Cahiers Fablijes
ISSN : 2999-9154
Publisher : Université Lumière Lyon 2

2 | 2024
Littérature de jeunesse et éducation des filles au dix-neuvième siècle

Teaching and Touching : Schooling Girls in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* and Christabel Coleridge's *The Girls of Flaxby*

Claudia Nelson and Mary Nelson

https://publications-prairial.fr/fablijes/index.php?id=365

DOI : 10.35562/fablijes.365

Electronic reference
Claudia Nelson and Mary Nelson, « Teaching and Touching : Schooling Girls in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* and Christabel Coleridge's *The Girls of Flaxby* », *Cahiers Fablijes* [Online], 2 | 2024, Online since 02 décembre 2024, connection on 05 décembre 2024. URL : https://publications-prairial.fr/fablijes/index.php?id=365

Prairial
Pôle éditorial
Lyon Saint-Étienne

Teaching and Touching : Schooling Girls in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* and Christabel Coleridge's *The Girls of Flaxby*

Claudia Nelson and Mary Nelson

OUTLINE

TEXT

1 Because children's writers often seek to supplement formal curricula by offering moral and informational lessons, children's fiction about education can provide interesting critiques of widespread pedagogical practices and afford insight into the authors' and culture's theories about what good teaching encompasses and how one might best accomplish it. Along the way, stories on this topic point to how power discrepancies involving gender, age, and class may be negotiated to reach what the authors deem satisfactory results for all sides, as the hitherto disadvantaged gradually learn, mature, and gain status. This article considers an American novel about a girl's education at home, Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* (1875), alongside a contemporaneous British novel about girls in a teacher training course, Christabel Coleridge's *The Girls of Flaxby* (1882). Both authors were the daughters of teachers, Bronson Alcott being one of his era's best known educational innovators and Derwent Coleridge (son of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge) being the first principal of St. Mark's College, Chelsea, a teacher training school for boys founded in 1841 as part of an effort to « promot[e] the education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church [1] », where his daughter Christabel was born in 1843. Both women, indeed, were briefly teachers themselves before becoming successful authors, as the teenaged Alcott worked, reluctantly, as a governess [2]

and Coleridge ran a school with her brother Ernest. Accordingly, education was a subject to which they frequently returned in their fiction and upon which they wrote from a position of authority and experience, as women who had grown up in homes that literally were also schools and who had tried out their educational theories on their own pupils [3].

2 As Abigail Ann Hamblen, Cathlin M. Davis, and other scholars cited in this article suggest, these two novels about girls being shaped into exemplary women anticipate pedagogical theories frequently associated with the twentieth century [4]. In this regard, they help to remind readers that educational « innovations » and understandings of developmental psychology typically do not emerge from nowhere. Rather, they build on a substratum of ideas available in the culture at large, perhaps being promulgated in low-status texts such as children's fiction, before they become professionalized and are heralded as new insights. And as one would expect, Alcott's and Coleridge's recommendations about education also draw upon educational theories already circulating in these authors' eras ; in both cases the texts reflect the ideas of mentors such as Bronson Alcott and Coleridge's longtime guide and friend the novelist Charlotte M. Yonge, as well as those of internationally influential pedagogical theorists such as Friedrich Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi and classical philosophers such as Aristotle. Our principal object here, however, is not to trace the lineage of *Eight Cousins* and *The Girls of Flaxby*'s insights into female education but to explore the power structures, mechanisms, and environments through which the authors see successful learning being transmitted.

Home and the educational environment : Character training in the « queen's garden »

3 Both novels present these environments as feminized ; indeed, these authors' visions of boys' education also privilege the feminine and domestic. In *Domestic Occupations : Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work*, Jessica Enoch analyzes the « spatial rhetorics that paved the way for women teachers in the early to mid-nineteenth

century », identifying a « regendering process [that] made the school into another kind of home [5] ». The impulse to collapse pedagogical and domestic spaces typified an approach to girls' education in particular that harmonized with the nineteenth-century idealization of the home as what John Ruskin calls in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) the « queen's garden », the place where feminine morality was to rule [6]. So dominant was the idea that morality rather than intellect was women's sphere, and that child rearing was part of that sphere, that writers such as Alcott and Coleridge (and innumerable others, not all of them female) produced novels about schooling that present educating both girls and boys as a matter of gently forming character through personal ties, with the communication of knowledge and skills secondary to the cultivation of virtue.

4 Alcott's novel presents a happy home as the best place to learn ; the protagonist, Rose, has attended a boarding school, which has taught her little and injured her health, before becoming the ward of her Uncle Alec, who largely forsakes his medical career to devote himself to his brother's orphaned child. As Kristina West observes, « Rose's education within the family [...] comes as a result of the perceived failure of a schoolroom education [7] », although it is noteworthy that the novel points out (via several of Rose's boy cousins) that parents, too, can fail as teachers. Conversely, Coleridge's novel presents the school as an alternative family whose communal life does a better job of shaping the girls' characters than can be accomplished in the smaller domestic space. Thanks to Flaxby, Coleridge's narrator reports of the students central to the narrative, Daisy Morris's « best earthly safeguard would lie in her loyal and loving affection for the teachers and trainers of her early youth », while « The same influences checked in Florence Hervey tendencies that might have spoiled her life for ever »

> and Isabel Grey, gentle, dignified, and self-possessed, with all her faculties in working order, and no restless uncertainties as to her duties in life, was superior to what she had promised to be at fifteen, and fit for whatever life might bring to her [8].

Parents, in Coleridge's narrative, provide noticeably flawed raw material to be refined by wise but also loving « teachers and

trainers » while Alcott suggests that a benevolent adoptive father can rectify the educational establishment's errors.

5 As stories about education, both works go into some detail about the informational content of the girls' schooling, but in doing so they suggest that this content is considerably less important than character training. For instance, Coleridge's narrative provides essays ostensibly written by the pupils, but it does so primarily in order to offer a spice of humor via the inadequacy of the girls' analysis of Longfellow's « Excelsior », which, Daisy writes, « is very poetical, and I think there is some more meaning in it which I cannot understand [9] ». Alcott's novel similarly includes an entertaining moment in which Rose vanquishes a critical aunt by firing off random facts about China that she has learned via an excursion to her Uncle Mac's warehouse :

> « Chops » are the boats they live in ; and they drink tea out of little saucers. Principal productions are porcelain, tea, cinnamon, shawls, tin, tamarinds, and opium. They have beautiful temples and queer gods ; and in Canton is the Dwelling of the Holy Pigs, fourteen of them, very big, and all blind [10].

While Aunt Jane, a bluestocking, mistakenly equates facts and education, both authors see academic training as only one element in instilling in the growing girl (or boy) an appropriate outlook on life [11]. Daisy will not need in her adulthood to devise a more sophisticated reading of « Excelsior », and Rose will have little use for statistics on China, but both girls will benefit greatly from the affectionate relationships formed with their instructors.

6 Arguing that « Alcott presents a child-centered solution for the problems in education », Davis sees her as prefiguring the theories of John Dewey in emphasizing learning by doing, personal connection to the subjects of study, and the importance of teachers' sympathy for their students [12]. Certainly *Eight Cousins* makes Uncle Alec's success as a teacher depend upon his ability to produce a pupil who is not merely mistress of memorized facts but also healthy, principled, no slave to fashion, adept in philanthropy and in the housewifely arts, and capable of relinquishing her own desires for the sake of people she loves. Similarly, the happy ending to Coleridge's tale is not a

prize-giving scene celebrating academic achievement but a summation (quoted above) of how the various Flaxby girls have improved in manners and morals. Yet in both cases, one might reasonably align the authors not only with the progressive educational theories of the mid-twentieth century but also with what Jon Fennell and Timothy L. Simpson identify as « the cardinal objective of classical education », namely « to produce a certain sort of individual, i.e., to form character[13] ». Fennell and Simpson look back to Plato and Aristotle to propose that the classical philosophers were right to believe that in an ideal education, « the training of the mind grows out of the cultivation of the heart »[14]. One sees this premise illustrated in both *Eight Cousins*, in which educational progress is often indistinguishable from the growth of family love, and *The Girls of Flaxby*, which removes girls from their families only to substitute other ties of affection and respect.

7 Becoming a teacher is itself a learning process, and in both narratives the girls' growth is shown in part by how they come to view themselves not only as pupils but also as instructors, with Rose tutoring the unlettered maid-of-all-work Phebe and the Flaxby trainees realizing from observing an admired teacher what constitutes effective pedagogy, which they attempt to reproduce with their own students. Significantly, in neither case does anyone receive formal training in instructional methods ; it is rather suggested that good teaching, like other responsible uses of status, is rooted in good feeling. That Rose assumes the role of Phebe's teacher is her own idea, prompted by the discovery that Phebe is trying to teach herself but lacks the resources available to her wealthy young mistress. And that the household has afforded Phebe only

> A broken slate that had blown off the roof, an inch or two of pencil, an old almanac for a reader, several bits of brown or yellow paper ironed smoothly and sewed together for a copy-book, and the copies sundry receipts written in Aunt Plenty's neat hand,

explains why « she did not "get on" in spite of the patient persistence that dried the desponding tears and drove along the sputtering pen with a will »[15]. A dearth of supplies is one potential problem with home instruction ; another emerges in Rose's awareness of her own shortcomings in grammar, arithmetic, and general knowledge, which

she attempts to remedy by consulting an encyclopedia. The chief advantage of the home as a site for teaching, however, is that it is the best venue for personal relationships. Once Phebe is no longer learning on her own but in partnership with her friend and patron Rose, « getting on » is both possible and pleasurable for both girls.

8 To sell Uncle Alec on the desirability of the tutoring project (Rose has been ill and is not supposed to be exerting herself), Rose focuses on what *she*, not Phebe, is gaining : « [Teaching her] is as good as a general review of what I've learned, in a pleasanter way than going over it alone [...]. I like it much better than having a good time all by myself[16] ». Rose, that is, positions herself as needy pupil rather than as knowledgeable authority, and readers can see that this self-identification is not simply a canny negotiating position when Phebe proves to be Rose's superior in arithmetic, a discovery that requires Rose to apply herself to a branch of learning in which she has had little interest and that West persuasively identifies as one of a number of moments in which « Alcott questions the status of a hierarchical education[17] ». Moreover, since she has already informally « adopted Phebe and promised to be a sister to her », Rose suggests, the tutoring sessions are not really school but an extension of family life[18]. As such, the techniques of professional teachers as displayed in the school that Rose attended – chiefly encouraging the rote memorization of ill-digested facts, with seemingly no attention to emotional or spiritual growth – would be as inappropriate as they are ineffectual. Rather, she is putting into practice what she already understands from her experience with Uncle Alec (and subsequently with her great-aunts Plenty and Peace) about creating new family bonds, namely that within the family, teaching is a way of showing love[19].

« Mental growth » and reorganizing worldviews

9 Conversely, most of the girls at Flaxby initially do not understand the teacher training college as a substitute family ; they have enrolled from practical motives, seeking to rise socially and/or to help their parents financially. Isabel, the protagonist to the extent that Coleridge's novel contains one, « recognized the duty and the

necessity [of becoming a national schoolmistress], but she did so with a sense of infinite condescension », considering the position beneath the one to which her impoverished but genteel birth should have entitled her [20]. Like Rose, though, she discovers to her surprise that she has much in common with the classmates in whom she expected to find inferiors, the chief distinction being that while she

> knew nothing of arithmetic and little of geography, and thus was at fault in the actual studies on which they were engaged [...] her mind had a background, and though she could not repeat nearly as many dates as Clara, was perfectly clear without them that Julius Cæsar was over and done with before William the Conqueror [21].

The emphasis here is on the desirability of a sense of context, much as Rose realizes that in order to satisfy Phebe's desire for general knowledge, she needs to know more about cotton than « that it was a plant that grew down South in a kind of a pod, and was made into cloth [22] ». Ultimately, Isabel's developing sense of how things fit together enables her to understand the importance of the classroom and the wider national-school environment as spaces shaping British womanhood, and thus to accept her own position as a source of self-worth rather than shame. She thus demonstrates that she has undergone the « mental growth » that Coleridge later describes in *The Daughters Who Have Not Revolted* (1894), an advice book aimed at young women:

> By mental growth is not [...] meant a sudden facility for translating German, or for working problems in Euclid [...] but a sort of readjustment of your point of view, a change in the sense of proportion, not always a change of opinion, though that *may* result, but a change in the way of holding opinions [23].

10 The word that West repeatedly uses in discussing the education on display in *Eight Cousins* and other Alcott works – and this term applies to *The Girls of Flaxby* as well – is « holistic [24] ». For both Alcott and Coleridge, the emphasis is not on possessing many individual pieces of information but on having a mental, moral, and physical structure into which that information fits. In this regard, we might see the two authors as products of a moment that emphasized the relationality of learning. *Eight Cousins* was published one year

before, and *The Girls of Flaxby* six years after, Melvil Dewey created the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, which Richard E. Rubin and Rachel G. Rubin describe as revolutionary because

> it provides for a relative location [for the materials being classified] rather than a fixed one. Before DDC, books in libraries were numbered based on a specific, fixed physical location. In DDC [...] the physical location of materials can change as long as the books remain in appropriate relation to each other [25] [...].

Much as Dewey offered the librarians of this moment a way of organizing materials that permits the user to find not just a single book housed in a given place but also books on similar topics housed nearby, thus creating the potential for linking separate pieces of knowledge, Rose and Phebe, Isabel and her schoolmates, are enabled to form a new sense of their positions in the social systems that they occupy – the « change in the sense of proportion » that Coleridge refers to in *The Daughters Who Have Not Revolted.* Rose quickly identifies Phebe as like herself, a suitable adoptive sister, and this reclassification moves Phebe from the position of servant in volume one to in-law (despite the elders' initial reluctance to see this happen) in the sequel ; Rose herself blooms into an ideal young American woman focused on helping others rather than a fretful and timid quasi-invalid focused on her own woes. Coleridge's Isabel loses her snobbery and develops fellow feeling both for the classmates she initially despised and for the pupils in her care. Not the mastery of an academic subject but the reevaluation of other people, the new understanding of relationality, proves to be the linchpin in the education of both sets of girls.

11 Georgina O'Brien Hill discusses Coleridge's early training in the Goslings, an informal society for girls who were guided toward authorship under Yonge's direction. Although the girls were in their own homes and received their instruction via letter, illustrations for their handwritten group-authored magazine, *The Barnacle*, depict them « rarely in isolation, most often working in collaboration with two or three others », or even, in one instance, in a group of nine with Yonge as the « Mother Goose », personally overseeing their studies of Hesiod, Aristotle, Plato, the physical geography of Fez, and the history of Greenland [26]. While Hill describes the space shown in

this drawing as « a vast library », it looks more like a schoolroom due to its large globe, its maps hanging from hooks on the wall, and its age-based authority structure. The picture's emphasis, as Hill notes, is on the value of being part of a female educational community, of learning cooperatively in a group. A range of disparate academic subjects is referred to here, but they are being made to fit together via moral qualities such as self-discipline ; the illustration is the second in a pair of humorous drawings, the first of which shows the naughty Goslings facing Yonge's punishment for having been inattentive and lazy [27]. Together, the two illustrations hint at what will become the trajectory of *The Girls of Flaxby*, in which being part of the school community but also of a nonacademic improvement society, St. Agnes' Guild, both trains the pupils' minds and helps to rid them of faults such as vulgarity, conceit, and inattention.

12 If the figure of Yonge, Coleridge's most important teacher in her youth and an ongoing influence throughout her later life, stands behind the positive depiction of middle-aged and young female mentors in *The Girls of Flaxby*, Coleridge is adapting her personal experience of receiving mentorship into a more general principle of the importance of good role models for young women as a group. Claudia Nelson has written elsewhere about Coleridge's ongoing literary interest in « cooperative intergenerational relationships », focused on tutelage [28], and a similar point might be made of Alcott ; again and again, wise and benevolent elders appear in these novelists' work to point rather than to force younger characters in productive directions, reminding us that both Coleridge and Alcott present personal ties as the foundation upon which education rests. Accordingly, instruction in both *The Girls of Flaxby* and *Eight Cousins* hints at mid-twentieth-century social learning theory, in which, in the words of its explicator Albert Bandura, people « learn through the influence of example », from « competent models who demonstrate how the required activities should be performed [29] » – a family-like mode of education both described in the novels and enacted by them for the benefit of the reader.

Beyond book learning : Physical touch and educational progress

13 Personal ties require personal contact. Within the novels, then, the motif of physical touch marks significant steps or moments in the characters' education and development, frequently acting as a signal that imprinting is or has been taking place. When Miss Gertrude, a Flaxby employee who, at twenty, is closer in age to the girls than to her fellow faculty members, introduces the concept of St. Agnes' Guild, Isabel asks, « Is it something then for ladies – for you too ? », as she wants to ensure (through ascertaining the appropriateness of the model she is being asked to follow, as Bandura might see it) that attending will be advantageous for her social standing. At the meeting, the leader, Mrs. Wayland, « shook hands with the girls as they entered » [30]. This physical contact, in its nineteenth-century context a gesture of equality, marks a transformative moment for Isabel, as she is introduced to a different mode of learning. This meeting is discussion-based, rather than emphasizing hierarchy by being lecture- or exercise-based, and she notices that the members offering the best insights are from the school. We are told that Isabel will never forget this experience for the rest of her life, so powerful are her feelings of kinship with the other attendees, even those she does not know well.

14 The power of the handshake is again invoked at a school treat and summer lawn party. Here the narrative contrasts Isabel and her fellow pupil-teacher Clara when they each come across people whom they are conflicted about being associated with. Isabel sees Annie, a former classmate, now serving as a nanny for some other party guests – a servant, then, rather than a member of the bourgeoisie. But although Annie is no longer of her own social standing, « Isabel was thoroughly honest ; and by the time she reached Annie's side her mind was made up, and she held out her hand [31] ». She has successfully quelled her initial sense of superiority and greets Annie as a peer, the physical contact showing the newfound emotional maturity that is a crucial product of her education : Isabel now occupies the role of Mrs. Wayland, extending her hand to someone who is not her social equal but toward whom she nonetheless wants

to show friendship. To complete the lesson for the reader, Clara comes across her cousins from the poorer side of the family. One of them attaches herself to Clara, who « couldn't speak in her horror ; but the child's mother pulled her off saying shrilly – "Come away, Ada, and don't interrupt your cousin when she's talking to the ladies" [32] ». In contrast to Isabel, Clara rejects Ada's touch, attempting to separate herself from her cousins and thereby revealing her own inability to profit from the positive models in her environment. Humiliated by the exposure of her low connections, Clara runs from the party, and « Isabel followed and tried to give her a soothing pat [33] ». Here Isabel is offering another moment of physical touch, again demonstrating her maturity and development, and Clara's reluctance to accept it is presented to the reader as a marker of the extent to which her education remains incomplete.

15 These instances of physical interaction between characters underscore that education in Coleridge's novel (as in Alcott's) encompasses more than book learning and reaches more than the mind. Quasi-egalitarian social learning practices such as peer teaching, cross-age student/teacher groups, and teachers providing hints as opposed to lectures enable Isabel to learn from Miss Gertrude and the Guild ladies, empowering her in turn to take on a tutelary role with Clara and with her protégée Daisy. Closeness or perceived closeness is perennially important for the characters' learning ability and development ; for instance, in orienting her, the Flaxby girls tell Isabel that they don't like staff members Mr. Alison or Miss Flint because these individuals are reserved and don't develop warm relationships with the pupil-teachers, who therefore are reluctant to learn from them. Physical contact with more mature characters signals emotional and intellectual proximity and both enables and measures the girls' progress. Membership in a learning community at once depends upon and helps to create fellow feeling, and fellow feeling is not only an important end product but also a prerequisite for education, since true education, as Coleridge sees it, is a matter at least as much of attitude as of information. The ability to reach out to others literally and figuratively, and to accept others' outreach in turn, is thus paramount for the would-be teacher.

16 In *Eight Cousins*, the narrative favors experiential learning over a formal curriculum, but here too, important moments in Rose's

education are marked via touch. Over the course of the novel, there are many instances of physical displays of affection between characters. Joe Sutliff Sanders examines how the comparatively formal handshake Uncle Jem initially offers when he first greets Rose rapidly becomes an embrace, arguing that this revised contact can occur « because Rose is a cipher for her father », just as « Rose and Alec, the individuals who occupy the two apparently distinctive positions in the teacher-student relationship, are both over-written by the impression of the dead father [34] ». While we agree with Sanders that Alcott's narrator uses different actions to signal different levels of intimacy and that there is considerable slippage between the roles of teacher and learner, we suggest that another way to read the various forms of touch in this novel is that they signal different stages of learning. For instance, hand holding typically signifies the beginning of a relationship, often a relationship that will involve Rose in learning, teaching, or both. Kisses represent progress in learning a lesson or something new, and embraces or other forms of physical touch represent a bigger moment.

17 When Rose is first introduced to her cousins, she is dismayed that « hands were offered, and […] she was expected to shake them *all* [35] », – but this contact turns out to be her inaugural lesson in being part of a family, a lesson essential to the more advanced curriculum of womanhood, which involves taking on the task of improving her cousins. Additionally, when Rose decides that she will « adopt », Phebe and be responsible for her education, Phebe « put[s] both arms round Rose », and then « presse[s] the little hand Rose offered warmly in both her hard ones » [36], signifying both the beginning of their teacher-student relationship and something bigger, their incipient transition from mistress and servant to family. Significantly, the phrasing here echoes language used in describing Rose's first extended conversation with Uncle Alec, who is now responsible for raising and educating her : he takes « the little cold hand she gave him in both his big warm ones [37] ». His teaching methods differ drastically from those she's used to, and he is also a stranger to her. But when he proposes his plan, and « he held out his hand with that anxious, troubled look in his eyes, she was moved to put up her innocent lips and seal the contract with a confiding kiss [38] ». His offering his hand marks the beginning of her

education, and her answering kiss shows progress as she agrees to the process – an agreement that, he fully understands, she could withhold if he were to misuse or mistake his position as her guardian. Uncle Alec and Rose exchange numerous kisses over the course of the novel, typically when she has successfully learned a lesson that he has been presenting or when he is pleased with her independent learning efforts. For example, he decides that in addition to learning academic subjects, she should master domestic skills through practical application and measures her success by her ability to produce a loaf of bread by herself. He states that when she has achieved this goal, he will give her his « heartiest kiss ». Rose also undertakes her own projects and applies the lessons she's learned about sacrifice to planning a surprise for Phebe ; in bidding her uncle goodnight before her plan is revealed, she departs « throwing him a kiss [39] ». Here she is the one initiating the kiss in a learning situation, demonstrating her progress. Their conversation causes Uncle Alec to reflect on the sacrifices he has made and learned from in his own life, furthering the connection between kisses and educational development and emphasizing that teachers, too, must grow.

18 Embraces happen at particularly emotional bonding moments, Uncle Alec's arrival in Rose's life and Rose's « adoption » of Phebe being two examples. True, the lack of an embrace can also signal a learning opportunity, as when Rose assumes a « school-marmish » tone toward four-year-old Pokey, who bursts into tears at being the object of an instructional story based on a shameful deed she has committed. Chiding Rose for her insensitivity, Uncle Alec takes Pokey « on his knee and administer[s] consolation in the shape of kisses and nuts [40] », a sight that itself serves as a reproof to Rose as she is accustomed to being the recipient of Uncle Alec's physical affection. She internalizes from this misstep that doing is better than preaching, a lesson consonant with the way in which Uncle Alec has taught her. More commonly, however, Rose is the object of embraces. At the novel's end, Rose chooses Uncle Alec as her permanent parent (initially his guardianship occupied a trial period of a year), a moment that emphasizes that the pupil too has decision-making rights. She hugs him so strongly that his waistcoat button leaves an imprint on her face, and he responds with a « kiss that half effaced it [41] ». This

embrace marks her « graduation » from this year of her schooling, a year that has covered subjects from handwriting and anatomy to dress reform, health, and domestic happiness. Accordingly, he rewards her with a kiss that eclipses all the others, signifying the success of his educational and parental program. Uncle Alec's teaching practices, then, are not only experiential learning featuring games and trips and interactions with cousins and uncles but are also literally hands-on.

Conclusion

19 Many critics have looked at education in Alcott's works ; very few have examined the writings of the much less well known Coleridge. We contend that comparing these two authors is fruitful, in part because the many points of overlap help to indicate engagement with a transatlantic pedagogical and ethical philosophy privileging family and questioning the status deriving from social standing and/or masculinity. For both Alcott and Coleridge, a desirable education shapes and reforms the « whole girl » : character, dress and manners, attitudes toward social class, and in Alcott's case also bodily health. Moreover, both authors' understandings of education are essentially sociocultural, emphasizing the transmission of knowledge, skills, and attitudes from one individual to another – nor are the transmitting individuals necessarily adults. *Eight Cousins* suggests that while facts are meaningless in the absence of a larger framework, learning about cotton is worthwhile if Rose is absorbing these facts in order to teach them to Phebe, not because Phebe needs to be well informed on such points but because their two-person learning community is emotionally valuable to both girls. *The Girls of Flaxby* shows the educational community extending beyond the bounds of Flaxby school, with learning apparently more likely to occur at a garden party or Guild meeting than from formal assignments such as essay writing. The open-hearted sympathy that prompts Rose's love for Phebe increases the domestic and ultimately the wider social standing of both girls ; Isabel's eventual readiness to feel kinship with girls whom she was initially inclined to hold in some contempt enables her to occupy a role once restricted to women she initially saw as her superiors. In both cases, the central lessons to be learned have little to do with traditional academics. Ultimately, Alcott and

Coleridge's shared vision of girls' education emphasizes youth's plasticity and the importance of education's physical, emotional, moral, and tactile dimensions. In doing so, it also proposes for both characters and readers a route to mature femininity that privileges female agency and the authority that may be derived from developing virtues associated with nineteenth-century womanhood.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources primaires

Alcott Louisa May, *Eight Cousins ; or, The Aunt-Hill*, Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1887, 291 p. [En ligne sur Project Gutenberg : https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/38567/pg38567-images.html ou sur Internet archive : https://archive.org/details/eightcousinsorau00alco/page/n7]

Alcott Louisa May, « How I Went Out to Service », *The Independent*, 4 June 1874, p. 1-3. [En ligne sur Internet Archive : https://archive.org/details/sim_independent_1874-06-04_26_1331]

Coleridge Christabel Rose, *The Daughters Who Have Not Revolted*, London, Gardner, Darton & Co, s. d. [1894], xii-82 p.

Coleridge Christabel Rose, *The Girls of Flaxby*, London, Walter Smith, 1882, 154 p. [En ligne sur Google Books : https://books.google.fr/books?id=8RcCAAAAQAAJ]

Sources secondaires

Alcott Bronson, « The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture », dans *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists*, éd. George Hochfield, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2e éd., 2004, p. 131-143.

Bandura Albert, *Social Learning Theory*, Morristown, General Learning Press, 1971.

Davis Cathlin M., « An Easy and Well-Ordered Way to Learn : Schooling at Home in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* and *Jack and Jill* », *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 42, 2011, p. 340-353. [Accès restreint sur Springer: DOI 10.1007/s10583-011-9136-1]

Enoch Jessica, *Domestic Occupations. Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, « Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms », 2019, 260 p.

Fennell Jon and Simpson Timothy L., « An Epistemological Rationale for Classical Education », *Principia*, vol. 2, nº 1, 2023, p. 81-98. [En ligne sur Philosophy Documentation Center : DOI 10.5840/principia2023215]

Hamblen Abigail Ann, « Louisa May Alcott and the "Revolution" in Education », *The Journal of General Education*, vol. 22, nº 2, July 1970, p. 81-92. [Accès restreint sur JSTOR : http://www.jstor.org/stable/27796204]

Maibor Carolyn R., « Upstairs, Downstairs, and In-Between : Louisa May Alcott on Domestic Service », *The New England Quarterly. A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters*, vol. 79, nº 1, March 2006, p. 65-91. [Accès restreint sur JSTOR : https://www.jstor.org/stable/20474412]

Mangan J. A. and Hickey Colm, « Athleticism in the Service of the Proletariat : Preparation for the English Elementary School and the Extension of Middle-Class Manliness », dans J A. Mangan (dir.), *Making European Masculinities. Sport, Europe, Gender*, London, Routledge, « Sport in the Global Society », 2000, p 112-139.

Nelson Claudia, « Alienated Girlhood in Works by Christabel Coleridge », dans Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith (dir.), *Literary Cultures and Nineteenth-Century Childhoods*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, p. 193-207. [Accès restreint sur Springer : DOI 0.1007/978-3-031-38351-9_12]

O'Brien Hill Georgina, « Charlotte Yonge's "Goosedom" », *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, nº 8.1, Spring 2012, [en ligne], https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue81/hill.html.

Rubin Richard E. and Rubin Rachel G., *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, American Library Association, 2020, 648 p.

Ruskin John, « Lecture II : Lilies. Of Queens' Gardens », dans Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (dir.), *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 18, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 109-144. [Accès restreint sur Cambridge University Press, DOI 10.1017/CBO9780511696213.010]

Sanders Joe Sutliff, *Disciplining Girls. Understanding the Origins of the Classic Orphan Girl Story*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, 240 p. [Accès restreint sur Project Muse : DOI 10.1353/book.10553]

West Kristina, chap. 7 : « "The Model Children" : Alcott's Theories of Education », dans *Louisa May Alcott and the Textual Child. A Critical Theory Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 161-185. [Accès restreint sur Springer : DOI 10.1007/978-3-030-39025-9_7]

NOTES

1 Quoted in J. A. Mangan and Colm Hickey, « Athleticism in the Service of the Proletariat : Preparation for the English Elementary School and the

Extension of Middle-Class Manliness », dans J. A. Mangan (dir.), *Making European Masculinities. Sport, Europe, Gender*, Routledge, 2000, p. 138, n. 32.

2 « I had tried teaching for two years, and hated it », Alcott notes in her account of her stint as a domestic servant at age eighteen, « How I Went Out to Service ». See Louisa May Alcott, « How I Went Out to Service », *The Independent*, 4 June 1874, p. 1.

3 Alcott's children's fiction with substantial discourse on schooling includes assorted short stories, *Little Women* and its sequels (1868-1886), *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Under the Lilacs* (1878) and *Jack and Jill* (1880), while Coleridge's includes *Giftie the Changeling* (1868), *The Green Girls of Greythorpe* (1890) and *Three Little Wanderers* (1894). For reasons of space, we have opted to focus on a single work by each author, but many of the authors' insights into girls' education may be found in more than one text.

4 For instance, Hamblen identifies « astonishing similarities of thought » between the ideas of Bronson Alcott and his daughter and those of « advanced educators and critics of education » in the mid-twentieth century ; see Abigail Ann Hamblen, « Louisa May Alcott and the "Revolution" in Education », *The Journal of General Education*, vol. 22, nº 2, July 1970, p. 82.

5 Jessica Enoch, *Domestic Occupations. Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2019, p. 6.

6 John Ruskin, « Lecture II : Lilies », dans Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (dir.), *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Works of John Ruskin*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 109.

7 Kristina West, chap. 7 : « "The Model Children" : Alcott's Theories of Education », dans *Louisa May Alcott and the Textual Child*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 169.

8 Christabel R. Coleridge, *The Girls of Flaxby*, London, Walter Smith, 1882, p. 150-151 and 153.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 46-47.

10 Louisa May Alcott, *Eight Cousins ; or, The Aunt-Hill*, Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1887, p. 92.

11 In this regard as in many others, Alcott's positions recall those of her father. For Bronson Alcott, intellectual training was less of a priority in education than moral training ; in an 1836 essay he explains that the job of the teacher is to « inform the understanding by chastening the appetites,

allaying the passions, softening the affections, vivifying the imagination, illuminating the reason, [and] giving pliancy and force to the will » (Bronson Alcott, « The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture », *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists*, edited by George Hochfield, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 139). Meanwhile, a historical overview of St. Mark's College notes that « [Derwent] Coleridge was determined that children would develop best if taught in attractive surroundings and were exposed to the "daily sight and sound of good" » (« Celebrating the Early Days of the College of St Mark in Chelsea », *Marjon News*, 30 August 2016, [en ligne]) ; while academic training was important to the scholarly Coleridge, he too was clearly interested in the « whole child ».

12 Cathlin M. Davis, « An Easy and Well-Ordered Way to Learn : Schooling at Home in Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* and *Jack and Jill* », *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 42, 2011, p. 341 and *passim*.

13 Jon Fennell and Timothy L. Simpson, « An Epistemological Rationale for Classical Education », *Principia*, vol. 2, nº 1, 2023, p. 93, [DOI 10.5840/principia2023215].

14 *Ibid.*, p. 94-95.

15 Louisa Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

17 Kristina West, « "The Model Children" », chap. cité, p. 177.

18 Louisa Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, *op. cit.*, p. 261. Carolyn Maibor points out in her discussion of *Eight Cousins* and its sequel that Rose's assertion that Phebe should be considered a family member is naive : even years later, « Despite the girls' mutual affection, from Phebe's perspective, they cannot be sisters because they are not equals » socially ; see Carolyn R. Maibor, « Upstairs, Downstairs, and In-Between : Louisa May Alcott on Domestic Service », *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 79, nº 1, March 2006, p. 86. For the less worldly wise Rose, however, teaching Phebe is a genuine attempt at building family.

19 Presumably the social discomfort cited by Maibor is what causes the tutoring project, as West puts it, to « com[e] to a premature end when Uncle Alec finds out and decides to send Phebe to a formal school, despite this approach not being good enough for his niece ; the patriarchal and class order is therefore restored » (Kristina West, « "The Model Children" », chap. cité, p. 178). Yet this order is only temporary, as eventually Phebe's

worth is fully acknowledged and the class barrier broken by her marriage to Rose's oldest and most respected cousin, Archie.

20 Christabel Coleridge, *The Girls of Flaxby*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

22 Louisa Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

23 Christabel R. Coleridge, *The Daughters Who Have Not Revolted*, London, Gardner, Darton & Co, s. d. [1894], p. 65 (emphasis in original).

24 Kristina West, « "The Model Children" », chap. cité, p. 164, 166, 168, 170 and 172.

25 Richard E. Rubin and Rachel G. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, American Library Association, 2020, p. 339-340.

26 Georgina O'Brien Hill, « Charlotte Yonge's "Goosedom" », *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, n° 8.1, Spring 2012, [en ligne], § 16 and fig. 5.

27 That this cartoon, which depicts Yonge as Artemis slaying the mortal girls who have elicited her divine wrath, is drawn by a Gosling rather than by Yonge suggests a complex treatment of authority : Yonge here has life and death power over her juniors, but this power is being granted as a jest by the young artist and does not represent Yonge's own vision. What is really on display, then, is an affectionate camaraderie that both acknowledges and collapses hierarchy.

28 Claudia Nelson, « Alienated Girlhood in Works by Christabel Coleridge », dans Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith (dir.), *Literary Cultures and Nineteenth-Century Childhoods*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, p. 204.

29 Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, Morristown, General Learning Press, 1971, p. 5.

30 Christabel Coleridge, *The Girls of Flaxby*, *op. cit.*, p. 29 and 33.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

34 Joe Sutliff Sanders, chap. « *Eight Cousins* and What Girls Are Made For », dans *Disciplining Girls. Understanding the Origins of the Classic Orphan Girl Story*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, p. 58 and 59.

35 Louisa Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 29-30.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 183 and 107.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 175 and 176.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 291.

ABSTRACTS

Français

En 1875, dans *Eight Cousins*, Louisa May Alcott dépeint l'éducation à la maison d'une jeune Américaine ; en 1882, dans *The Girls of Flaxby*, Christabel Coleridge se concentre sur un groupe de jeunes Britanniques qui suivent une formation pour devenir enseignantes. Nous explorons les structures de pouvoir, les mécanismes, les contextes féminins et domestiques qui, selon les deux romancières, assurent la réussite de ces deux types d'éducation. Les deux romans valorisent une formation qui façonne et réforme « la fille dans son ensemble » sans se limiter à l'intellect. Selon eux, le contact physique joue un rôle important dans la transmission de valeurs assurant une cohésion sociale. Alcott et Coleridge proposent à leurs personnages et à leurs lecteurs des modèles d'éducation qui privilégient l'action et l'autorité qui peut découler du développement des vertus associées à la féminité du dix-neuvième siècle.

English

Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins* (1875) depicts an American girl's education at home ; Christabel Coleridge's *The Girls of Flaxby* (1882) focuses on British girls in a teacher training course. We explore the feminized and domesticated power structures, mechanisms, and environments through which these authors see successful learning being made possible. The novels share many similarities in addressing how a desirable education shapes and reforms the « whole girl », not merely the intellect. Particularly important are their depictions of the role of physical touch in signaling the transmission of values. Both authors propose for both characters and readers a route to mature femininity that privileges female agency and the authority that may be derived from developing virtues associated with nineteenth-century womanhood.

INDEX

Mots-clés

Alcott (Louisa May), Coleridge (Christabel), éducation des enfants, féminité

Keywords
Alcott (Louisa May), Coleridge (Christabel), child rearing, femininity

AUTHORS

Claudia Nelson
Texas A&M University

Mary Nelson
Indiana University