

12-2015

# Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp's Progeny: Mapping the Governess in Victorian Literature

Amanda M. Lagoe

*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Lagoe, Amanda M., "Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp's Progeny: Mapping the Governess in Victorian Literature" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1332.

<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1332>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact [cclouser@iup.edu](mailto:cclouser@iup.edu), [sara.parme@iup.edu](mailto:sara.parme@iup.edu).

STUDENT HAS RESTRICTED ACCESS TO FULL TEXT OF THE DISSERTATION.

ONLY COVER PAGES AND ABSTRACT ARE AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME

JANE EYRE AND BECKY SHARP'S PROGENY:  
MAPPING THE GOVERNESS IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Amanda M. Lagoe

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2015

© 2015 Amanda M. Lagoe

All Rights Reserved

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Amanda M. Lagoe

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

---

---

Christopher Orchard, D.Phil.  
Professor of English, Advisor

---

---

Michael T. Williamson, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

---

---

Todd Thompson, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

---

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research

---

Title: *Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp's Progeny: Mapping the Governess in Victorian Literature*

Author: Amanda M. Lagoe

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Christopher Orchard

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Michael T. Williamson  
Dr. Todd Thomsson

Criticism on the role of the Victorian governess is not new, but much of the critical coverage has been confined to the historical and cultural context of the figure and her presence in fiction. And critical studies that *have* examined the role of the governess have been restricted only to well-known novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey*. However, there has not been a discussion about how the fictional governess has evolved or a discussion of the deviations between governess novels. This dissertation will bring together those discussions to trace the evolution of the governess in Victorian fiction.

I will argue that 1847-1848 was a paramount time for the fictional governess due to the publication of three notable texts featuring a governess that deviated significantly from her literary antecedents: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's "Some Account of the Latter Days of the Honorable Richard Marston of Dunoran" (1848). Of these texts, two would go on to create new and lasting models that would be used well into the twentieth century: *Jane Eyre* of *Jane Eyre* and Becky Sharp of *Vanity Fair*. This study will examine the progression of future governesses by locating both well-known and forgotten governess novels along the *Jane Eyre* and *Becky Sharp* trajectories.

I will also examine the presence of the governess in these texts in relation to how anxieties over her gender and social class are manifested in these novels. If we look at the

progression of the governess figure, it becomes clear that she has become the embodiment of her employer's fears about their own precarious social status and the threat she poses to the roles of the women who already reside in the house.

These twin anxieties of class and gender will be theorized by utilizing a materialist-feminist critical position as outlined by Judith Newton and applying this approach in the vein of Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey, both of whom examine the influence of gender relations upon the discourse used by middle-class, British men and women to determine class relations.