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ANNE BRONTË

AGNES GREY

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



ANNE BRONTË

Agnes Grey



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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS EDITION

- BST* *Brontë Society Transactions*
Gérin *Anne Brontë*, by Winifred Gérin, new edition, 1976
Life *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, by E. C. Gaskell, 3rd edition, 'revised and corrected', 2 vols., 1857
LL *The Brontës; Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence: In Four Volumes*, 1932: part of *The Shakespeare Head Brontë*, edited by T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, 19 vols., 1931-8
OED *Oxford English Dictionary*
Poems *The Poems of Anne Brontë*, edited by Edward Chitham, 1979
TLS *Times Literary Supplement*
† Northern dialectal word, form, or idiom; primary source, *The English Dialect Dictionary*, edited by Joseph Wright, 6 vols., 1898-1905

In the Explanatory Notes reference is made to the following World's Classics editions of novels by the Brontë sisters:

- Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith, 1980
Wuthering Heights, ed. Margaret Smith, 1980
Shirley, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, 1981

INTRODUCTION

LITTLE is known about the composition of Anne Brontë's first novel *Agnes Grey*. In the 'birthday note' that she wrote on 31 July 1845 Anne refers to what is almost certainly an early draft, mentioning that she has 'begun the third volume of *Passages in the Life of an Individual*', and adding slightly wearily, 'I wish I had finished it.'¹ *Passages in the Life of an Individual* would certainly be an appropriate title: one is reminded of the opening paragraph of the completed novel, with its insistence on the truthfulness of what follows: 'shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend' (p. 1). There is no doubt that in writing *Agnes Grey* Anne Brontë drew directly on her own experiences, especially during her years as a governess, first, for several months in, 1830, at Blake Hall, Mirfield, with the Ingham family, and subsequently, probably from some time in 1840 to June 1845, with the Robinsons of Thorp Green Hall, Little Ouseburn, about twelve miles from York. It is worth noting that in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* Elizabeth Gaskell describes a conversation with Charlotte about *Agnes Grey*, 'the novel in which her sister Anne pretty literally describes her own experience as a governess', and particularly the nestlings episode in chapter V:

She said that none but those who had been in the position of a governess could ever realise the dark side of "respectable" human nature; under no great temptation to crime, but daily giving way to selfishness and ill-temper, till its conduct towards those dependent on it sometimes amounts to a tyranny of which one would rather be the victim than the inflictor.²

Charlotte's comment certainly throws light on her sister's novel. There is no doubt that personal experience lies behind many of

¹ *LL*, ii. 52.

² *Life*, i. 197.

the characters and incidents, much of the dialogue, and, more immediately, the presentation of Agnes's thoughts and feelings. In the Preface to the 'second edition' of her second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne remarks, interestingly enough, that *Agnes Grey* has been criticized for its 'extravagant over-colouring in those very parts that were carefully copied from the life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration'.³ The remark, particularly the last phrase, suggests something of the seriousness of purpose with which the novel was written; no doubt she was thinking mainly of the descriptions of Agnes's experiences as a governess. It is, of course, dangerous to read *Agnes Grey*, or parts of it, as simply autobiographical; even more to quote passages, as Anne's biographer Winifred Gérin frequently does, as if they represented straightforward personal reminiscence.

Agnes Grey was probably completed by the spring of 1846. On 6 April Charlotte Brontë wrote to the publishers Aylott and Jones, who were about to publish *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, informing them of 'a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales', that 'C. E. & A. Bell are now preparing for the Press':⁴ the 'tales' were *The Professor*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey*. During the following months the manuscripts were submitted to a number of publishers, and finally, probably in the early months of 1847, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were accepted by Thomas Cautley Newby, of Mortimer Street, London. Newby's inefficiency and shiftiness soon became apparent. In December, after what Charlotte, writing to W. S. Williams of Smith, Elder, described as 'exhausting delay and procrastination',⁵ the three-volume edition appeared, *Wuthering Heights* occupying the first two volumes and *Agnes Grey* the third. Though Newby had apparently agreed to print 350 copies, only 250 actually appeared. The edition was very poorly produced: 'the books are

³ *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 'second edition', 3 vols. (London, 1848), vol. i, p. iv. This 'edition' is actually a reissue of the first edition.

⁴ LL, ii, 87.

⁵ LL, ii, 154.

not well got up—they abound in errors of the press', Charlotte remarked in a letter to Williams on 14 December.⁶ There are numerous literal errors, and the text of *Agnes Grey* is marred by various peculiarities of punctuation, especially in the use of commas (some of these, however, may be authorial). At some point Anne at least made a start on revising the text of her novel: a copy of the third volume, now in the Morris L. Parrish Collection in Princeton University Library, contains some 121 revisions made in pencil in her hand, many of them involving quite significant substantive alterations.⁷ In the later months of 1850, after Anne's death, Charlotte carried out a thorough revision of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* for the second edition, which was published by Smith, Elder in December; this edition includes the important 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell'. Charlotte's revised text cannot, of course, be regarded as authoritative.

References to *Agnes Grey* in early reviews tend to be brief and perfunctory. The reviewer in *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* (15 January 1848) declared, 'we do not actually assert that the author must have been a governess himself, to describe as he does the minute torments and incessant tediums of her life, but he must have bribed some governess very largely, either with love or money, to reveal to him the secrets of her prison-house, or, he must have devoted extraordinary powers of observation and discovery to the elucidation of the subject'.⁸ More interestingly, the reviewer in *Atlas* (22 January) observed that 'there is a want of distinctness in the character of Agnes, which prevents the reader from taking much interest in her fate—but the story, though lacking the power and originality of *Wuthering Heights*, is infinitely more agreeable. It leaves no painful impression on the mind—some may think it leaves no impression at all'.⁹

⁶ *LL*, ii. 162.

⁷ On the revisions in the Parrish copy, see *Agnes Grey*, Clarendon edition, pp. xviii–xx.

⁸ Miriam Allott (ed.), *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (1974), 227.

⁹ *Ibid.* 233.

As a first novel *Agnes Grey* is certainly a remarkable achievement, displaying both maturity and considerable technical accomplishment. By contemporary standards it is, of course, a relatively short novel, and the narrative structure, with Agnes as first-person narrator, is managed with economy and restraint. As the novel progresses Anne Brontë seems to write with increasing self-assurance and incisiveness. The handling of dialogue is particularly impressive: an example is this short exchange between Agnes and Rosalie Murray in chapter XVI, immediately after Rosalie's startling declaration that she intends to 'take up Mr. Weston instead of Mr. Hatfield': she is well aware of Agnes's feelings towards the new curate, and is deliberately seeking to hurt her. Agnes, trying to conceal her shocked embarrassment, nevertheless makes clear her deep distaste at Rosalie's irresponsibility; Rosalie's reply, typically over-emphatic and self-dramatizing, suggests something of her vanity and manipulativenness, as well as her active maliciousness towards Agnes:

"If you mean Mr. Weston to be one of your victims," said I, with affected indifference, "you will have to make such overtures yourself, that you will find it difficult to draw back when he asks you to fulfil the expectations you have raised."

"I don't suppose he will ask me to *marry* him—nor should I desire it . . . that would be *rather* too much presumption! but I intend him to feel my power—he has felt it already, indeed—but he shall *acknowledge* it too; and what visionary hopes he may have, he must keep to himself, and only amuse me with the result of them—for a time." (pp. 136–7)

The use of emphatic italics, frequent in Rosalie's speeches, helps to convey her self-indulgent tone—"that would be *rather* too much presumption!" precisely suggesting her affected disgust at the thought of a marriage proposal from someone as patently her social inferior as the curate, and 'he shall *acknowledge* it too' carrying an undertone of ruthless determination. *Agnes Grey* is undoubtedly in many ways a deeply personal novel: interestingly, in a letter to W. S. Williams Charlotte Brontë described the work as 'the mirror of the mind of the

writer'.¹⁰ Anne Brontë's sense of personal identification with Agnes was clearly powerful: in this connection it is worth noting that in chapter XVII she quotes one of her most intensely personal poems, 'O, they have robbed me of the hope', as having been written by Agnes.¹¹

In writing *Agnes Grey* Anne Brontë was almost certainly aware of the widespread public concern about the welfare of governesses that had found expression in the periodical press and elsewhere during the previous few years.¹² Drawing on her own experiences, she seems consciously to have set out to describe as accurately as possible the almost unbearable pressures that the governess's life frequently involved—the isolation, the frustration, the insensitive and sometimes actively cruel treatment on the part of employers and their families. Clearly part of her purpose was to shock: one is reminded of her remark in the Preface to the 'second edition' of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, insisting on her 'scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration'. In this passage in chapter III Agnes describes her violent attempts to subdue the six-year-old Mary Ann Bloomfield:

Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulders, or pull her long hair, or put her in the corner,—for which she punished me with loud, shrill, piercing screams, that went through my head like a knife. She knew I hated this, and when she had shrieked her utmost, would look into my face with an air of vindictive satisfaction, exclaiming—

"Now then! *that's* for you!" (p. 28)

The description is extremely economical and vivid, the self-willed maliciousness of the spoilt little girl emphasized in the detail of her look of 'vindictive satisfaction', and her slightly sickening exclamation, 'Now then! *that's* for you!'. At the beginning of the following chapter Agnes, as narrator, remarks, 'I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein, however you may long for success, however you may labour to

¹⁰ *LL*, ii. 165.

¹¹ See note to p. 77, l. 15.

¹² See note to p. 10, ll. 17-26.

fulfil your duty, your efforts are baffled and set at naught by those beneath you, and unjustly censured and misjudged by those above' (p. 33).

Anne Brontë was obviously painfully conscious of the fact that in many middle-class households the governess was treated as little more than a servant—itsself an indication of the undervaluing of her educational role. After Agnes's disastrous experiences in the Bloomfield household, culminating in her dismissal, her mother (herself, significantly, a daughter of the landed gentry, disinherited because of her marriage to Richard Grey) declares, 'this time, you shall try your fortune in a somewhat higher family—in that of some genuine, thoroughbred gentleman, for such are far more likely to treat you with proper respect and consideration, than those purse-proud trades-people, and arrogant upstarts' (p. 52); having accepted her new post with the Murrays, Agnes hopes that Mr Murray 'was one of those genuine thoroughbred gentry my mother spoke of, who would treat his governess with due consideration as a respectable, well educated lady, the instructor and guide of his children, and not a mere upper servant' (p. 54). Her hopes are disappointed. Soon after her arrival at Horton Lodge she meets 'a well-dressed female' whom she addresses with some hesitation, 'as I was not quite sure whether it was one of the upper servants, or Mrs. Murray herself'; the woman turns out to be the lady's maid, who, 'with the air of one conferring an unusual favour', agrees 'to undertake the sending up of my things' (p. 57)—the lady's maid keenly conscious of her position within the household, and determined not to let Agnes forget it. The servants, 'seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children' (p. 69), treat Agnes with disdain. In chapter XIII Agnes describes at length her feelings when walking back from church with the Murray girls and their friends:

As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as

if they looked on vacancy—as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so.

It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, who knew her own place too well to walk beside such fine ladies and gentlemen as they were . . . though her young ladies might choose to have her with them, and even condescend to converse with her, when no better company were at hand (p. 106).

The account of Agnes's feelings is extraordinarily sensitive: behind her irritation at the rudeness of the Murray girls and their companions lies a deep, stubborn, uncompromising sense of self-respect. Agnes regards herself as 'pretty nearly as good as the best of them' in social terms—an interesting admission—and is extremely anxious that they should not 'imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic'. The final conditional clauses, 'though her young ladies . . .', are quite sharply ironic. 'Thus', Agnes goes on, '—I am almost ashamed to confess it—but indeed I gave myself no little trouble in my endeavours (if I did keep up with them) to appear perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence, as if I were wholly absorbed in my own reflections or the contemplation of surrounding objects' (p. 106). 'I am almost ashamed to confess it': Agnes seems to acknowledge that she may have gone too far, perhaps slightly demeaning herself in the process.

Throughout *Agnes Grey* Agnes's religious feelings are given special prominence: at the beginning of chapter XVI, for example, Agnes describes her troubled attempts to reconcile her feelings for Weston with her love of God, concluding that 'we do well to worship God in His works' (p. 134). It is not difficult to recognize something of the intensely introspective, conscientious religious sensibility that finds expression in Anne Brontë's poetry. Anne's strong 'evangelical' sympathies and her views on the practical role of the clergy are strikingly reflected in the deliberate contrast between Weston the curate and Hatfield the rector. In chapter X the very different preaching styles of

the two clergymen are described.¹³ Agnes tells us that when she heard the new curate she was 'decidedly pleased with the evangelical truth of his doctrine, as well as the earnest simplicity of his manner, and the clearness and force of his style' (pp. 80-1). Hatfield's extravagantly affected appearance and mannerisms are described with wry humour, Agnes commenting characteristically, 'it was sometimes hard to listen quietly throughout, without some slight demonstrations of disapproval or impatience' (p. 81). His 'favourite subjects', which are ironically listed at some length, include 'church discipline, rites and ceremonies, apostolical succession, the duty of reverence and obedience to the clergy' and 'the atrocious criminality of dissent'; significantly, he seems 'far better acquainted' with the Fathers than with 'the Apostles and Evangelists' (p. 81). Hatfield is recognizably a High Churchman of generally Ritualist-Tractarian sympathies. The contrast between the rector and the curate is further developed in the following chapter, in which the elderly cottager Nancy Brown describes to Agnes the visits she has received from both clergymen. Hatfield's reaction to Nancy's religious anxieties, which centre on the statement in the First Epistle of John, 'He that loveth not knoweth not God', is harshly contemptuous—'Oh it's all stuff! You've been among the Methodists, my good woman' (p. 89)—while Weston deals with them kindly and sympathetically, patiently explaining the Christian teaching of love, and, incidentally, quoting heavily from the New Testament, especially the First Epistle itself. There is no doubt that Anne Brontë intended to present Weston's practical, compassionate, strongly 'evangelical' version of Christianity as an ideal.

One of the most distinctive features of *Agnes Grey* is the sharp, often ironic observation of middle-class social behaviour and the suggestion of the values and attitudes that lie behind it. The mildly absurd aspects of social behaviour—the self-satisfaction, the vulgar affectation, the small-minded snobbery and social pretension—are vividly portrayed; but there is also a more disturbing insistence on the serious moral deficiencies,

¹³ See note to p. 80, l. 35-p. 81, l. 22.

almost a kind of moral vacuity, that manifest themselves all too clearly in everyday behaviour: one thinks of Charlotte Brontë's remark about the 'dark side of "respectable" human nature'. In the households of the Bloomfields and the Murrays Agnes is surprised and shocked by the coarseness of moral sensibility with which she is brought face to face; she experiences, in fact, a moral isolation that becomes increasingly oppressive and debilitating. The description in chapter VII of Agnes's first meeting with Mrs Murray, 'a handsome, dashing lady of forty, who certainly required neither rouge nor padding to add to her charms' (p. 59), is a good example of Anne Brontë's observation of social behaviour:

She just stepped into the school-room, on her return from ordering dinner in the housekeeper's room, bid me good morning, stood for two minutes by the fire, said a few words about the weather and the "rather rough" journey I must have had yesterday, petted her youngest child—a boy of ten, who had just been wiping his mouth and hands on her gown, after indulging in some savoury morsel from the housekeeper's stores—told me what a sweet, good boy he was, and then sailed out, with a self-complacent smile upon her face, thinking, no doubt, that she had done quite enough for the present, and had been delightfully condescending into the bargain. Her children evidently held the same opinion, and I alone thought otherwise. (pp. 59–60)

The tone of quietly disapproving irony, with the suggestion of barely suppressed impatience, is characteristic. The casualness and brevity of Mrs Murray's visit, and the chilly banality of her remarks to Agnes, point to her lack of personal interest in her new governess and her underlying contempt for the governess's role; her petting of her ten-year-old son, together with the sharply observed detail of him wiping his mouth and hands on her dress, suggest her excessively, indeed offensively, indulgent attitude towards her children. The reference to her 'self-complacent smile', and the irony of 'thinking, no doubt, that she had done quite enough for the present, and had been delightfully condescending into the bargain' (the briskly colloquial 'into the bargain' is pleasantly undercutting) confirm the impression of closed-minded self-satisfaction. Agnes's quietly

understated comment, 'I alone thought otherwise', hints at her dismay and disgust.

Agnes's own moral attitudes are quite uncompromising: in chapter IV, for example, discussing the eccentric Mrs Bloomfield senior, she remarks, 'I knew that in order to gain her cordial friendship, I had but to utter a word of flattery at each convenient opportunity; but this was against my principles' (p. 38); and similarly, in chapter VII, she describes Mrs Murray's advice on the need to 'rouse and cherish' Matilda's 'dormant vanity, and, by insinuating, skilful flattery, to win her attention to the desired objects—which I would not do' (p. 64)—the last clause carrying a note of characteristic firmness. 'I was', Agnes observes in the same chapter, referring to the Murray household, 'the only person in the house who steadily professed good principles, habitually spoke the truth, and generally endeavoured to make inclination bow to duty' (p. 62); and at the end of the chapter she gives a revealing account of herself as she imagines the Murray girls might see her, stressing her oddity—'Miss Grey was a queer creature'—and in particular the curious fact that 'she had her own opinions on every subject, and kept steadily to them—very tiresome opinions they often were, as she was always thinking of what was right and what was wrong, and had a strange reverence for matters connected with Religion, and an unaccountable liking to good people' (pp. 69, 70). The ironic adoption of the Murray girls' point of view produces an oddly strained effect, the tone coming over as slightly irritatingly self-righteous; but the insistence on Agnes's practical sense of moral principle and her 'strange reverence' for things religious is worth noting.

In her first post as governess Agnes reacts with surprise and distaste to the behaviour of the newly rich Bloomfields. At her first meeting with Mr Bloomfield, when he berates her for allowing his young children to get wet and dirty, she is surprised that he should, with vulgar pretentiousness, refer to them as Master and Miss Bloomfield, 'and still more so, that he should speak so uncivilly to me—their governess, and a perfect stranger to himself' (p. 22). Agnes is also shocked by the ill-tempered

rudeness of Bloomfield's remarks to his wife during their luncheon, in which, incongruously, he addresses her as 'Mrs. Bloomfield': 'I never felt so ashamed and uncomfortable in my life, for anything that was not my own fault' (p. 24). Living with the Bloomfields, Agnes feels painfully cut off from ordinary human kindness and affection: referring to Mrs Bloomfield senior, with whom, for a time, she is on reasonably friendly terms, she observes, 'Kindness, which had been the food of my life through so many years, had lately been so entirely denied me, that I welcomed with grateful joy the slightest semblance of it' (p. 36). The concern with kindness and family affection is apparent throughout the novel. At Horton Lodge Agnes's isolation becomes more desperate and potentially destructive. In an important passage towards the end of chapter XI she describes her increasing sense of intellectual stagnation: 'Never a new idea or a stirring thought came to me from without; and such as rose within me were, for the most part, miserably crushed at once, or doomed to sicken and fade away, because they could not see the light.' She goes on to reveal her fear that habitual association with the Murray girls might have a detrimental effect on her own moral character: 'And I, as I could not make my young companions better, feared exceedingly that they would make me worse—would gradually bring my feelings, habits, capacities to the level of their own'; already, indeed, a perceptible deterioration seemed to have set in: 'I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting, and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last, beneath the baleful influence of such a mode of life' (pp. 97–8). Agnes is terrified at what seems the real possibility of the gradual disintegration of her own moral identity; again there is the stress on the capacity for moral discrimination—'my distinctions of right and wrong'.

Anne Brontë's concern with the insidious corruption of moral feeling is most clearly apparent in the presentation of Rosalie Murray and her mother. Rosalie is undoubtedly the most

vividly realized and disturbing character in the novel: her vanity, affectation, and self-indulgence are accompanied by a moral irresponsibility that is profoundly dangerous. Rosalie's relationship with Agnes, though not without warmth, is constrained by her constant awareness of Agnes's social inferiority: 'on a further acquaintance,' Agnes remarks as narrator in chapter VII, 'she gradually laid aside her airs, and in time became as deeply attached to me as it was possible for *her* to be to one of my character and position; for she seldom lost sight, for above half-an-hour at a time, of the fact of my being a hireling, and a poor curate's daughter' (p. 61). Rosalie's speeches, frequently almost self-parodying in their affectation, have a kind of adolescent vitality of their own. In chapter IX she reacts with exaggerated prissiness to the supposedly coarse language of her younger sister Matilda: 'Miss Grey, I wish you *would* tell her not to use such shocking words; she *will* call her horse a mare; it is so *inconceivably* shocking!' (p. 75); equally characteristic is the self-conscious flippancy of her description of Weston in the same chapter: 'Oh *such* a beast! . . . I can give you his description in three words . . . an insensate, ugly, stupid blockhead. That's four, but no matter . . . enough of *him* now' (p. 77). Rosalie's ruthless manipulativenness becomes clear in her treatment of Hatfield; in chapter XIV, after describing with undisguised satisfaction her refusal of the rector's proposal of marriage, she expresses delight in the fact that now she will be able to allay her mother's anxieties about her flirtatious behaviour: 'Of course I shall tell mama: that is the very thing that pleases me so much. I shall now be able to convince her how mistaken she was in her fears about me' (p. 123)—an admission that reveals something of her relationship with her mother. At the end of the conversation, Agnes tells us, Rosalie leaves her, 'offended at my want of sympathy, and thinking, no doubt, that I envied her'; interestingly, she adds with self-questioning honesty, 'I did not—at least, I firmly believe I did not. I was sorry for her; I was amazed, disgusted at her heartless vanity' (pp. 124–5). Mrs Murray's treatment of Agnes displays a patronizing insensitivity that borders on deliberate cruelty. In

chapter XVIII, for example, she offers at length her own 'hints' on governessship, observing that many ladies 'would not trouble themselves to speak at all, but quietly look out for a substitute. That, of course, would be the *easiest* plan; but I know the advantages of a place like this to a person in your situation'; 'it was', Agnes reflects with quiet bitterness, 'my business to hear, and not to speak' (p. 153). In the same chapter, when Agnes has heard that her father is seriously ill, Mrs Murray remarks with breathtaking insensitivity, 'And instead of *repining*, Miss Grey, be thankful for the *privileges* you enjoy. There's many a poor clergyman whose family would be plunged into *ruin* by the event of his death; but *you*, you see, have influential friends ready to continue their patronage, and to show you every consideration' (p. 157)—the emphatic italics helping to convey the peremptory tone, and the reference to the 'influential friends' underlining the impenetrable self-satisfaction that goes with her insensitivity.

Mrs Murray's extreme mercenariness is reflected in the single-minded determination with which she pushes Rosalie's marriage with the dissolute Sir Thomas Ashby. In chapter XIV, complaining to Agnes about her mother's strong disapproval of her flirtation with Hatfield, Rosalie exclaims with affected outrage, 'Oh! it provokes me so—To think that I could be such a fool as to fall in *love*! It is quite beneath the dignity of a woman to do such a thing. Love! I detest the word! as applied to one of our sex, I think it a perfect insult!' (p. 116). Rosalie protests a little too much; ironically, she goes on immediately afterwards to reveal the extent to which she is trapped by her mother's determination to bring about the financially and socially advantageous marriage with Ashby—a degradation indeed. In reply to Agnes's disbelieving question, she confirms that her mother is fully aware of Ashby's dissoluteness, but still wishes the marriage to go ahead: 'To be sure she does! She knows more against him than I do, I believe: she keeps it from me lest I should be discouraged; not knowing how little I care about such things. For it's no great matter really: he'll be all right when he's married, as mama says; and reformed rakes make the best