Chapter Four

DIDACTIC FICTION

PROTESTING against the abuses of the modern novel, Mrs. Tenney herself employed the form of the novel. She not only found it the weapon best suited to fight the enemy on his own ground, but she probably also counted on the popularity of the genre as a powerful help. She referred to the authority of an instance of useful fiction, Don Quixote. Others who also wished to point out that fiction was not without its merits brought forwards the example of the New Testament parables.

1. The Pilgrim's Progress

It is therefore hardly surprising to find a religious allegory among the earliest works of fiction written in America, if indeed it is not the very first: The History of the Kingdom of Basaruah (1715), by Joseph Morgan (1671-post 1745). Labored yet consistent, this abstract book makes for reading far more demanding than Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan's faith and message were based on, and addressed to, common sense and religious feeling, whereas Morgan's book is an intellectual exercise, an exposition of various points of doctrine. Here, in a passage typical of Morgan's allegorical interpretation, the author describes election by predestination among one class of men:

14. As to the County of Morality, one of the Finest Places in the Wilderness, on this side, from hence his Lordship called some, but not very many; for they living so near the Water, would not be persuaded that they had any need to go over; and seeing their Country was so much better than the rest of the Wilderness, and a place where there grew but few wild fruits,
and their County being a Neck in the River, and they seeing some part of the River behind them, viz. the Gulph of Amendment of Life, they would not be persuaded but that they lived in the Borders of the Happy Land.

15. So the Publishers could do no more with these than with those farther off; The Fruits of Self-Dependence grew exceeding plenty here, which the people of Basaruah love greatly; So they mostly abode here, till Mr. Maveth came and carried them to the Lake, to a very bitter Slavery, yet not so bitter as the Slavery of those in the Counties of Prophaneness, Unjust Dealing, &c. (p. 140)

The journey allegory, which operates intermittently in The Kingdom of Basaruah, has appealed to man's mythological imagination at all times. Undoubtedly the tradition lived on in America in some of the numberless sermons preached there. A related instance of religious testimony, which might conceivably have served as a sermon, is The Spiritual Voyage (1819). The full title of this allegory by the Baptist preacher Edmund Botsford (1745-1819) reads, "The Spiritual Voyage, performed in the ship Convert, under the command of Captain Godly-Fear, to the haven of Felicity, on the continent of Glory." The thirty-two pages of Botsford's work are closer to The Pilgrim's Progress than The Kingdom of Basaruah; the very shortness of the allegory gives it an effect of directness on the whole adequately supported by Botsford's style: "Not long after a fog arose, which soon became so thick that we could scarcely see each other on deck, and when night came on it was dreadful; the darkness was like the Egyptian darkness, it might be felt; we hoped it would soon be over, but it continued many days, and with the best light we could possibly make, we could not see a yard before us: and at the same time a very great heaviness or drowsiness seized the whole crew; which was succeeded by a horror and dread on our spirits, which terrified us to a very great degree." 8

2. Mentoria

It was however not in an age of meditation, congenial to the elaboration and interpretation of religious allegories, that Amer-
DIDACTIC FICTION

can fiction took its first steps. The secular bent of the eighteenth-century mind, when it was brought to bear on the possible uses of fiction, conceived practical applications, such as the propagation of educational, social, and humanitarian notions.

The Reverend Enos Hitchcock (1744-1803), described as a liberal-minded and public-spirited gentleman, set forth in Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove Family (1790) the possibility of grounding the children's education at home. By example and precept parents should teach their children to realize the ideals of behavior which perfectible man may attempt. Hitchcock particularly stressed two aspects: the need for an education appropriate to time and place, with special reference to the United States, now emancipated from Great Britain; and for women, educational opportunities as adequate and liberal as those for men. Hitchcock's argument is that women have been deliberately handicapped and at best "have been taught a graceful deportment, some of the fine arts, and the less useful parts of needle work"; insufficient education has made many a woman vulnerable, and her vulnerability has been exploited. As one of them writes to a male correspondent, "...Are not your sex, in a great measure, the cause of our frailty; by first denying us the advantages of education, which you take care to appropriate to yourselves; and then flatter and admire us for adventitious powers, and shadowy accomplishments" (2:20).

The ninety-three letters which make up the two volumes of The Bloomsgrove Family consist of the direct statement of the elder Bloomsgroves' precepts and, either as confirmation or foil, of illustrating anecdotes. By the end of the book the Bloomsgrove children, Osander and Rozella, have become fit to marry, the young man having escaped, among other dangers, contamination through the bad company he was tempted to keep while at the university. They will continue with their own children what their parents have begun with them. Hitchcock's educational report frequently suffers from repetitiousness and the obviousness of some of its illustrating material. The book displays many of the marks of the fiction of the age. There is, for example, the tendency to mobilize the sensibility, as in a conversation about filial ingratitude, at the end of which "the old
gentleman dropt a tear” (2:146). There are, too, the affected
diction and conventional clichés clearly transposed from poetry
into prose, as in the following description: “On a day, when the
decaying sun had tinged the mountain tops with its milder rays,
and reddening skies invited the tuneful choir to serenade the
groves, with the faint lays of their evening song; these happy
parents were invited, by the serenity that followed the shower,
to the gravel walk” (1:91).

A book in many ways similar to Hitchcock’s, The Boarding
School; or, Lessons of a Preceptress to her Pupils (1798), by
Mrs. Hannah Webster Foster (1759-1840), sketches how girls
equipped with elementary knowledge and some sense of their
family membership might be further prepared to fulfill their civi­
лизing roles as well-bred ladies, wives, and mothers. Mrs. Foster
wrote, “I trust that our improved countrywomen...are able to
convince the world, that the American fair are enlightened, gen­
erous, and liberal. The false notions of sexual disparity, in point
of understanding and capacity, are justly exploded; and each
branch of society is uniting to raise the virtues and polish the
manners of the whole.” Like Hitchcock, Mrs. Foster did not
mean that her countrywomen should become learned ladies; it
was enough if they knew how “to taste the delights of literature,
and be qualified to bear a part in rational and improving con­
versation” (p. 182). She spoke at some length of her conven­
tional views about the caution to be exercised in the choice of
novels—there were so few that deserved being read. She shared
with Mrs. Rowson the opinion that a girl seduced need not be a
girl irremediably fallen; on the other hand she warned, as did
others, against the hasty acceptance of the maxim, “That re­
formed rakes make the best husbands” (p. 103). She thought
society much too lenient toward the seducer and commented
bitterly on the effrontery of the seducer who would not marry the
girl he had led astray because only a chaste bride was good
enough for him (p. 189). She resented the dissipations of the
town and praised, in a style meant to be elevated, the beauties of
the country and (like Hitchcock) the serenity of an evening
which must incline the sensitive to gratitude: “The sun had nearly
finished his diurnal course, and was leaving our hemisphere to
illuminate the other with his cheering rays. The sprightly songsters had retired to their bowers, and were distending their little throats, with a tribute of instinctive gratitude and praise" (p. 138). In the American Review Mrs. Foster was reproached for having failed to at least establish a good model of letter-writing; since she could lay no claim to originality in the matters she expounded, the reviewer felt that she ought to have called herself the editor, not the author, of the book.  

*Alcuin*, by Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), also published in 1798, could hardly have been called the work of a mere compiler. Though Brown's feminist radicalism was not so violent or consistent as might appear from isolated quotations, his plea for improved educational facilities for women and a true acknowledgment of woman's individual social value as opposed to her mere social duties sounds nevertheless more original and convinced than Mrs. Foster's mild injunctions. The reader of *Alcuin* may conjecture that if Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was read in the United States, it received from Brown support more impressive than, for example, from *The Emigrants*. Alcuin’s assertion that woman is equal to man in point of intellect and superior to him as to beauty and sensibility (p. 75) reflects an attitude that determined the parts to be played in Brown's novels by his male and female protagonists. Mrs. Carter, Alcuin’s antagonist, is a lady gifted with intellectual vigor who despises fashionable “sentiment,” a lady after the heart of the Mary Wollstonecraft of the *Rights of Women*. Brown’s idea of marriage as outlined in the later fragment of *Alcuin* is strictly institutional—that of Constantia, not Martinette, if we think of the views expressed in *Ormond*.  

Whereas Hitchcock and Mrs. Foster wrote somewhat comprehensive educational treatises, *Alcuin* focused on the one question of the rights of woman. Mrs. Rowson’s *Mentoria* also has one main theme, that of obedience and dutifulness in children, specifically respecting their parents' and elders' decisions in questions of marriage. Mentoria, who has acted wisely in this as in everything, writes her young charges letter after letter exemplifying the woeful consequences of marriages entered upon
without parental approval; she recommends submission to the superior experience and wisdom of the older generation. Each of her stories might be elaborated into a full-scale novel.\textsuperscript{23} Belinda Dormer is another Dorcasina Sheldon.\textsuperscript{24} The longest of Mentoria's tales, which in some sixty pages extends over two generations, uses the themes of seduction, a fake marriage, and near-incest.\textsuperscript{25} There is also an "Essay on Female Education,"\textsuperscript{26} the basic ideas of which sound like Hitchcock's and Mrs. Foster's; it emphasizes in particular woman's domestic duties and her role as an educator.

The style of \textit{Mentoria} is generally conventional, as is usual with Mrs. Rowson—more than in the narratives themselves, it is rather painfully predictable in descriptions and pathetic uses: "I am a mother. I hear the darling of my heart, the child of my bosom asking for food, and have it not to give him. I am a wife, and see my adored, my almost idolized husband, sinking under the complicated evils of famine, grief and sickness, yet have neither comfort or consolations to offer..." (1:74-75).

When Mrs. Rowson's aim and style are not directed at her readers' emotional response, she occasionally attempts caricature, in spite of her lack of a sense of humor: "Prudelia is a woman who pays the nicest regard to propriety and decorum, she is ever prying into her neighbour's conduct, and if their actions do not exactly agree with her scrupulous notions of rectitude, she hesitates not to conclude them abandoned and lost to every sense of virtue" (2:106).

The need for circumspection not merely in young persons but in anyone thinking, or forgetting to think, of marriage is the main subject of \textit{The Art of Courting} (1795), by the Reverend Ebenezer Bradford (c. 1746-1801). The writer meant to sound a warning against too firm reliance on various preconceived ideas about marriage: it is difficult to say beforehand whether a match is practicable or whether some partners are incompatible. Bradford insisted on the authenticity of his examples, like Mrs. Rowson, saying, "The principal scenes of courtship, here displayed, are taken from actual life; and consequently must be more interesting to the reader, than if they were merely fictitious."\textsuperscript{27} He wanted to be quite sure, that much is clear, that \textit{The Art of
DIDACTIC FICTION

Courting should be considered instructive literature, as opposed to "novels and plays" read by young ladies wishing to be fashionable, "accomplished," and "to form themselves companions agreeable to gentlemen who are determined to live a vicious and irreligious life" (p. 76). However, the ideas and the style of the popular fiction of the age were catching: the conception of a perfect wife outlined by one of Bradford's lovers would not have been out of place in one of those much-despised novels:

I wish her to be the favourite child of respectable parents, educated in the Christian religion. With respect to her person, I should wish she might be above the common size of women, well proportioned in body and limbs; her skin white and ruddy; her eyes black and sparkling; her hair brown and flowing, and her features well proportioned one with the other: But what I should prize above all the rest, is a dignified mind, full of activity, generosity and meekness—unless it be some peculiar qualifications of heart, such as benevolence and patience, with a soul turned for love. (p. 39)

Most of Bradford's energy went into relating the serious and successful campaign conducted by Harriot to reform Damon. That young man has become a deist while at the university. The girl is fortunately well read in the deistical writers, having enjoyed a liberal education such as even Mrs. Foster and Hitchcock might have been alarmed at, whereas it would doubtless have pleased Brown's Ormond. Harriot refutes the deistical arguments and convinces Damon of their weakness before undertaking his conversion to a true Christian faith.

It is interesting that The Art of Courting should have been criticized for its lack of "tender sensibilities." Whether consciously or not, Bradford apparently tried to make his guidebook for marriage candidates commonsensical and to steer clear of sentimentality by using what Tremaine McDowell called "broad jocularity." But Bradford's clumsy humor has no more appeal to the modern reader than the appallingly humorless productions of those fellow writers of his who were not afraid of using fiction and addressing their readers' sensibility quite openly.

Questions of practical behavior were also discussed by the
"Gleaner," a Mentor-figure created for the *Massachusetts Magazine* by Mrs. Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820) in the early 1790s. The Gleaner enjoyed playing hide-and-seek with his readers and inserted into his essays and stories their supposed conjectures about his identity; he also weighed with them the significance of his opinions or commented upon his manner. The obvious self-consciousness of Mrs. Murray reveals how seriously she took her role; she was a monitor and arbiter demonstrating the "necessity of religion, especially in adversity" (chap. 31) or exposing her "sentiments on education" (chaps. 35-36). She also offered her readers a "Panegyric of the American Constitution" (chap. 27), praised Washington's military and civic firmness (chaps. 76-78), and recommended "a spirit of national independence" (chap. 96). Mrs. Murray shared Mrs. Foster's hope that the education newly available to woman would do her abilities justice (chaps. 63, 88-91). She stated her suspicions and reservations with regard to novel-reading (chap. 40). According to her, it could best profit girls between eight and fourteen, for whom it might serve as a pleasant training in reading; once used to books, they would have no trouble in choosing serious reading matter more appropriate to a later stage of their mental development. Even so, it was necessary to protect them from unsuitable novels. Mrs. Murray praised *Clarissa* but blamed *Evelina*, especially because of the uncharitable and unladylike nature of the remarks passed on Madame Duval and the practical jokes played on her (chap. 43). Her own novel-like "Story of Margaretta," which occupies a large part of the first volume of *The Gleaner*, includes a warning against fiction, since novel-reading may well render a girl in love impervious to sound advice, such as Margaretta's guardian can give her. Even without guidance, the girl realizes that Sinisterus Courtland is not a husband for her: she comes to her senses by being allowed to make her own observations and reasonably assessing his qualities and faults. She does so even before finding out that he seduced Frances Wellwood and deserted her and their three children. The reader is encouraged to believe that, whatever crises are in store for her, Margaretta will be a good wife to Edward Hamil-
DIDACTIC FICTION

Of needle work, in its varieties, my wife pronounced her a perfect mistress; her knowledge of the English, and French tongues, was fully adequate to her years, and her manner of reading had, for me, peculiar charms; her hand writing was neat and easy; she was a good accountant, a tolerable geographer and chronologist; she had skimmed the surface of astronomy and natural philosophy; had made good proficiency in her study of history and the poets; could sketch a landscape; could furnish, from her own fancy, patterns for the muslins which she wrought; could bear her part in a minuet and a cotillion, and was allowed to have an excellent hand upon the piano forte. We once entertained a design of debarring her the indulgence of novels; but these books, being in the hands of every one, we conceived the accomplishment of our wishes in this respect, except we had bred her an absolute recluse, almost impracticable; and Mrs. Vigilius, therefore, thought it best to permit the use of every decent work, causing them to be read in her presence, hoping that she might, by her suggestions and observations, present an antidote to the poison, with which the pen of the novelist is too often fraught... in the receipts of cookery, she is thoroughly versed; she is in every respect the complete housewife; and our linen never received so fine a gloss as when it was ironed and laid in order by Margaretta. (1:70-71)

There is nothing very original either in the conception or the execution of The Gleaner. Mrs. Murray appears to have been an energetic sort of person, and yet of a moderate and conservative temper. This had the merit of launching her in her literary enterprise, but of keeping her from overdoing the appeal to the "tender sensibilities" or indulging in elaborate stylistic embellishments. From a literary point of view her production seems rather pedestrian; but since The Gleaner first appeared in serialized form, it may well have had a more varied and lively effect than the collected edition.

Compared to the books so far treated in the present chapter, Mrs. Rowson's The Inquisitor has a larger number of the surface attributes of entertaining fiction and also seems to indulge more freely in sensibility for its own sake. Yet it is not out of

[73]
place among didactic writings in which a central figure, through superior knowledge and by manipulation, draws lessons from his or her observation and makes these lessons available to an audience within the book and to the reading public. The Inquisitor, an exercise in Sternean sensibility, uses in fragmented form the plot elements typical of the fashionable novel of Mrs. Rowson's times; but what emerges in the end as its most memorable feature is the author's plea in favor of all that have a claim on our understanding and compassion. Mrs. Rowson attempted to persuade her readers to try to overcome the alienation that results from moral wrongdoing or from the pride of rank and riches. She apparently enjoyed varying her tone and approach; her familiarity with the stage shows in the ease with which she occasionally slipped into the stylistic personality of some of her personages.

Among those to be treated with sympathy are the debtors, whose plight is often desperate because of the existing laws and the literal interpretation and application of them. With Mrs. Rowson as with others, the theme of the debtors' prison may be used as a rebuke addressed to the father and husband who has dissipated the family wealth, as in Trials of the Human Heart or Sarah. More often, it functions as one appeal among many stressing some unfortunate heroine's helplessness in the face of impersonal forces of victimization, as in The Fille de Chambre. Stories as pathetic as any similar novel scene were contributed by Joseph Dewey Fay (1779-1825) to the New York Columbian, to campaign for humane consideration of the debtors' jail legislation. When these Essays of Howard were reprinted in book form in 1811, the publisher included a (possibly fictitious) reply called forth by the original publication, reproaching Fay with passing off fiction as truth. Fay, however, meant to expose the truth, not to write fiction; if his book was looked upon as such, that was simply because the public were used to just that note of didactic pathos in novels which was sounded in his essays.

The anonymous author of Rosa; or, American Genius and Education (1810) rather recklessly employed a mixture of fictional elements; yet for all its narrative variety, the novel is
above all concerned with aspects of education. Its heroine is
mainly passive; both to her father and to Mrs. Charmion she is
a means of illustrating and embodying the advantages of a sound
upbringing. The book offers a contribution to the noble savage
theory and the concept of civilization. According to its author,
the American native and European civilization are quite com­
patible; there is no hopeless struggle of the pure, natural instincts
against restraining and atrophying institutions. Rosa indeed ful­
fills her Incan father's expectations: she extracts all the benefits
from an enlightened eighteenth-century education and thus fully
develops her innate gifts. But not only can the New World com­
pete with the Old with respect to the individual's potentialities;
*Rosa* also sets forth the superiority of the New World, deriving
from the democratic encouragement given the individual in
America.

In one sense only are the Old World critics proved right:
America is as yet an uncivilized country (p. 145). This state of
affairs is responsible for the unsavory experiences which Richard
Orvaine must undergo. This young man subjects himself to an
educational process rather unlike that of Rosa, his future wife.
Having yielded to the temptation of gambling, Orvaine decides
to make a fresh beginning in new surroundings, a resolution
which starts him on a short picaresque progress from Maryland
to Boston (chap. 5). He is thrown into the company of drinkers,
confidence men, and forgers; yet in the end he can be reinstated
in the good graces of his former employer and protector. Prac­
tically, by trial and error, he has thus come to know and avoid
the pitfalls of his future career. The overall balance is in favor
of trust and honor, and Orvaine is clearly considered worthy of
becoming Rosa's husband.

The author's underlying view is that chance education such
as Orvaine's will soon be a thing of the past, and America will
produce more and more Rosas. The strict and purposeful guid­
ance on the part of Mrs. Charmion (pp. 53-54) demonstrates
that systematic education is practicable, and the product of her
supervision indicates that confidence may safely be placed in
models like herself or Derwent. If much civilizing work remains
to be done, especially by the ladies (pp. 27-28), people from
over-civilized countries may already profit from the American environment: "In time, by associating in rational company, Mr. Longpee and his spouse lost their English and French oddities, . . . the uncorrupted manners of America are more favourable to happiness than the frivolities of Europe, which are the spume of luxurious indolence" (pp. 262-63).

Such is the reassuring message of Rosa. Against its background it was permissible and advisable to single out for ridicule some aspects offending against a rational and urbane pattern of social life. A journalist and an illiterate justice of the peace come in for their share of satire (chaps. 2 and 3); so do a group of gossips (chaps. 2), who belong—with the diffident lover (pp. 225-26) and the hypocritical enthusiast of love and the softer sex, cruelly venting his anger on a lapdog (pp. 32-33)—to a species not restricted to the young American republic. The justice of the peace is assigned a role in a comedy that is less satirical than it is robustly crude (pp. 67-68), and of a temper relating it to Richard Orvaine's picaresque encounters. The author of Rosa was here perhaps trying to counterbalance the essential seriousness, if not solemnity, of his concern over the American practice of education. Some unintentional humor derives in part from the complexity of certain plot devices, patently so in the final chapter: there the true identity and relationship of several characters must be unfolded together with the Gothic mysteries of Rosa's desertion by her father, deliberately engineered to place Rosa under Mrs. Charmion's protection.

The implausible plot of Rosa is structurally very awkward; it loosely links up the clusters of events related in the six chapters. The characters are introduced in varying scenes of social comedy and a Gothic event; the retrospect of Mrs. Charmion's life then jumbles together many favorite elements of the novel of adventure. The following chapter, comprising one-fourth of the entire book, unfolds the panorama of Orvaine's experiences. Finally, after the young man's ousting of the other rivals for Rosa's love, the motives of the characters are hastily revealed. The connection of the main theme of education with the multiple events and characters is only intermittently realized; though the author's
message is clear, the reader frequently wonders why it had to be conveyed in such a questionable shape.

3. "Bildungsromane"

In the *Mentoria* type of didactic fiction, the criteria of right behavior are preached and taught by the author, sometimes through a mediating speaker; the narrative element of these books is concentrated in the stories exemplifying models of good conduct or deviations from the right path. Some books are now to be introduced which, in a rather special sense, could be called "Bildungsromane"; they have at their center not the teacher, but one who learns by experience.

Enos Hitchcock outlined his program of experiences in 1793 on the title page of his tale *The Farmer's Friend, or the History of Mr. Charles Worthy*. "Who, from being a poor orphan, rose, through various scenes of distress and misfortune, to wealth and eminence, by industry, economy and good conduct." Throughout this farmer's progress, the career of Worthy is contrasted with the faults and errors of others. They lack his strength of faith, sound morals, common sense, and his ability to work hard. He is very much a subject fit for a writer like Hitchcock, whose aim is "to write of worth, to detail transactions, and unfold virtues which dignify human nature, and extend the blessings of society." Novel-like, the story ends with two marriages; but this is a mere outward element of conclusion because the book is what it was meant to be; the relation of a Franklinesque career from rags to riches. Only rarely is Hitchcock's prose colloquial; he seems at ease only when he feels he can call upon sensibility and pathos—his reader's and his own: "Here they wallowed about half buried in the snow banks, exerting their weary and enfeebled limbs, to reach the wished for home, while the anxious wife prepares the best repast the humble room afforded, to warm and refresh them at their return. But alas, how vain is all her care! While she is thus employed for their comfort, the blood chills and grows stagnant in their veins!" (p. 248).

Charles Worthy's common sense and his openness to what is
good and useful are paralleled in the main character of *The Life and Reflections of Charles Observator* (1816), by the Reverend Elijah R. Sabin (1776-1818), again combined with a fashionable dash of sensibility. In this book, too, seducers are branded with infamy and their victims interceded for; the reading of the Bible is recommended, and sermons are shown to move the hero deeply. Washington is praised, and so is the American political system, which "lies exactly between" the extremes of British and French politics (p. 179). The end of this book "of experience" (p. 36) reads like a fairy tale: "Charles returned, was married to Prudelia and entered on the oversight of her father's affairs; and they now live the pattern of conjugal affection, as well as of Christian duties" (p. 271). Other parts of *Charles Observator* benefit from elements successfully used in the novel, such as a richly varied description of nature (pp. 51-52) or a grotesquely repulsive character whose appearance, of course, serves the ends of our didactic author: "His face was bloated, his nose of a double size, and somewhat resembling a piece of red hot iron. He presented an unwieldy carcase, and was groaning under a fit of the gout. One could see BRANDY written in livid capitals on his lips" (p. 74). A facile comic effect is obtained through the spelling of an illiterate would-be teacher (p. 25), but otherwise the tone of this book is as solemn as that of very nearly all didactic fiction.

*The Soldier's Orphan* (1812), attributed to John Finch, is termed a novel, we are told, because its publishers "cannot assert that it is anything else" (p. iv). Their embarrassment is probably owing to the didactic nature and consequent episodic structure of the book. Its heroine, Emily Thompson, is an interested on-looker before whose eyes there unrolls a panorama of the problems, the vicissitudes and compensations that are part of man's life. Her education is not a process she actively shares in; it seems instead to be dissociated from her, to be constantly analyzed and commented upon for her benefit. Her outward life, punctuated by the departures and returns of her seafaring uncle, is exceptional only in the fact that she was orphaned on the day of her birth. In a late chapter she assumes the charge of her cousins after the death of their mother. Between these two points,
Emily's existence is marked emotionally and morally by the brief appearance for the duration of a visit or a conversation of people familiar with distressful maladjustments or comforting arguments. When troubles close in, the reader feels he need not be alarmed, so clearly can Emily be trusted with doing what is required of her. Fittingly, when her cousin Robert Center comes home, a word of advice from her uncle and a brief conversation with Center are all it takes to make her accept the young man for her husband. This is so sensible a decision that it reduces to near-irrelevance the fact of the couple's mutual love. In such a climate of placidity Morris's violent outburst of grief on learning that his wife has died must quickly yield to a rational concern—the very suggestion that Emily and Center should marry.

The stress in this narrative, which ends with the heroine's wedding, is on conjugal love, not romantic passion. The theme is introduced through the examples of Emily's parents and the Morrieses, brought into relief by a miserable tale of seduction (chap. 5), given substance in a clergyman's chapter-long apology of marriage in reply to a question from Center (chap. 7), again approached through the story of thoughtless Sally (chap. 8), and finally glorified when Emily and her husband erect a monument to the girl's parents, "those godlike beings" (p. 179). Next to married love, the subject of death ranks second in importance: general reflections and memories of dead relatives and friends are used insistently and, at times, gratuitously. These topics, as well as some others, are familiar features of the contemporary didactic and sentimental fiction; so is the author's stress on the heroine's perfections (pp. 24-25, 48) and his "style of sensibility."

The sensibility so much in demand with the heroes and heroines of the fiction of the age turns into grievously didactic sentimentalism in the stories of Miss Sarah Savage (1785-1837). *The Factory Girl* (1814), which might have furnished the writer with fresh subject matter, becomes the dreary relation of the self-effacement of a humble girl, "always accustomed to trace her misfortunes to her own faults, rather than to those of others." When Captain Holden, whose children she has been looking after for many months, wishes to thank her, the conversation
takes an expected turn: ‘... I wish I could thank you, but I can't do it just now; there is such a high swell of my heart, that my gratitude is raised aloft to Him who made you so excellent, so benevolent.’ ‘God is the proper object of your gratitude, my dear cousin, you owe me nothing,’ said Mary, who felt, in witnessing such a scene of parental joy, fully compensated for all the sacrifices she had made” (p. 103). In the end Mary is found ready to be rewarded with happiness: she marries a widower and becomes a perfect stepmother to his children.

The heroine of Miss Savage's *Filial Affection, or the Clergyman’s Granddaughter* (1820) loses successively her father, lover, mother, grandmother, and grandfather. At no time does she allow herself to forget her duties to parents and neighbors, surrendering even her chance of becoming a clergyman's wife. This is the end of the book:

The death of Dr. Unwin was the last severe calamity Phebe ever suffered; her time, divided between religious, social, and domestic duties, passed on in an even tenour. The remembrance of those she loved was sweet, for it was unimbittered by the recollection of neglected duties. The present was cheerful, because she constantly occupied herself in acts of benevolence, the cultivation of her mind, or the necessary cares of life, and the future, seen with the eye of faith, opened scenes which reflected back upon her mind a cheerful serenity, that excited and secured the love of all who had the happiness to know her. Even to the young and frivolous the epithet “old maid” lost its opprobrious sound, when connected with the name of the “Clergyman's Grand-Daughter.”

Though intent upon the perfection of their heroines, Miss Savage and the author of *The Soldier's Orphan* could not quite conceal the imperfection of some of their sisters. *The Vain Cot­tager: or, The History of Lucy Franklin* (1807) is an anonymous tale about a girl who becomes the victim of her own vanity. Too often praised for her pretty face, Lucy starts wearing clothes “beyond” her humble social rank and suffers the shame of seduction. Finally given a chance to repent and reform, she cannot, however, achieve the simple domestic happiness that might have been hers; that her former suitor should marry her own sister
serves to emphasize the bitterness of Lucy's punishment. *The Vain Cottager* is no more than a literary exercise in didacticism, designed to justify the strict sumptuary laws of old: it is introduced and spiced with remarks on the necessity of dressing according to one's rank and occupation.48

Our specimens of didactic fiction rarely sink to the dismal level of Miss Savage's tales or *The Vain Cottager*, but they do not offer much literary excitement either. The two that might have benefited from their traditional form, the allegories of Morgan and Botsford, are at best competent and yet, more generally, plodding attempts. The other books are marred by downright bad writing, their author's didacticism having proved stronger than their creative impulse, which may only intermittently be guessed at. There are thus evidences in *Mentoria* and *The Inquisitor* of Mrs. Rowson's skill, and *The Art of Courting* has a basic diversity that occasionally enlivens its author's style.

Generally, however, it is the revealing use of the stock situations of fiction and the corresponding manner that appear most striking to the student of this didactic storytelling. This is especially pronounced in the tales meant as warnings, not models: in such narrative illustrations the necessity of making a forceful impression led the authors to borrow from the novelists' arsenal suitable material and, particularly, rhetorical stresses. The unfortunate result of applying borrowed resources may be exemplified by the portrait of the foil meant to enhance the merits of Osander Bloomsgrove:

He never stopped in his fatal career, till he had reduced himself to beggary, and broken the hearts of his parents. His vices at length undermined his constitution—a threatening disorder seized him—Emaciated by sickness and worn out with pain, he gave up the ghost, amidst the horrors of an awakened conscience, and the tremendous apprehensions of his future condition; and, what rendered the scene most distressful, was, that reflecting upon the neglect and indulgence of his parents, as the cause of all his miseries, he cursed them with his dying breath.49

1. Novelists who humbly pretended to a didactic purpose first and a literary one last, and appeared to consider the novel a simple vehicle for their views, could appeal to Blair's "Fictitious histories might be employed for very

2. One derivation from this nationalism is the patriotism that was to find expression in the historical novel; and the historical novel in turn helped to render prose fiction respectable, since its patriotic subject matter was eminently instructive. See John Pendleton Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, ed. Ernest E. Leisy (New York and London: Hafner, 1962), p. xvi.

3. There is in Benjamin Silliman's *Letters of Shahcoolen* (1802), just after a denunciation of Mary Wollstonecraft, a long passage offering an ideal picture of the majority of American women, which seems to sum up contemporary conceptions. It may serve as a standard relevant to a proper valuation of the role and behavior of heroines and female villains in fiction. It is also a good instance of the stylistic tradition linking up the pietism and sensibility of a declining age with the genteel outlook of later generations: "They are placed above the miseries and meanness of poverty; and below the vices and vanity of wealth.

"Early imbued with virtue and modesty, they are rational, domestic and industrious. Their life is divided between useful employment, cheerful society, and virtuous and moderate amusements. Rarely at the theatre and assembly room, and never at the circus and card-table, their pleasures give a zest to life, and render welcome the return of the fire-side happiness, and the family society. Business is with them the pleasure, not pleasure the business, of life. They rise to breathe the sweet incense of the morning, which the joyful earth offers to the great Creator; they listen to the matin song of the lark, while she mounts into the clouds that are gilded with the first effusions of light.

"The volumes which contain the precepts of religion and morals; those which unfold the springs of human action, and delineate the thousand shades of human character; the clear page of history; the books of the fine arts, and the treasures of poetical lore, all lie open to their perusal, and occupy a portion of each passing day.

"The domestic offices, and the household good, are not forgotten. Conscious that the family is the great scene of female action, and of female pleasure, here they concentrate their most serious thoughts, and make their most serious exertions.

"Despising, alike, that contemptible servility, which would ascribe to them the perfections of angels, and offer them the adoration of Gods; and that unnatural system of false philosophy, which would harden them into masculine beings, too proud to be women, too weak to be men, they cultivate the feminine virtues, sweeten every action by tenderness, and grace every sentiment by love" (pp. 60-62).

4. Miss Helena Wells wrote in this sense in the preface to her *Constantia Neville* (1800): "While the younger part of the fair sex continue to devote so large a portion of their time to the light reading which circulating libraries furnish, it is incumbent on those who employ the pen with a view to their edification, to avail themselves of the same channels for conveying useful lessons; which might not be perused under any other form" (p. iii). Cf. also the prefaces to Gilbert Imlay, *The Emigrants* (1793), and Sukey Vickery. *Emily Hamilton* (1803).

5. Samuel Miller deplored that "depraved man" had been unable to maintain fiction at the level of religious prophecies and parables; see *A Brief Retrospect*, 2:370.

6. "If Pilgrim's Progress is to be reckoned as one of the early examples of the English novel, then *The History of the Kingdom of Basaruh* may well
be called the first American novel” (Richard Schlatter, ed., *The History of the Kingdom of Basarunah* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946], Introduction, p. 3).

7. In this context it may be recollected that, of the first twenty bestsellers of Colonial times, twelve were written to teach lessons of piety and doctrine; see F. L. Mott, *Multitudes*, p. 12.


9. See *DAB* 9:72-73. Hitchcock consulted Benjamin Rush, “a respectable citizen of Philadelphia,” on the plan of *The Bloomsgrove Family*, but did not adopt Rush’s view that the family should have half a dozen children instead of just two. See Benson, *Women*, p. 155. One other publication of Hitchcock is *A Discourse on Education*, “delivered... in Providence, November 16, 1785.”

10. *Bloomsgrove Family*, 2:24. Richardson’s views on female education, as exemplified through his novels, were conservative in the sense Hitchcock meant; Latin and Greek, for example, Richardson feared were apt to overtax women’s minds (see Benson, *Women*, pp. 49-50). At the school of Nancy Maria Hyde (1792-1816), a friend of Mrs. Sigourney, practical usefulness was stressed rather than ornament and fashionable accomplishments (*The Writings of Nancy Maria Hyde*, pp. 156-57).

11. The existence of evil cannot be ignored; but since Hitchcock shared with others the view that its manifestations should not be described in a novel, vice is only allowed to hover on either side of the narrow path of virtue.

12. Various heroes have contacts with wicked people and pernicious ideas while at the university and beyond parental control; see, e.g., Bradford, *The Art of Courting* (1795), chap. 8; Watterston, *Glencarn*, chaps. 9-11; Woodworth, *The Champions of Freedom* (1816), chaps. 11-12. Such heroes are men of sensibility (see Tremaine McDowell, “The Big Three in Yankee Fiction,” *SR* 36[1928]:157-63). But unfeeling villains also attend the universities and frequently develop a vindictive inferiority complex there when competing with others superior to them in intelligence, industry, and morals.


15. Eliza Wharton, the heroine of Mrs. Foster’s novel *The Coquette* (1797) thought that she could rely on the truth of this adage (p. 76). The maxim is referred to in several other novels, for example, Miss Vickery’s *Emily Hamilton*, p. 108.


17. *American Review and Literary Journal* 1, no. 1(1801):85-86. The reviewer concluded: “In these days, when so many books of questionable utility are published, it may be thought some commendation to say of the present volume, that if it is not calculated to do much good, it will do little harm, unless to the bookseller.”

18. *Alcuin* perhaps did sound deliberately provoking; but so do all revolutionaries, and Mary Wollstonecraft’s attack itself had its conscious exaggerations. See Horner, *English Women*, p. 79.

19. A reviewer of *Letters of Shahcoolen*, which contained an attack on Mary Wollstonecraft’s doctrines, thought that in Boston no one bothered with them (see *Monthly Anthology* 2[1805]:83-88). A contemporary testimony does not quite support this dismissal: “It does not follow...that every female who
indicates the capacity of the sex is a disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft. Though I allow her to have said many things which I cannot but approve, yet the very foundation on which she builds her work will be apt to prejudice us so against her that we will not allow her the merit she really deserves,—yet, prejudice set aside, I confess I admire many of her sentiments..." (written in 1801; see A Girl’s Life Eighty Years Ago: Selections from the Letters of Eliza Southgate Bowne. With an Introduction by Clarence Cook [1887], pp. 61-62).

20. Alcuin was offered to the public as a book in 1798 and in a shortened version, bearing the title “The Rights of Women,” in the Philadelphia Weekly Magazine, March 17-April 7, 1798. For Imlay and his novel (ostensibly elaborating on Mary Wollstonecraft’s theories), see below, pp. 216-21.


22. Mentoria was published in London in 1791, in Philadelphia in 1794 in two volumes. References are to this American edition.

23. Mentoria’s own story (1:15-20) reminds the reader of Mrs. Rowson’s novels and of Miss Helena Wells, The Step-Mother (1799). Mrs. Rowson was to have a successful career as a teacher conducting her own “academy.” Among her pupils was Eliza Southgate, quoted above (note 19) on Mary Wollstonecraft, clearly very properly educated to refuse to love “unsolicited” and encourage a suitor too much before he had presented his aspirations to her parents (A Girl’s Life, pp. 40-41, 139-41). Susan Warner’s best-selling novel The Wide, Wide World was recommended for publication to Putnam by his mother, who had been educated at Mrs. Rowson’s school (see Helen W. Papashvily, All the Happy Endings [1956], p. 8).

24. Belinda disregards her father’s advice and elopes with Horton, an officer. She later regrets having given up Lord Gaymore, whom her father had selected for her, for Gaymore actually possesses the qualities that Horton has only in appearance (1:38-48).

25. This is the story of Marian and Lydia. They are the daughters of Dorcas who had been tricked into marrying Melfont, and later betrayed and deserted. Marian is seduced, then abandoned, and reforms just in time to escape becoming her father’s mistress; she dies repentant. Lydia, who has led a blameless life, marries an earl; and Dorcas is rehabilitated (1:76-106; 2:3-37). Unlike the other stories in Mentoria, that of Marian and Lydia is embarked upon without preamble, as if Mrs. Rowson, in her hurry to get on with her narrative, had forgotten to state once more her didactic motivation.

26. There were to be many more pleas for an improvement of female education. A late one summing up many of the points raised during that period is Emma Willard’s An Address...to the Legislation of New York... (Albany, 1819). Another book that might be treated in this context is William Wirt’s The Old Bachelor (1814); see below in the next chapter, under the sub-heading “American Spectators.”

27. Bradford added: “Several of the parties are now alive, and the original letters in the hands of the writer” (The Art of Courting pp. vii-viii). An extreme example of a guarantee of authenticity is that of Mrs. Manvill, Lucinda, or the Mountain Mourner (1807).


29. Mrs. Murray presumably adopted a male disguise because her age preferred Mentors to Mentorias (see Benson, Women, p. 176). The “Gleaner”
contributes, after being first published in the *Massachusetts Magazine* chiefly from 1792 to 1794, were reissued in three volumes "by Constantia," Boston, 1798. References are to this edition, which also contains two comedies, "Virtue Triumphant" and "The Traveller Returned."

30. "...I was aware that, manured by the prejudices prepared in the hot-bed of novel reading, the impressions made upon young minds, with the passions implanted in the tender soil, were not easily erased, or up-rooted..." (1:82).


32. Mrs. Rowson, who announced that she meant to imitate Sterne, was deliberately "sentimental," as an example may show. The Inquisitor has begun reading some verse printed on a scrap of wrapping-paper: "I turned the paper, but there was no more—There are times when the mind is affected by mere trifles; such was now my case—I was vexed at not finding the continuation of the story, and determined to go back to the fruiterer's, and inquire if they had the remainder" (1:15). He is, however, distracted from this intention by overhearing a tale of distress, and charitably offers help; thus the trilling vexation leads to an opportunity to do good. Cf. also the Inquisitor’s return to his anxious wife (2:62).

33. The Inquisitor himself generally sounds either sententious or sentimental. Mariana tells her story straightforwardly and rather breathlessly, while the East Indian embellishes his tale with biblical turns (see 2:112-14, 102-3).

34. Heartfree is in debt because he has been too generous in helping others (1:16-19). The East Indian, a slave given his freedom without the possibility of earning a living, must wait in jail till his creditor dies (2:102-6).

35. "The introduction of a pathetic story—of a prisoner starving in confinement—his wife clinging round his neck—his children at his feet petitioning for bread—bereft of his liberty, and encountering all the horrors of his situation, without one gleam of hope, one glimmering ray of comfort to support him in this adversity—these are pretty stories for the entertainment of children by the winter’s fire-side, but they lose their effect on a moment’s reflection, with the conviction that incidents of that nature are never to be met with among us" (Essays of Howard [1811], p. 49; cf. also p. 95).


37. Only the praise of Baltimore (p. 24) sounds as earnest as the discussion of education!

38. *The Farmer’s Friend*, p. 14. Another farmer’s friend is speaking in parts of Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), e.g., in chapter 2, "On the Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures, of an American Farmer," or in the “History of Andrew, the Hebridean.” Novels like Imlay’s *The Emigrants* (1793), Mrs. Rowson’s *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), and Mitchell’s *The Asylum* (1804-11) continue the tradition that combines the fresh start in emigration with the return to the soil.

39. "Her personal appearance was a true picture of the house within. Here every thing was at sixes and sevens" (p. 87).

40. "...He took his leave. The scene was truly affecting. The father was first seen embracing and kissing the son; his last words were, farewell, my son—follow the advice I have given you. The mother took him by the hand, but uttered not a word—her tears spoke for her. The younger children wept. —It was too much for Charles—he hasted away" (The Life and Reflections of Charles Observator, p. 51).
41. See *The Soldier's Orphan* copyright notice, and Wright, *American Fiction*, item 267.

42. "With frenzied strides he paced the room—His glaring eye-balls seemed started from their sockets—...The distended fibres of his crazed brain must soon have cracked, and death relieved his distress. But...kind tears gave vent to that excess of woe which nature could not bear; and reason resumed her empire in the breast" (p. 158).

43. The dead are either closely related to Emily (her parents, her aunt) or hardly connected with the plot at all (though possibly close to the author: the clergyman's friend, chap. 6; Harriet, chap. 8).

44. See the characterization of a clergyman (p. 36), the Thompsons' parting (p. 11), and the quotation in note 42, above. Among topics not immediately linked up with the educational trend, there are some comments on the French Revolution (chaps. 9, 11) and on slavery (chaps. 12, 13).


46. In due time the children buy her a Bible, with a rose "fastened to the following passage; 'Her children rise up and call her blessed'" (p. 112).

47. *Filial Affection*, p. 162.

48. See the "Address to Young Women in Humble Life," pp. 3-14, and Mr. Nelson's remarks to Lucy as she is recovering from the shock of her fall, pp. 62-63. The edition referred to appeared in New Haven in 1807.