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**“Relative Creatures”:
Sisters and Female Development in Ferrier’s
Marriage and Jewsbury’s *The Half-Sisters***

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Women were “from their own constitution, and from the station they occupy in the world, strictly speaking, *relative* creatures.”

Sarah Ellis *The Women of England* (1838), emphasis mine

If Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau, and later the prolific Sarah Ellis, asserted that women were created to serve men, women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier and Geraldine Jewsbury were making another case. In the novel *Marriage* (1818), Susan Ferrier uses the plot of the courtship novel to examine the parallel development of twins raised separately. In becoming women these girls move from a position as daughters to assume their adult place in society as wives, with greater or lesser success. Thirty years later, Geraldine Jewsbury would similarly investigate divergences in class and nationality, as well as the nature of their upbringing, and especially their mothering, in *The Half Sisters*, a novel that reflects the greater possibilities of the time for female involvement in the public sphere. Geraldine Jewsbury explicitly confronts the notion that women cannot be anything in their own right as she contrasts the life of an actress with that of a half sister who embodies the conventional Victorian lady. This comparison of two novels that put into question prevailing attitudes about the position of women will examine the discourses of motherhood and the ideal wife that underwrite the stories. Underlying the overt courtship plot of the novels is written another story in which the young women seek in a relationship with their sisters a position in which to develop their identities as adult women.

Both authors use the situation of sisters that have been separated at birth to explore alternative ways of becoming a woman within restrictive social worlds. The role of environment in shaping character, with important implications for female education, is examined as both authors look at the different paths that their characters’ backgrounds have provided for them. Though nature endows them with similar attractiveness, nurture is the determining factor, as their futures are largely determined by their personal histories and upbringing. In both stories the sister placed in less favourable economic circumstances achieves greater success.

The Susan Ferrier novel *Marriage* remains largely unknown today despite its satiric edge and humour, yet with a recent re-issue in Oxford World's Classics it may soon find a wider readership. Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) was a contemporary of Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth, and like them, she has made a contribution to the art of the regional novel. The scenes she paints of life in the Highlands, as well as her depiction of aristocratic life in London, are full of satiric wit and larger than life characters from all walks of life. She did not marry, but one may conjecture from the novel *Marriage* with its proliferation of estranged couples and divorces that she was well informed about its pitfalls. However, for those of her female characters who combine good sense with feeling, she also presents the marital happiness possible to women who attain full adulthood. Her first novel, *Marriage*, was started in collaboration with her aristocratic friend Charlotte Clavering, who is responsible for the chapter about Mrs. Douglas' early life. Though it took her many years to complete it (1810-1818), she went on to write two other novels, *The Inheritance* and *Destiny; or The Chief's Daughter* (1831). Like Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier sought to instruct in her writing, and we may discern the effect of the liberatory writings of the age on her work, as she asserts that women too are entitled to the freedom and happiness that free choice of their marriage partner may bring. At the same time, in the line of Enlightenment feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Ferrier believed that women must have education to make such choices rationally and with discernment. She regretted the conventions that made it impossible for young women to be self-assertive, as she commented about her own failed courtship in 1809 to her friend Charlotte Clavering:

Had my eyes been worth a button they'd soon have settled the matter; but there's the misery of being sent into the world with such mussel shells!! I (a modest maiden) said nothing and it seems they were silent; and so we parted, never to meet again!!!¹⁾

Ferrier regretted her lack of the necessary requirements for attractiveness, and her inability to succeed in a highly competitive marriage market, yet she turns any feeling for bitterness into comedy. What made her novels such a success at the time, moreover, and continues to make them worthwhile for the twentieth-century reader, is her astute observation of local language, her creation of idiosyncratic characters and her use of wit.

Geraldine Jewsbury is better known today for her voluminous correspondence with Jane Welsh, the wife of Thomas Carlyle, than for her fiction, though in addition to her many reviews she wrote six novels. She was an enormously colourful character who smoked cigars and swore, and was also known for witty conversation so that her house in Manchester and later in London drew such prominent figures as T. H. Huxley, D. G. Rossetti, Ruskin and the Carlyles. In her intimate friendship with the

Carlyles she often shocked and provoked them, yet as Virginia Woolf shows in her discussion of the friendship in her essay “Geraldine and Jane,” they were, with reservations, staunch supporters of her talent. Whereas Geraldine Jewsbury hated ‘respectability’ more than anything else, her friend Jane disapproved of ‘humbug’ but took care to maintain the social proprieties. She helped Jewsbury’s first novel *Zoë* find a publisher, but wrote

Geraldine in particular shows herself here a far more profound and daring speculator than ever I had fancied her. I do not believe there is a woman alive at the present day, not even Georges Sand herself, that could have written some of the best passages in this book . . . but they must not publish it — decency forbids! (Woolf, 194)

After Jewsbury made the necessary concessions to respectability — though as she said she “had no vocation for propriety as such” — the novel was published in 1845.

Geraldine Jewsbury occupied a significant position in the publishing world as the first woman to have a career as a publisher’s reader, reviewing about 2,000 books for the Atheneum. Her novels provide not only an alternative look at a world made so familiar to us by more well known Victorian novelists, but also enable us to reconsider the nature of female development, and particularly that of sisterhood, as seen by an unconventional woman of the period. As Gardiner reminds us, “within literary texts too, where critics previously read overt plots concerning courtship, marriage or adultery, some now discover crucial subtexts built around relationships among women” (Gardiner, 136). To read beyond the marriage plot is to see an important subtext often obscured by the more prominent narrative that fulfills genre expectations. And here, beneath the courtship plot, is a story that centrally involves sisterhood, and the patriarchal constraints that thwart it.

Maternal Splitting

The mothers of each novel are clearly differentiated from each other: as good or bad mothers in *Marriage*, or as good or bad women in *The Half Sisters*. It has become a commonplace of feminist criticism following the work of Gilbert and Gubar that the conflicted energies of the woman writer are often represented in characters who embody conflicting sides of the writer. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory provides an explanation for the prevalence of wicked mothers. Bruno Bettelheim notes,

far from being a device used only by fairy tales, such a splitting up of one person into two to keep the good image uncontaminated occurs to many children as a solution to a relationship too difficult to manage or comprehend. . . . The fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also pre-

vents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts or wishes about her (39). In her essay discussing the phenomenon of maternal splitting, Susan Suleiman draws attention to the fact that whereas in Freud, this splitting refers to the erotic realm, here these literary versions involve the issue of maternal nurturance. In *Marriage*, the splitting of the mother into biological and foster mothers engages the issue of proper child-care, beginning with the problem of breast-feeding.

The explicit discussion of breast feeding in the Susan Ferrier novel echoes concerns also found in another courtship novel of the period, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*. In both cases, the story involves aristocratic mothers who do not take to mothering naturally, refuse to breast feed (which was strongly advocated by Rousseau and other authorities of the time) and risk losing their babies as a result. The aristocratic tradition represented in British novels held that children "were an inconvenience that should be kept from interfering with the pleasures and intrigues of the mothers" (Thadden 6). The birth of twins is regarded as a misfortune first for financial reasons, but also given the mother's feeling for girls, it is seen as a double calamity: "I hope to goodness I shall never have any more — I wonder if any body ever had twin daughters before! and I, too, who hate girls so!" (119) Lady Juliana is coerced into attempting to breast feed "but the first trial proved also the last, as she declared nothing on earth should ever induce her to perform so odious an office" (118) and a wet nurse is hired for one of the twins. The other is left to the caprices of her eccentric aunts and fails, not surprisingly, to thrive on their regime of alternate under- and overfeeding. Lady Juliana's failure of feeling and incompetence as a mother had been anticipated by the childless Mrs. Douglas, the good mother of the novel, in her reflection that "this unfortunate will herself become a mother; yet wholly ignorant of the duties, incapable of the self-denial of that sacred office, she will bring into the world creatures to whom she can only transmit her errors and her weaknesses" (99). Indeed, the victim of a fashionable education, Lady Juliana prefers her pug to her babies and her husband's hope that she will develop maternal feeling is unfulfilled.

By contrast, Mrs. Douglas, who becomes foster mother to the abandoned baby, is the epitome of practical, balanced and loving motherhood. The frivolity and overconsumption that characterize Lady Juliana's way of living are strongly contrasted with the thrift and rationality of Mrs. Douglas. Middle-class values are asserted against decadent aristocratic ways, particularly with regard to child-raising:

"Take her away," cried Lady Juliana, in a tone of despair, "I wish I could send her out of my hearing altogether, for her noise will be the death of me."

"Alas! What would I give to hear the blessed sound of a living child!" exclaimed Mrs. Douglas, taking the infant in her arms. "And how great would be my happiness, could I call the poor rejected one mine!" (120).

In such vastly different environments, then, are the twins raised, and the reader can safely predict that though one is undersized and squalling at birth while the other is the picture of health and contentment, at adulthood the outcome of different forms of upbringing is apparent.

In *The Half Sisters* the mothers are equally contrasted, though in terms of class, nationality and economic situation rather than in moral terms. Destitute, foreign, and mad, Bianca's mother cannot provide her with entrée into society; moreover, the fact that she is a Catholic, "a word of abomination as great as that of Socialist,"²⁾ (18) puts her completely outside of conservative British society. The Italian mother of Bianca is portrayed as guilty of having loved 'not wisely but too well', and the burden for the daughter's illegitimacy is placed securely on her father's shoulders, since he was persuaded to abandon his first love when he returned to England, not knowing that he left her with child. His absence overcasts his daughter's childhood, which, shadowed by both poverty and the chronic depression of her mother, is not a happy one. The young industrialist sensibly marries a young woman with a fortune, his partner's daughter, who brings the safety of an 'intensely prosaic heart' and a gift for housekeeping to their home.

Jewsbury counters the prevailing notions from the cult of childhood, stating that "in spite of all that has been said about the happiness of childhood, of its being a recollection of the better world from which we came forth, it is to many a most purgatorial entrance into life" (21). Alice's childhood is characterized as unhappy, though she suffers more from the excess of material comfort than the reverse: "The life was almost choked out of her by the rank, over-fed material prosperity which surrounded her" (42). These "solid comforts" do little to alleviate the longing for what she lacks — "kind words, smiling looks, sympathy with [her] little pains and pleasures" (21). The two families are parallel at the outset of the novel, when both girls are fatherless and suffer in different ways from excessive proximity with their mothers. However, Jewsbury undercuts what advantages accrue to Alice: "Indeed, whether she or her poor unknown half-sister Bianca were in the worse position for all that regards real help and training for the lifetime opening before each, it would be hard to say" (23). Which girl is more likely to escape the unpromising future ahead? — Alice, prone to "vague, undefined, restless aspirations that defined her heart" and critical of the value of the marriages she sees around her; or Bianca, entrapped by poverty and illegitimacy?

The Mother-Daughter Dyad

The difficult relationship with their mothers is made suffocatingly close as a consequence of paternal absence. This conflicted relationship is emblematic of the way in

which “femininity is conceived psychoanalytically as a state of psychical and sexual impasse. Femininity is of its essence something to be struggled over, fought for, defended and, in the last resort, stolen” (Raitt, 104). The mother-daughter relationship in the novels will be examined in terms of the achievement of feminine identity, theorized by Freud (1933) as an outcome, an arrival. Freud sets out a threefold path for female development: “One leads to sexual inhibition or to neurosis, the second to change of character in the sense of a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity” (in Raitt, 104). Though recent psychological theory, especially that of Chodorow, has questioned the inevitability of the repudiation of the mother for female development, Freud claims that arrestment in the original attachment to the mother will result in the daughter’s failure to achieve a true changeover towards men. The daughter lives her femininity in a state of envy and blame — envy of little boy’s bodies and blame toward her mother for her state. For the mother, on the other hand, her daughter may be regarded as a rival. Within the framework of the patriarchal society whose unconscious mechanisms Freud was the first to track, the mother-daughter relationship is fraught with competitiveness, blame and anxiety.

The negative aspects of becoming a woman are brought out in the two novels in mother-daughter relationships which are shown to be problematic. For Alice, the form of womanhood lived by her mother is seen as trivial, boring, and unappreciated. Jewsbury contrasts the managerial tasks of the ‘angel in the house’ with that of the husband in the public sphere, so that the essential similarity of the two roles brings out the inferiority of the woman’s work in the home. A young man makes the comment that his mother “makes more noise and bother about managing her three women, than I and my father do over four hundred men” (39). At the same time, the servants are not treated as humanely as they would be in the factory, since they are overseen in every aspect of their lives, whereas outside labour allows them some degree of autonomy and self-determination. The angel of the house, contrary to the dominant ideology, is seen to rule over her small domain with gloves of iron. Alice is ruled over at home by her mother in the same way: the tasks of mending and making innumerable sewn objects are given priority over reading or improving her mind. Alice’s mother has the weight of educational authority behind her in this prohibition on novels: the Edgeworths wrote that

with respect to sentimental stories, and books of mere entertainment, we must remark, that they should be sparingly used, especially in the education of girls. This species of reading cultivates what is called the heart prematurely, lowers the tone of the individual, and induces indifference for those common pleasures and occupations which . . . constitute by far the greatest portion of our daily happiness (Armstrong 920).

Alice's mother informs her, "Your life will be domestic; you are neither to be a fashionable woman nor an authoress; therefore your excessive devotion to books and accomplishments will bring no useful results, but only unfit you for your duties, and fill your mind with fancies" (14). Mrs. Helmsby's assessment of what Alice's life is to be sounds a death knell for Alice's youthful hopes of a life that is different from that of her mother's. Yet, as Hirsch argues, in conventional nineteenth-century plots of the European and American tradition, "the fantasy that controls the female family romance is the desire for the heroine's singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers" (Hirsch 10). Alice, however, is not the young woman to be capable of breaking out of the domestic hell she sees as constituting her future. For Jewsbury, Alice represents "a type of a very numerous class of English women, whose fine qualities, for lack of wise guidance, evaporate amid the common material details of household life, leaving them ineffectual and incomplete — grown children without the grace of childhood" (41). Jewsbury's story will outline the perils of this incomplete development of adulthood, which for women entails a kind of stunted humanity that is unable to think or judge for itself, and ultimately lacks the necessary moral fibre.³⁾

If women are required to remain childlike to fit their role in society, Alice notices with disturbing acuity that their work is not appreciated. Men engaged in large-scale business operations "were not likely to feel any interest in small refinements and elegancies for which there was no tangible use. Consequently, female society went for very little" (42). Though Alice is not depicted as having unusual intelligence or ability, to someone of her sensitivity, the futility of female adult life is striking and she despises the women who are held up as role models. Her peers are content to limit themselves to the circumscribed lives allotted them, "doing their work, and their practising, and their visitings," but Alice longs for something beyond the smallness of their lives. Where Bianca has learned that passion leads to sorrow and wasted lives, paradoxically, the daughter raised within stifling respectability seeks in romantic love an escape from the deadened sensibility that surrounds her.

In *Marriage* too, the relationship of the biological mother and daughter is portrayed as fraught with tension and difficulties. The source of much of these problems is rooted in class, since middle class prudence confronts aristocratic spendthrift ways and immoral behaviour, and the contrast in personalities derives as well from the class difference. Lady Juliana's selfishness is a consequence of an upbringing characterized by excessive wealth and numbers of servants to carry out her every wish. Mary is placed in a dilemma such that "with the highest feelings of filial reverence, she found herself perpetually called upon, either to sacrifice her own principles, or to act in direct opposition to her mother's will" (345). Nothing in Mary's upbringing in the

Highlands has prepared her for the frivolous life of reading fashionable novels, party-going, and unbridled consumption that is her mother's. When her mother opposes her going to church, however, Mary takes a stand, whereas she has compromised on other issues. Ferrier has created here a worthy representative of an educated woman; the creation of a young woman with strong religious convictions and the integrity and courage to carry them out. Similarly, when her mother demands that she accept the proposal of a young aristocrat, Mary maintains the right to choose someone she can love and respect, and asks about his character, principles and habits. Like Mrs. Helmsby, Lady Juliana rejects these prerequisites for marriage as ridiculous notions: "Character and principles! — one would suppose you were talking of your footman!" (347) Her other twin daughter, raised by her mother to despise love marriages, turns down the man she loves in order to marry wealth and position. Adrienne Rich observes that in a patriarchal culture women have "neither power nor wealth to hand on to their daughters . . . the most they can do is teach their daughters the tricks of surviving in the patriarchy by pleasing, and attaching themselves to, powerful and economically viable men" (Thadden 22). Daughters critical of the limitations of their mothers may look to sisterhood, a relation between equals that promises friendship as well as freedom from the unproductive and repressive aspects of the mother-daughter relationship. The sister is a figure of importance in the creation of female identity, since she shows her sibling possibilities not represented in the mother; she is the figure who shows them an alternative feminine identity.

Significant Sisters

For there is no friend like a sister
 In calm or stormy weather;
 To cheer one on the tedious way,
 To fetch one if one goes astray,
 To lift one if one totters down,
 To strengthen whilst one stands.

Christina Rossetti "Goblin Market"

Conflicted daughters may use their sense of oppositional relation to their mothers in the mother-daughter dyad (which they must escape in order to mature) to construct a third position as sister. Rose Norman notes, "she does not stop being a daughter, but she projects a third position from which to speak her . . . selfhood, creating a balanced triad — mother-daughter-sister — as an alternative to the rivalrous Freudian triad, mother-father-child. Thus she speaks from a position in a female triad, a positive posi-

tion for speaking the self as a woman” (Norman 89). As we shall see, however, women do not necessarily work together to produce themselves as women but rather “define themselves *against* other women, in competition with them” (Raitt, 104). In *The Half Sisters*, Alice finds support in her friendship with her half sister Bianca, despite never knowing their true relationship, and discovers an alternative form of womanhood to that inculcated by her mother. Initially, a source of solace and support as she befriends the poor young woman looking after her sick mother, Alice finds more meaning in the financial transaction of charity than in any of the other womanly tasks she performs. Here she has a chance to engage in a meaningful relationship based on equality and mutual respect, where her money can be of more fundamental importance than in the decoration of her home: “For the time being she was delivered from the black cloud of ennui which weighed on her like a cloud” (127). In entering this relationship she also escapes from her position of subordination as daughter and young wife to forge a relationship in which she is the superior with Bianca as her ‘*protégée*’. If looking after Bianca is merely a diversion at first, it soon becomes transformed into a true friendship, which Jewsbury views as a solemn covenant — “A real affection is a heavy responsibility to accept; it is a solemn trust, and one that neither man nor woman can lightly undertake . . . woe to those who seek to extract the pleasure whilst they ignore the duties” (132). Bianca becomes a necessary part of her sister’s life: Alice assures her “I care for you, as I never cared for anyone — you do me so much good — I feel a better person since I knew you” (134). Bianca is Alice’s other; a better, more worthwhile version of her irresolute self.

For Bianca, the meeting with Alice entails a return to the father she was seeking at the beginning of the story, all her life. It is in Alice’s home that Bianca encounters the portrait of Philip Helmsby, the father who abandoned her before her birth. Bianca recognizes the difficulties she places her sister in due to her position in society as an illegitimate child and actress and proposes to return to her when she has achieved success. Jewsbury blames the ‘timid conscientious character’ of Alice who would be overcome by “the *gêne* of finding a relation in such a questionable social position” (132). What Bianca does not anticipate is that Alice’s husband’s dislike of actresses will be in no way altered by her success, so that his injunction on seeing her makes their relationship impossible. It is an ironic twist of the plot that had Bianca been allowed to see her sister, the romantic entanglement with Mr. Bryant’s business partner would not have taken place.

The sisterhood Mary Douglas seeks in her twin in *Marriage* is not available to her since her sister has little idea of the use of female friendship. When she first meets her mother after an 18-year separation she is hurt by the inadequacy of her mother’s greeting to her. Too much in awe of her mother to give way to her hurt feelings, Mary does

give vent to her distress at her sister's coldness:

She followed her sister's steps as she quitted the room, and, throwing her arms around her, sobbed in a voice almost choked with the excess of her feelings, 'My sister, love me! — oh! love me!' but Adelaide's heart, seared by selfishness and vanity, was incapable of loving any thing in which the self had no share; and, for the first time in her life, she felt awkward and embarrassed (229).

Since Adelaide does not find in her sister even the interest she would have in a rival, she takes no interest in her whatsoever and Mary learns that friendship and love will not be found in her twin. Though resembling her outwardly, Mary's twin sister presents the reverse of any feeling or thought Mary might have and is repeatedly used to form a contrast between aristocratic and middle-class values and the world of self-interest versus that of sympathy. Her twin sister may have been the ideal refuge from the 'implacable wrath and unceasing animadversion' of her mother, yet her upbringing within a culture that sees only the value of catching a husband makes her oblivious to the merits of sisterhood. After her brilliant marriage to the Duke of Altamont, Adelaide distances herself from her sister still more, "feeling that the joys of her elevation would be diminished if shared with her sister" (366).

Good Wives

All four sisters of the two novels are successful in ways the authors were not in securing husbands and a home of their own. Susan Ferrier failed to marry, and Geraldine Jewsbury is notable for her time as having proposed three times to men, all with no success. As she wrote to her friend Jane,

I wish I had a good husband and a dozen children! Only the difficulty is that 'women of genius' require very special husbands — men of noble character, not intellect, but of a character and nature large enough, and strong enough, and wise enough to take them and their genius too, without cutting them down to suit their own crotchets, or reprobating half their qualities because they don't know what to do with them, or what they are intended for (Moers 156).⁴⁾

Ferrier's writing about a failed courtship above, similarly indicates her regret at being a spinster. There is also striking convergence in the stories of married life found in the two novels. Having chosen ambition over love, Adelaide engages in an adulterous liaison within the first year of her marriage, divorces her husband, and retreats with her lover to France, the appointed location for sinful behaviour in the 19th-century novel. When invited to come and join her daughter in the South of France, Lady Juliana leaves, never to come back since she finds "foreign manners and principles too congenial to her taste ever to return to Britain" (452) — Ferrier's final indictment on this

inadequate mother’s character.

In *The Half Sisters* the sibling raised by short-sighted motherhood suffers a similar fate in her marriage, with more disastrous consequences.⁵⁾ Whereas the earlier novel makes the failed marriage a result of the daughter’s following her parent’s rather than her own choice of husband, here, the lack of companionate marriage due to the separate spheres of husband and wife accounts for the problem. Alice is drawn to the illicit delights of passion and is ready to elope when her husband returns unexpectedly. She is swiftly carried off by a fatal attack of hysteria and stomach spasms, dead within twelve hours of writing the farewell note to her husband. Alice is not the monster of selfishness Ferrier portrays as her heroine’s foil, however; rather she is merely a discontented housewife with little or nothing to occupy her mind and suffering from lack of resources due to her inferior education. In her resides Jewsbury’s strongest critique of a system that takes a vital thinking person and enslaves her in the trivial activities of home management. As Alice comments, “I have felt as if I had been all my life banished from my natural home, and forced to live in a strange place where I could not feel *at home*. . . . You see I am surrounded with every thing that a woman can desire, and yet I feel shut up in prison; I can get to hear and see nothing that my heart cares for” (265). Jewsbury anticipates and critiques the full-blown ideology of wifhood that would be developed in the future by John Ruskin in *Sesame and Lilies* in which he defines the separate spheres according to the divergent natures of man and woman:

The man’s power is active progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. . . . But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle — and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision (Ruskin 121).

Alice’s half sister Bianca, despite enormous setbacks due to her precarious position in society, achieves balance through work, so that even when a failed love affair makes her desperate, she is able to channel this feeling into her acting. Jewsbury uses the parallel lives of the sisters to uncover the emptiness found in the heart of the home and contrast it with the value of work in the public sphere in giving life meaning and developing women’s powers.

“Making Themselves Women”

According to the dominant Victorian discourse of gender, the position of woman is constructed as passive, subordinate and decorative. The young woman of the female Bildungsroman will need to challenge this designation of her role if she is to achieve selfhood. Her mother’s life provides a map for her, but she may wish to reject this guidebook, just as Alice disputes the value of guidebooks “that [teach] us all the walks,

and drives, and 'points of view': "We know, beforehand, all we are going to see and . . . cannot help wishing it were possible to set out like the heroes of old to seek our fortune, and walk to the end of the world" (58).⁶ Alice experiences the lethal nature of the "domestic carceral" (Michie 58), or imprisonment within the home, a concept which undoes the benign meaning of staying at home and replacing it with the suggestion of various perils to be found within the house. Being a Victorian homemaker, a superfluous role in a house full of servants, causes the boredom that Jewsbury likens to leprosy, a self-consuming disease. But despite Bianca's persuasive criticism of women leading a life of nonentity (248), she marries and gives up her career. The radical position sketched out by Jewsbury earlier dissolves in the portrayal of Bianca's new life as a lady. In an essay describing how the public is domesticated within the novel so that the actress is represented in terms of home, while Alice is shown as playing a part or acting, Rosen concludes that Jewsbury attempts to show Bianca's "embrace of domesticity as an exercise of individual will," yet finds the ending problematic (Rosen 29). Indeed, Bianca goes from receiving public adulation to receiving her husband's praise about her housewifery in short order; yet she maintains her clear-sighted view of things and challenges him on his assumptions: "You are like all the rest of men, and have no faith in a woman's genius, until it is shown in the practical manifestation of arranging your breakfasts, dinners and servants" (392). The novel's ending fails to provide a portrayal of what a woman of genius is capable of. The value of sisterhood is undone with the resolution of the novel, as Bianca is sisterless and depends upon her husband for the friendship she had sought in her sibling. Ironically enough, Jewsbury ends this tale of the rebinding of her female Prometheus with a quotation from *Prometheus Unbound*, a passage preaching the passive virtues of "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance" (397).

However conventional the resolution of the novel is, Jewsbury in her private life was convinced that a woman was not designed to be merely instrumental in her dealings with others, but possessed qualities capable of creating a valuable existence on her own.

I believe we are touching on better days, when women will have a genuine, normal life of their own to lead. There, perhaps, will not be so many marriages, and women will be taught not to feel their destiny manqué if they remain single. They will be able to be friends and companions in a way they cannot be now. . . . Instead of having appearances to attend to, they will be allowed to have their virtues . . . without being diluted down to the tepid 'rectified spirit' of 'feminine grace' and 'womanly timidity' — in short, they will make themselves women, as men are allowed to make themselves men. (Wilkes xxv)

In "making themselves women" girls may need to find a new map for womanhood,

one that does not have the limitations of that of their mother’s life. Women may need to “think through our mothers” as Virginia Woolf suggests, in reevaluating history and rethinking social roles; however, to form a new woman, the new feminine identity struggling to emerge throughout the nineteenth century would need to look to its sisters for contemporary solutions to a contemporary problem. No longer satisfied to be the “relative creatures” endorsed by Mrs. Ellis, the woman seeking independence of thought and personal integrity would look rather to relatives — sisters — for the support and guidance needed in forging a new self. In seeking the support of their sisters for affirmation, affiliation and connection, the heroines depicted in these novels are thwarted by the hegemonic values of Victorian womanhood, so that sisters remain rivals in Ferrier’s *Marriage* and are separated by social propriety in Jewsbury’s *The Half Sisters*. Both novels look toward a better future in which, as Jewsbury hoped, women “will be able to be friends and companions in a way they cannot be now.”

Notes

- 1) Cited by Kathryn Kirkpatrick in her introduction to Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1997. All subsequent quotations will be placed in parenthesis in the text.
- 2) Geraldine Jewsbury, *The Half-Sisters* Joanne Wilkes, (ed.) Oxford World’s Classics. Oxford and New York, Oxford UP, 1994, 18. Subsequent quotations will appear in the text in parenthesis.
- 3) Note the similarity to this sentiment in writing from the first wave of the women’s movement: “By choosing femininity over the painful growth to full identity, by never achieving the hard core of self that comes not from fantasy but from mastering reality, these girls are doomed to suffer ultimately that bored, diffuse feeling of purposelessness, non-existence, non-involvement with the world that can be called anomie, or lack of identity, or merely felt as the problem that has no name” Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; rpt. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), 172.
- 4) There is implicit criticism of Carlyle in this statement since Jewsbury had urged Jane to write, but had cautioned her against showing any of her work to her husband. Though Thomas Carlyle neglected his wife during her lifetime, his remorse after her death is well known, and he was unable to write from this period.
- 5) This reflects the more serious consequences of adultery within the two time periods due to the rise of middle class values by the mid-century. As I discussed in “Disciplined and Punished: Monstrous Motherhood in *Belinda* and *East Lynne*” (Konan University Journal, #96, 1995, 66-93), Lady Delacour in *Belinda* (1801) is rehabilitated and disciplined, whereas the aristocratic heroine of *East Lynne* (1861) dies as a result of her transgression in *East Lynne*. Similarly, though Alice has not actually committed adultery, the fact that the intention was there means that a life of exile is too lenient a fate for her.
- 6) Rosen draws attention to this passage for the formation of female identity but without linking it with the maternal. (Rosen 21)

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