consideration as a central issue. According to Shelston, "the choice of a name with traditional pastoral associations helps to remind us that one dimension of *Cousin Phillis* is pastoral rather than realist fiction" (p. 64). As put by Heidi Hansson, the female protagonist's name Phillis "introduces the whole body of pastoral literature – a genre where women characters are frequently spoken about, but less often speak for themselves" (p. 427). Hansson's statement backs up the rationale of selecting *Cousin Phillis* as a case study. The female protagonist, Phillis Holman, goes through controversial scenes of learning before reaching a level of maturity to disclose her mind and her internal feelings in the challenge of her paternal protective manners.

THE RATIONALE FOR SELECTING THE NOVEL

What has made *Cousin Phillis* a masterpiece still valid for investigation in the twenty-first century is the Victorian historical and cultural purport of the period that is mirrored, to varying degrees, in the novella. And what has made the current topic of education worthy of study is the imposed need for promoting literacy among women.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The selected novella *Cousin Phillis* raises thought-provoking questions about women's yearning for learning foreign languages and reading literature of different cultures. Based upon this question, the main problem revolves around the examination of the type of education provided for women in the Victorian period and what alternatives Gaskell provides throughout her fictional narrative.

Hypothetical questions

In line with the problematic issue of this paper, hypothetical questions that embody the target of the paper are raised as follows. Was Victorian education intended to beautify women's souls and develop their skills? Was it meant to elevate their level of understanding in response to their internal needs or their environmental needs? How does Gaskell's fiction show interest in education and gender? Is education intended to make women characters suitable as wives and mothers or pioneering lifelong learners? What is the implication of the challenging experience of the romantic love story in *Cousin Phillis*? These hypothetical questions represent the main analytical points throughout the different sections of this paper. These questions hypothesise challenges women encounter during their educational experience due to the deep-seated patriarchal standards of femininity. The conventional profile appraises women's docility, obedience, silence, dependence, and all the variables related to this set of feminine *attributes*. As such, this study intends to examine the strata of meanings epitomised in education which is expected to train the female protagonist to transcend the traditional concept of woman's learning as a training process to accomplish gendered domestic roles. Relevant to the problematic issue and the hypothetical questions, this study is two-fold. First, it underlines the Victorian gender-biased education in Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* and, second, it underpins the vitality of education as an apparatus to enhance a woman's literacy and strengthen her existential dimension in the fashioning process of the female identity.

Theory of gender as 'doing'

To come to terms with the set forth aim of the paper, the theory of gender as performativity promotes the effectiveness of constructing a new womanly experience via education for self-development. The theory of gender that has been developing across diverse disciplines was established by the philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler. Her erudition is epitomized through her influential masterpiece *Gender Trouble* (1991) which tackles the problematic issue of gender identity construction and subversion. Butler underpins the importance of gender roles, which are not obviously framed in conformity with social expectations or "normative expectations" (Butler, 2004, p. 218). She states that

“the body is only known through its gendered appearance” which implies that what the woman performs in terms of gendered speech, appearance, and daily work experience identifies her identity (Butler, 1997, p. 406). Therefore, gender identity is defined by what one is doing or is not doing. It is the way a person performs one’s roles after selecting what best fits one’s capabilities and choices. This is conceptualised by Butler who argues that gender is a performance, a “doing” or an act (Butler, 2004, p. 451) of a culturally constructed role.

In line with Butler’s theory of gender as ‘doing,’ the feminine innocence in the Victorian family that is cherished as a woman’s blessing is an act mirroring an internalised statement about women’s docility. The Victorian concept of femininity and masculinity enhances the constructed educational content for each gender to normalise patriarchal constructs of femininity.⁷ Within a complex power structure of a patriarchy-oriented culture, the female figure is drawn as silently obeying without resisting and listening without speaking. Advocating education for women and arguing that it is a woman’s asset systematically implies the worth of education for gender identity construction. Gaskell’s *Cousin Phillis* remains a masterpiece that appeals to twenty-first-century scholars to go deeper into the investigation of education as a trajectory of the reassessment of women’s status in society. Therefore, the identification of the needs of women’s education suggests selecting the appropriate teaching materials and methods in response to the needs. However, the traditional femininity that is structured by the Law of the Father stands as an impediment while regulating women’s learning environment which will be evidenced by Gaskell’s novella.

Text-based analysis methodology

Embracing the constantly evolving theory of gender to interpret Gaskell’s writings is a trajectory to trace the development of the protagonist’s growth into a subject; an agency. This becoming which is in contradiction to being (borrowing Simone de Beauvoir’s

⁷ Gaskell’s discourse is sometimes ambivalent as it presents the educational guidance in the possession of men. In *Sylvia’s Lovers*, for example, the narrator puts that, “Sylvia’s last protest against learning for the night, for ... she turned docile, and really took pains to understand all that Philip could teach her” (p. 104).

concept)⁸, is the performance or the doing of one's role and performing one's gender as circumstances require the woman subject to do. This gendered aspect will be further supported by textual clues endorsing the deconstruction of the traditional discourse on women's education.

EDUCATION IN GASKELL'S WRITINGS

Victorian proponents for domestic ideology preached the early 'antifeminist' discourse such as Sarah Stickney Ellis in *The Family Monitor and Domestic Guide: Women of England; Daughters of England; Wives of England and Mothers of England* (1845). She normalised Coventry Patmore's and John Ruskin's discourse on subservient passive femininity to enhancing the authority of The Law of the Father. Such writings had a far-reaching impact on the education of young girls which, according to Ellis, should provide the substantial means to manage a household, learn self-renunciation norms of behaviour and establish a comfortable domestic sphere. As such, gendered and sex-based education which entailed feminine self-abnegation was initially backed up by some women whose writings served to endorse patriarchal authority at the expense of women's abjection.

Other writings by intellectual women in Victorian scholarship advocating women's empowerment have not taken their rightful place although the period was governed by the Queen and Empress Victoria (1837-1901). Being an age of transition at all levels (Fyfe, 2013) in a post-Industrial Revolution period, education as an enlightening means was a privilege for many men and a few upper and middle-class women as it was influenced by class and gender in terms of the distinct quality of not only the teaching materials but also the environment where education takes place. Noticeably, Victorian society was affected by class division, poverty, marginalisation, and above all, gender distinctions. Gaskell wanted to establish her position "through her education" which influenced her writing style although "she was pulled by conflicting vices — the Unitarian call to independence and the conventional appeal to submission" (Uglow, p. 83). Gaskell quite manages to transcend the conflicting voices in her early educational environment although she sometimes allows her

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir's statement that initiated gender theory is "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949) which draws distinction between the biological determinants of *natural* being and the *cultural* constructs of becoming that Judith Butler tackles in her masterpiece, *Gender Trouble* (1991).

fictional creatures to conform to conventional standards.⁹ Nevertheless, other female authors namely Ellis embraced and endorsed “the conventional appeal to submission” (p. 83) through the publications of *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839) added to her other writings. Gaskell’s novella, *Cousin Phillis*, testifies to authorial emancipation, in some measure, from patriarchal conventions to underpin the vitality of education as a woman’s asset to achieve gendered power and establish a woman’s voice.

The discourse on women’s education in Victorian writings emanates from the imposed social question about education as a means to serve a particular cause and not for personal enlightenment. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1857) is significant to mention because it highlights a woman’s struggle to cope with her life and how her education can make her an accomplished woman. Jenny Uglow mentions that “Aurora’s aunt (aunts turn up so often as the principal educators) prescribes” what her niece should learn (p. 33). Aurora’s aunt is open-minded to sharing foreign cultures since “she liked a range/ Of liberal education—tongues, not books” (Browning). Browning’s insightful narrative poem minutely presents what a woman’s education contains and for what purpose is offered. What Aurora likes above all are “books on womanhood” that show women’s “right of comprehending husband’s talk .../ With pretty ‘may it please you,’ or ‘so it is,’—/ Their rapid insight and fine aptitude... /And never say ‘no’ when the world says ‘ay,’/ She liked a woman to be womanly” (Browning). Education of women as Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* demonstrates should provide the substantial means to manage a household, to learn self-renunciation rules and self-denial norms of behaviour to establish a comfortable domestic sphere. Such requirements were judged as sacred values during Victorian times. In fact, the holy aspect of the gendered norms complicated the role of social critics and thinkers, such as Gaskell, to continuously question the established set of feminine norms of education.

EDUCATION IS A KEY ISSUE IN SOCIAL PROBLEM NOVELS

⁹ In one of the narrative scenes of *North and South*, Mr. Bell tells his opinion about women’s education when Mr. Hale criticises his daughter’s dislike of schooling when she was a child (*NS*, p. 368). The same opinion of disliking school is shared by Sylvia Robson who “did not like learning, and did not want him for her teacher; so she answered in a dry little tone” (p. 74), as put by the narrator. Rejecting to learn writing words on the pretext of its futility, Sylvia addresses her mother shouting “If I could see t’ use on ‘t, I’d ha’ axed father to send me t’ school; but I’m none wanting to have learning” (p. 90).

Before delving into the discussion of education in Gaskell's work, it is worth highlighting that education represents, to varying degrees, a key issue in the social problem novels. While industrialised Britain evoked paradoxical views of its mechanical progress (Carlyle, 1829; Mill, 1831; Engels, 1884; Fyfe, 2013), Victorian fiction epitomises a literary indicator of the space given to deal with education in fictional narratives. For example, George Eliot's *Felix Holt* includes an authorial vision of anti-Byronic readings through the female portrait of Esther Lyons who is criticised by the character Felix Holt, the epitome of manly logic. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* is also a Victorian novel that embodies a direct attack on Utilitarian education which applies Jeremy Bentham's philosophy of facts and statistics. Utilitarianism advocates the supremacy of the education of the mind to the detriment of the education of the heart during a period of the dominance of materialistic values. The representation of the woman as a subject is annihilated in Eliot's and Dickens' novels. Eliot's criticism of feminine fondness of Byronic writings makes Felix impose his reading taste on his beloved and Dickens' indictment of the Benthamite Utilitarian education entails preventing the circus girl, Sissy Jupe, from attending a Gradgrind's class of facts.

Selecting Gaskell's novella in this context of the study implies the importance the author gives to the status of woman as an agency. The theme of Phillis's education in the farming area is frequently raised by Gaskell to underpin the vitality of teaching women either in their families by their mothers and aunts or in public schools depending on the family income. Despite this authorial interest in female learning, slightly has been written about it in Gaskell's scholarship. In *North and South*, for example, the protagonist's construction shows development in the author's determination to openly interrogate the Victorian norms of the education available for (some) women. Margaret Hale's iconoclastic character is uncommon in Victorian fiction. Her portrait symbolises a woman's venture into manly networking relations such as her father, his relatives, his friends, and more importantly the young businessman, John Thornton. This network of men makes her boldly meet with the working-class family of Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy before she confronts the rioters in front of Thornton's factory. Margaret's unusual network epitomises young woman's ability to blur the borderlines splitting the public sphere from the private one.

Being a self-educated persona who has acquired business jargon by herself, Margaret Hale in *North and South* bravely constructs her profile as a woman leader struggling with challenges from an orthodox member of her society; her mother is not exempt. Thanks to her learning, Margaret's mind develops critical thinking to interrogate prominent aspects of industrial society related to class antagonism. Upon acquainting herself with the Northern dialect of business, which is considered as the manly sphere, Margaret's mother condemns the young woman's attempt at "picking up a great deal of vulgarity factory slang" (*NS*, p. 218). Mrs. Hale incarnates the internalised patriarchal culture making the industrial discourse banned for women. Therefore, Margaret's argument in support of her acquisition of the industrial register of words entailing an *imminent* change in her discourse is plausible. Since she moved to the industrial north, she practically starts equipping herself with the linguistic tools to interact with the social actors in the industrial sector: "if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it" (*NS*, p. 219). Indisputably, Margaret's knowledge of the industrial challenges, which is an invaluable aspect of her education, empowers her to reconcile antagonistic classes represented by her tutor, Mr Thornton, and his employees.

Gaskell's sublime aim of establishing the concept of women's education as a primacy illustrates her criticism of the paternal vision of education. In contrast to boys, girls are not considered full subjects. For example, in *Wives and Daughters*, Mr Gibson's love for his daughter, Molly Gibson, is not articulated in transcending the dominant stereotypical mode of education. He dictates to Molly's governess, Miss Eyre, what his daughter should and should not learn. He asks her to teach her only the required lessons girls must be familiarised with: "[d]on't teach Molly too much: she must sew, and read, and write, and do her sums; but I want to keep her a child, and if I find more learning desirable for her, I'll see about giving it to her myself" (*WD*, p. 21). It is visible that the father's mindset does not tolerate any self-emancipation aspect of learning for his daughter. However, by the closing of the narrative, some development in the mental and social faculties emerge from Molly's interaction with the self-educated and liberal-minded sister-in-law, Cynthia Kirkpatrick.

Gaskell's sustainable interest in education for young women keeps developing and burgeoning in a logical process of writing from the early publication of *Mary Barton* to the last one *Wives and Daughters*. The latter is a posthumous novel that marks the vitality of

education for both genders, men and women, with an emphasis on the class dimension and its prospective success when it becomes a key indicator of selecting a suitable partner. This complicated argument about education cannot be elaborated in Gaskell's novels without the sense of humour that is skilfully interwoven throughout the fictional discourse.

Attempting to captivate the heart of Osborne and/ or his brother Roger Hamley, as Mrs Clare Kirkpatrick wishes, Cynthia is exposed "holding a three-day's-old newspaper in her hand, which she was making a pretence of reading" before when she was interrupted by her mother's abrupt instruction to select a book instead of a newspaper to "improve" herself (*WD*, p. 267). What Mrs Kirkpatrick (later becomes Mrs Gibson) means by her daughter's *improvement* of herself is ambiguous because the purpose of a woman's growth to maturity is not straightforwardly defined.

EDUCATION MATTERS IN *COUSIN PHILLIS*

The Unitarian background is eminent in Gaskell's interest in education for country girls. Gaskell emphasises the shift between the agrarian south and the industrial north and affiliates it with feminine emancipation to perform gender roles in spaces that are allowed for individual development. Accordingly, country girls, namely Ruth Hilton in *Ruth* (1856), Sylvia Robson in *Sylvia's Lovers* and Phillis Holman in *Cousin Phillis*, experience teaching (as it is the case of Ruth) or learning (as it is the case of Sylvia and Phillis) as an empowering process despite the different background of each one and impediments each one encounters. Markedly, *Cousin Phillis* raises issues that have not so far been examined namely the thought-provoking issues about women's education that are blended with an emotional experience.

It is worth mentioning that Phillis is drawn through the narrative voice of Paul Manning. The narrator's effeminacy, as the author creates it, could be a gendered attribute throughout the narrative. In fact, in the opening chapter of the novella, Paul shows interest in promoting his cousin's literacy as soon as he discovers her love of Latin books. Critically depicting the unusual place of books, by inference the place where books are stored, upon seating himself into a large room offered to him by Reverend Holman, Paul Manning desires to unlock the private word of Phillis. He, first, observes "a great beau-pot of flowers [that]

was placed upon the folio volumes of Matthew Henry's Bible" (CP, p. 234). He astutely comments that "a small shelf of books hung against the wall, books used for reading, and not for propping up a beau-pot of flowers" (CP, p. 235). Being alone, he picks books to read "Virgil,¹⁰ Caesar, a Greek grammar—oh, dear! ah, me! and Phillis Holman's name in each of them!" (CP, p. 235). The remark of Phillis's name highlights the narrator's surprise as if it is one of his goals to see the books *visited* or read by the young woman. Although the theory of gender socialisation is relevant to investigate the patterns of gendered manners among children in the pedagogy of teaching, it is used in this study to examine the *juvenile* thinking manners of Paul Manning towards his cousin, Phillis Holman.

In the challenge of the overwhelming materialistic norms of the industrial society, the narrator (who could be the author's mouthpiece), tries to evoke the vitality of education for young women. Jeni Curtis argues that "Paul's overt concern is to record an important time in the life of his cousin [...] However, he inscribes Phillis's life through his subjectivity. Not merely a detached narrator, he plays an active part in her story" (p. 29). In line with this viewpoint, the general portrait of Phillis throughout three parts of the novella appears stereotypically stagnant. However, in the last part, and especially upon recovering her health after having a fever, Phillis demonstrates progress. Paul's subjectivity is infiltrated into the spirit and mood of the storyline along with the inclusive characteristics of idyllic scenes in pastoral literature.

Teaching girls in the countryside is not a primacy for parents. Being the unique daughter in the Holman family does not make a great difference although Paul's effeminacy offers readers a biased portrait of the female persona to highlight man's vision of *decent* femininity. Throughout descriptive passages, Phillis spends her time sitting in the large gloomy room without enjoying any aspect of interaction with her family. The image of the guiding mother is dormant. This atmosphere looks so ideal to enshrine the life of an *angel* in the promotion of innocence which equates to ignorance. Being exposed to Paul's gaze as an abject body that is silently sewing or knitting, as portrayed by the male narrator. Phillis'

¹⁰ Virgil's famous poem, *Georgics* (29 BCE), deals with agriculture and love as a passionate feeling shared by humans and animals as beings. What is resonant about its selection in *Cousin Phillis* is that *Georgics* contains "Virgil's passionate denunciation of the power of amor over the world of nature [...] In the reminiscence of Varius there are suggestions of the darker side of passion that prepare the reader for the generalization of this theme at the midpoint of the book. Attention focuses naturally on what the poet says here about the destructive consequences of amor for humans" (Knox, p. 46).

skills at accomplishing domestic tasks are highlighted in the following scene during the first meeting with the Holman family:

Phillis took up her knitting—a long grey worsted man's stocking, I remember—and knitted away without looking at her work. I felt that the steady gaze of those deep grey eyes was upon me, though once, when I stealthily raised mine to hers, she was examining something on the wall above my head. (p. 227)

The domestic sphere where Phillis spends most of her time does not raise expectations in the readers' minds about its contribution to developing a womanly personality with aspirations.

Even during progressive events, most often, when Phillis is expected to react, she “ended by not saying a word” (p. 259), as put by the narrator. Body language and symbolic signs are also recognised in the portrait of Phillis's upbringing. When “Betty the servant came to the door into the kitchen, and made a sign to Phillis, [the latter] put her half-mended stocking down, and went away to the kitchen without a word” (p. 242). The concept of silence as a feminine attribute is almost always endorsed with blushing, reddening, nodding, or waving the head of a young woman. However, any aspect of enlightening the women's minds through either questions or any form of intellectual sharing of ideas is not encouraged, neither literally nor symbolically. When Paul is talking with Phillis, he suggests talking about subjects of reading; however, she carelessly rejects his suggestion claiming that: “But you are our guest; and mother says I must make it pleasant to you. We won't talk of books. What must we talk about?” (p. 240).¹¹ This statement leaves no doubt about the indifference to the girl's intellectual development. By inference, a feeling of womanly estrangement and subordination within the domestic sphere is almost imposed on readers. Therefore, with the emergence of her cousin Paul and his best friend, Holdsworth, the private tutor, readers' expectations are raised to see layers of probable metamorphoses of dormant feminine skills.

Reminiscent

¹¹ Phillis's mentioning of her domestic role is reminiscent of conduct-books guidance which is endorsed in *North and South*. Upon mentioning Margaret's dislike of schooling, Mr. Bell, who is Mr Hale's friend, comments that “the child [Margaret] was getting a better and simpler, and more natural education stopping at home, and helping her mother, and learning to read a chapter in the New Testament every night by her side, than from all the schooling under the sun” (NS 368).

When Phillis starts reading Latin, her zeal incited Paul's mind to compare himself naively and egoistically to her. Murmuring to himself, he says, "[s]he shall see I know something worth knowing, though it mayn't be her dead-and-gone languages' (*CP*, p. 236).¹² Captivated by Phillis's beauty, Paul's masculinity turns his attention from considering his cousin a human being with the potential to learn to an object of feminine beauty whose calm performance while studying astonishes him. She "was sitting at her work quietly enough, and her hair was looking more golden, her dark eyelashes longer, her round pillar of a throat whiter than ever" (p. 235). The gendered implications are saturated in the text to impose a traditional aspect of assessing a woman's physical attractiveness rather than cognitive capabilities.

Paul's mental portrait mirrors his childish manner of comparing himself with the young woman who is two years younger than him but physically taller than him. Instead of figuring out a scheme to encourage her to learn, he "dreamed that [he] was as tall as cousin Phillis, and had a sudden and miraculous growth of whisker" (p. 240). What the narrator embodies is the masculine discourse in the Victorian period that obstructs women's intellectual progress. Paul's concept of virility combines appearance and learning. This perception of manhood is illustrated in his dream of a "miraculous growth of whisker" and learning to attain a "more miraculous" intellectual "acquaintance with Latin and Greek" (p. 240). The blend looks plausible because it implies an author's vision of the rise of decent men yearning for intellectual improvement which will be fruitful, in some measure, to advocate women's intellectual growth despite cultural challenges.

Gaskell's narrative further ridicules the narrator's position compared to that of the female character when he starts inventing a strategy to allow himself to perform the role of a knowledgeable man raising the question of a young beginner. "I could question cousin Phillis, instead of her questioning me, and so manage to keep the choice of the subjects of conversation in my own power" (p. 240). Obviously, Paul's resentment lies in his manly longing to make a completely established power as a man allowing himself to control the learning process of Phillis. Butler's advocacy of gender equality objects to the overprotective role of fathers whose sole objective rests upon the *natural* inculcation of patriarchal norms

¹² Rogers' comment in "The Education of *Cousin Phillis*" that "Gaskell resents Manning's glib certainty, yet in the text she nonetheless wonders what difference Greek and Latin can make to a wife and mother in a world harmonized by Minister Holman's spade and propelled by Inventor Manning's driving wheel" (31).

of gendered behaviour. Sharing Uglow's assumption, the latent power in Phillis Holman allows Paul to show male power upon the immature country girl. Meeting with his cousin enables a space for Paul to underpin conventional mannerisms. Phillis' grace which is endorsed by her feminine silence provides an opportunity for the guest, Paul Manning, to exhibit his masculine spirit, awkward though. Speaking Latin, and studying Dante and Virgil is a privilege for men. For this reason, when Paul observes Phillis he is surprised due to his feeling of masculine superiority. However, once adopted by Phillis, it could enhance her learned character which is a step in fostering Phillis's literacy.

However, neither Paul nor Holdsworth nor Reverend Holman could see Phillis' education as culturally enlightening to the young woman. "As opposed to Paul, Phillis is not allowed to become an adult through her achievements, but only through marriage" (Hanson, p. 433). Therefore, Mr Holdsworth is introduced as a desired prince for the mythical "Sleeping Beauty" (*CP*, p. 276). Critics interpret the portrait of Phillis as representative of fairy tales like that of Cinderella or the White Snow, which endorses the aspects of a dreamful young woman aspiring for the attainment of a lifelong dream. According to Holdsworth, Phillis's love is irresistible because "[h]er character as unusual and rare as her beauty! [...] her high tranquillity, her pure innocence. — [...] she lives in such seclusion, almost like the sleeping beauty" (p. 276). Critically reading this portrait, the sleeping beauty is experiencing isolation and solitude that affect her sensibility upon hearing about Holdsworth's desertion when he departed to Canada. The good point in this story is that Phillis awakens from the illusory dream to start a new life opening to maturity.

Although the congruity between the type of education provided for Phillis Holman is not relevant to woman's expectations, she has developed herself to maturity. Her tutor is a man whose posture, as provided by the narrator, leaves no doubt that he is making use of his being an educated male, a knowledgeable engineer, and a prestigious person whose reputation is his asset. Her father "still insists that Phillis remain[s] a child. Any emotional responses and any traces of her burgeoning sexuality have to be suppressed" (Hansson, p. 433). Needless to doubt his good intention and determination to make Phillis well educated even by giving her a novel to read without consulting her father as Paul suggests.

PATRIARCHAL INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Phillis Holman's childhood experience has its impact on her slow progress while being surrounded by men belonging to different age groups and holding utilitarian knowledge of their daily activities. Learning for Mr Holman, Paul and Holdsworth is of utility "in its direct connection to social advancement; learning is rising and "manning": promotion, partnership, the boss's daughter, and one's own carriage" (Rogers, p. 30). Nevertheless, the deep-seated Victorian standards of femininity entail tensions between the daughter who, inherently, likes to broaden her knowledge, and her parents, especially the father figure whose status represents an impediment along the journey of his daughter's struggle with self-construction. Domestic ideology endorses the naturalised/ normalised patriarchal culture that Victorian fiction critically presents. Gaskell highlights the manly power in the process of tutoring. During a conversation between Paul and Holdsworth, the latter informs Paul about his suggestion to Phillis to read Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*. I quote:

'I had a capital novel by Manzoni, I Promessi Sposi, just the thing for a beginner; and if she must still puzzle out Dante, my dictionary is far better than hers.'
'Then she found out you had written those definitions on her list of words?'
'Oh! yes'—with a smile of amusement and pleasure. He was going to tell me what had taken place, but checked himself.
'But I don't think the minister will like your having given her a novel to read?'.
(p. 264)

Upon hearing Holdsworth's suggestion, the only question that Paul raises is whether Phillis' father allows his daughter to read it or not: "I don't think the minister will like your having given her a novel to read" (264). By inference, men control the type of reading available for women as guardians of virtue.

Upon the publication of *Ruth*, fathers and husbands prevented their wives and daughter from reading the novel that bestows forgiveness on a fallen woman who infringed the Victorian norms of sexuality. Accordingly, the domination of patriarchy in Victorian society designs women's taste in reading on the pretext of protecting *innocent* females

against moral deviation. Again, the traditional concept of imprisoned women is unavoidable despite Phillis's access to the world of knowledge, the manly world of experience, and the authority of learning and literacy to manage the industrial and mechanical world. While interweaving the thread of the construction of Phillis's identity through education, the influential factors that affect her female experience are related to the farming environment. This ecological context connotes its challenges in framing the learning process under patriarchal supervision. Therefore, the environment of teaching Phillis, who is a sample of country girls, reveals the clash between the womanly desire to attain intellectual enlightenment and the male penchant to endorse the patriarchal mindset. In defiance of this challenge, education in Gaskell's fiction remains an apparatus to revisit the prevailing gender-based discrepancies.

UNCOMFORTABLE MALE GAZE AND ILLUSORY LOVE

Phillis's pastoral milieu favours her subordinate position aligning with male-cultural constructs of femininity. We mentioned in this paper how Paul's gaze embarrasses Phillis although she does not utter a word. Now, Phillis is embarrassed by Holdsworth's penetrating gaze, which casts doubt on the teacher's mission of enlightenment. The question of inviting a male teacher to train a female is not congruous if we claim that Gaskell's fiction advocates unbiased-gender training. Despite its crucial importance, the female psyche is not considered an issue. The act of Holdsworth's drawing Phillis alludes to eroticism. Accustomed to repressive scenarios of silence, Phillis cannot articulate troubled or tormented feelings in words upon encountering the male gaze. Although Holdsworth's discourse is embellished with civility and grace, the sexual arousal is not camouflaged. The textual clues are abundant to back up this idea. Addressing Phillis, Holdsworth requests her: "I beg your pardon, but I want hair loosely flowing" (p. 272). The narrator closely observes to comment that the teacher:

[B]egan to draw, looking intently at Phillis; I could see this stare of his discomposed her—her colour came and went, her breath quickened with the consciousness of his regard; at last, when he said, 'Please look at me for a minute or two, I want to get in the eyes,' she looked up at him, quivered, and suddenly got up and left the room. (p. 272)

Convention-based interpretations could see the painting of the woman's body as significant to foster Phillis's sentimental expectations and start dreaming about the attainment of the maiden's earthly ideal. To my mind, this sexually evoking scene is mystifying to decipher. The displacement of the teacher's mission is incompatible with the conceptual map of women's education. Nonetheless, the penetrating male gaze underscores Phillis's emotional experience that is dormant. Given the cultural attribute of male maturity, Phillis is not equipped to reject the embarrassing gaze of her teacher. Theoretically, a woman's mind is predisposed to reject the masculine maxims that appraise the culture of silence which is imbued in Phillis's rural upbringing. Inviting a male tutor multiplies the sense of Phillis's oppression. Although a private tutor's role is expected to elevate the daughter's literacy and nurture her knowledge in the promotion of feminine skills, Holdsworth's role affects the girl's emotional dimension. Although the father is not shown as actively following his daughter's developing knowledge of foreign languages and literature.

Tackling the complex topic of Phillis's desire to learn which consists of struggling to develop her skills opens to culture-based and gender-based issues. Gaskell mirrors the Victorian concept of domestic tasks that make women take reading as a secondary option. When Phillis leaves the kitchen door slightly open, Paul takes a stealthy look into the *womanly sphere* before joining her to see what she is doing. Paul's curiosity is irresistible till he discovers his cousin is fond of Virgil and Dante. At that time, Phillis is "peeling apples with quick dexterity of finger, but with repeated turnings of her head towards some book [the *Inferno*] lying on the dresser by her" (p. 242). Remarkably, the same scene occurs in Gaskell's work *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857) where "any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen [Emily] studying German out of an open book, propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough" (p. 105) to make delicious bread for the family. Books occupy a place in the kitchen but how important the time allotted for reading and studying is a worthwhile issue in Gaskell's writings.

Although the active roles of Paul and his friend Holdsworth, Phillis's tutor, have shown uncommon enthusiasm to acquaint the young woman with reading habits, the culturally embedded norms of patriarchy are infiltrated into the text. Despite this critical aspect, some scenes demonstrate the nascent outcome of a developing practical mind of

Phillis. This deduction challenges Curtis's imposed interpretation¹³ that "Phillis's desire to enter, through knowledge, this male world and her love for Holdsworth exceed accepted ideals of femininity, and transgress gendered codes of behavior" (p. 136). Curtis's statement denies Phillis's transcendence of the earthly ideal of single women. Phillis's sexuality is latent and shallow compared to her overt desire to be independent to speak her mind loudly about Holdsworth and to adjust her father's wrath against Paul. This phase of Phillis' wisdom matters in the narrative of a female's learning outcome. In contrast to her father's emotional rage against Paul and his friend Holdsworth, the Holman child, i.e., Phillis, frees herself from the paternal wings thanks to the social, intellectual, and emotional development of her personality. Phillis's identity construction process is articulated through a code of behaviour demonstrated through her daily activities. This metamorphosis in the character's performance reveals, in some measure, internal comfort to overcome the failed story of illusory love.

CRAVING FOR AUTONOMY TO PROMOTE IDENTITY

The concept of craving for autonomy is difficult for Phillis. Despite its challenging nature, the peculiarities of a cultivated woman's gender identity remain a site of deconstruction and innovation toward the establishment of a non-stereotypical personality. Examining the layers of meanings include the metaphorical pastoral innocence that is wrestling with Phillis's desire to transcend domestic ideology and the separate spheres' theory. Gaskell's discourse on country women's education comprises clues to a wide scope of futuristic vision. The promising education in the Holman's house is gauged through the change in the female's mind and heart which should be grasped by the father, too. A learned woman's status is more privileged in her society as well as outside of it. During a discussion with his convention-biased father, Paul twists in his mind the feasibility of Phillis becoming a future wife. While his father describes Phillis as a good fit for his son, Paul hesitates to avow that Phillis's education is an asset as it could be an impediment:

¹³ Curtis' statement that "[Phillis's] desire (textual/sexual) must be regulated" (136) because she transcends the "ideals of femininity" (136), implying the norms of female sexuality, does not have textual evidence in Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*. Despite this remark, Curtis's article remains insightful and inspiring in this paper.

'You see she's so clever she's more like a man than a woman—she knows Latin and Greek.'

'She'd forget 'em, if she'd a houseful of children,' was my father's comment on this.

'But she knows many a thing besides, and is wise as well as learned; she has been so much with her father. She would never think much of me, and I should like my wife to think a deal of her husband.' (p. 251)

Providing the right educational model and adequate materials for developing Phillis's intellect can be an asset to redefining her position in her community.

In fact, the act of revisiting for the sake of rewriting women's teaching method allows a deconstruction of prevailing norms of the Victorian conception of literacy as evidenced by the textual clues in *Cousin Phillis*. Paul naively supposes that her learning course has made her develop into a man more than a woman. Some critics consider Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* as a mere mockery of women's intellectual evolution by focusing on the dramatization of women's struggle against the male gaze and the dilemma of unrequited love. However, aligning with the objective of this paper, the novella provides readers with textual clues in support of the pragmatic journey toward a woman's liberation to *gradually* free her mind from the imposed cultural constructs of femininity. Becoming a learned daughter, "[Phillis] always did right in her parents' eyes out of her natural simple goodness and wisdom" (p. 290).

Nascent femininity on the Hope Farm has been embellished thanks to Phillis's education. As put by the narrator who smartly remarks that Phillis becomes knowledgeable of "the different broods of chickens, and she showed [him] the hens that were good mothers, and told [him] the characters of all the poultry with the utmost good faith" (p. 289). Meticulous examination of the register of words Paul uses to emphasise the practical knowledge Phillis becomes acquainted with to use in her daily farming activities. This development in Phillis's profile endorses Butler's theory of gender as "performativity," and as doing (1991, p. 128).¹⁴ More importantly, she demonstrates communication skills that empower her to articulate her ideas and to become plausible in her rural community. Paul appreciates his cousin's development by stating "I listened, for I believe there was a good deal of truth in all she said" (p. 289). Phillis' education strengthens her self-confidence in

¹⁴ Butler devotes a section in *Gender Trouble* to elaborate on her argument about "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions" (128-41).

being responsible for herself. Through education, Phillis's life experience transforms into a significant process heading towards the establishment of womanly autonomy.

Positive metamorphoses are accumulated to show how education has made profound progress in the external and internal profile of the young woman. Education is equated with mental and psychological excitement as evidenced by the narrator who affirms that she “never saw her so lovely, or so happy [...] My cousin Phillis was like a rose that had come to *full bloom* on the sunny side of a lonely house, sheltered from storms” (p. 289). However, the dynamics of writing require climactic scenes in the course of the development of events. The tension in the novella takes place in the third part to restructure the flow of feelings shared by the narrator and the female protagonist. Unable to transcend the deep-seated vision of submissive *pure* femininity, Mr Holman reminds Paul, who is accused of “raising hopes [and] exciting feelings” in Phillis' mind, that his child is 'So young, so pure from the world!' and does not deserve cheating (p. 307). Gaskell outlines her narrative structure and plot to establish women's ability to be independent, responsible, and self-protective. Therefore, upon hearing her father's furious statement, she breaks her silence avowing: 'I loved him, father!' she said at length, raising her eyes to the minister's face” (CP, p. 308). In this scene, Phillis breaks through silence to transcend the Oedipal phase, in psychoanalytical terms.

Upon hearing Phillis' declaration of her love of engineer Edward Holdsworth, Reverend Holman is shocked and could not absorb his child leaving the nest of fatherhood according to her will. His shock could be plausible, yet unbelievable. According to Uglow, “Farmer Holman's disbelief that Phillis could have left him to follow another, though for earthly, not religious love” is painful to endure (p. 532). The conflict between daughters and fathers is a recurrent theme from *Mary Barton*, the first publication to *Wives and Daughters*, the last and posthumous publication. Nevertheless, the love relationship that occurs by the completion of private tutoring does not take the natural procedure to leave Phillis responsible for her own choice. What the text criticises is the challenging “graceful resignation of the parent” (Uglow, p. 532). The Law of the Father enforces the deep-rooted patriarchal culture and represents impediments in the trajectory of Phillis's self-development as a learned mature woman.

The post-revelation scene is also promising more than the revelation itself because it projects a mature phase of feminine identity construction aspiring its power from cosmic values of social justice. Although the revelation is aesthetically dramatised, because it discloses pain and pleasure, it is representative of womanly growth within the pastoral community. Phillis' critical, social, intellectual, and emotional development is an outcome of her education that conducts her through the humanisation and identity construction process despite its emotional ambiguity. Finally, it is safe to state that Phillis's emerging predisposition to become acquainted with the ethics of autonomy along with the code of gender and morality is witnessed in her brave declaration of love without dramatising the unconsummated love.

Loving Holdsworth rather than Paul conforms to the vision of adhering to modernism and progress. Both are evidenced in Holdsworth's portrait as an engineer, a teacher who is open to foreign languages and cultures like the Italian one. These attributes are valorised by the enthusiastic student, Phillis, whose "mother bring (sic) her the Latin and Italian books she had been so fond of before her illness" (p. 316). Gaskell's narrative advocates the education of women in the early model of gender equality which simultaneously privileges experiential and practical education. However, it is not stated clearly whether attaining this objective requires a good gender-based tutor for young women or not. Admittedly, Holdsworth does not show objection to Phillis's reading the novel about a romantic topic; an issue that Mrs Clare in *Wives and Daughters* rejects as she advises her daughter, Cynthia, to read a book about history.¹⁵ Despite the character's ambivalence, Gaskell's fictional discourse supports women's education by men as an experience to develop an independent feminine identity in the promotion of womanly emancipation. As such, gender relations and the evolution of women's intellectual position are interwoven within the discourse of gender-biased education.

Literacy and the social codes of behaviour were not consistent with the developing industrialised British society. Intellectuals did not share views about the same education that should be provided for both genders. This inconsistency between economic progress and ethical progress represents a social dimension of women's education. Social awareness

¹⁵ Upon receiving Mrs Clare's request, which is intended to make the Hamley brothers appreciate her daughter's intellect, Cynthia "dutifully went and brought down from among her Boulogne school-books *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*" (WD 267).

of the futility of cultural conventions which are sex-biased is required to revise women's status in the Victorian family and, of course, society. According to Philip Rogers, Gaskell "stresses the utility of learning for males in its direct connection to social advancement; learning is rising and "manning": promotion, partnership, the boss's daughter, and one's own carriage" (p. 30). Education could be seen as an individual achievement of Phillis; but in reality, it is a key indicator of national identity. It is representative of cultural strategies stressing mechanical economic and social progress in which women's education is important to enhance the aspect of *being* rather than *doing*. Phillis's practical education epitomises authorial rejection of the circle of the male tutors especially the narrator whose description and reports about Phillis are subjective to distort her womanly valour within a community of men and a silent mother. Education marks Phillis's mental and psychological growth. Wandering alone with Paul on the Hope Farm without reluctance or any aspect of anxiety signifies self-confidence and belief in her identity as a free woman.

CONCLUSION

Gaskell's preoccupation with key issues related to women's identity construction underscores education as a prerequisite to establishing feminine power. Education is mostly a personal achievement and an asset to assess the developing spirit of country girls. Revisiting pure femininity as is the case of Phillis transforms into enhancing experience and knowledge. The burgeoning critical mind of the iconoclastic female character, Phillis, epitomises the progressively positive shift despite the overprotective paternal authority. Education is not to blindly fall in love with man's authority as much as to grow enlightened about one's femininity across the journey of the female quest for identity construction. The deconstruction of the Law of the Father, which aesthetically still requires sophistication in *Cousin Phillis* is revealed through the deficiency of the paternal role during the erotic scenes of Holdsworth's drawing. The withdrawal of paternal authority is also illustrated through Paul's clear statements that his cousin has been growing to maturity after being acquainted with rational reasoning tools and uncommon wisdom. This wisdom is a female attribute of learned women. In Gaskell's short story "Lizzie Leigh", the teacher Susan Palmer voluntarily takes care of Lizzie Leigh's abandoned baby and saves it. Miss Palmer's mind is enlightened to comfort the traumatised and shocked Leigh's family, especially the mother and her son.

The point is during the absence of the father, women stand up to support themselves. In the context of Phillis's declaration about her right to choose what best fits her personal life in terms of love because she desires to free herself from the moribund phase of childhood and her paternal domineering position. Gaskell's female persona in *Cousin Phillis* experiences the procedure of humanisation while leaving the ivory tower of childhood innocence. The development transforms a cool, silent, sensitive, and innocent girl into an educated, mature, knowledgeable, and courageous outspoken woman who represents a burgeoning healthy body and spirit.

Phillis integrates the womanly brave spirit in her education to break with normative standards of traditional femininity and enjoy an emotional flow of feelings without speaking a word. Phillis's mental evolution illustrates her self-awareness which is coined with her internal desire to enjoy the freedom of unconstrained emotions in the open nature of the Hope Farm. Unlike Molly's unrequited love of Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*, Phillis does not describe her emotional experience as frustrating because it is not consummated in marriage. Education and a woman's romantic experience in Phillis's case become organically combined to construct knowledge. Thus, the conventional standard prescribing love as the pivot of a woman's threshold to attaining her earthly ideal is a fallacy. She explores her emotional experience to free herself from the socially imposed taboo of feminine sexuality without performing sexuality.

Through the apparatus of education, a woman's self-fashioning within the frame of interconnected gendered relationships is a rewarding experience. Upon elucidating the importance of education as a woman's asset endorsing her empowerment by attaining literacy, the development of critical skills, and reform of the female self have become characteristics of the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman figure. At the intersection of early and mid-Victorian periods, the sublime style of writing Gaskell elevated her to a position of a Victorian icon advocating a non-stereotypical paradigm of feminine writing. Despite its challenging nature, the specificities of a woman's gender identity construction remain a site of the innovative project toward the establishment of a non-stereotypical female identity. Finally, to reform the arbitrariness of education in terms of its materials and teaching methodology, open education for Victorian people was confirmed through the announcement of Forster's Education Act of 1870.

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