Appendix 3.2: from *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools* (1797)

ED wrote this plan for the boarding school he set up to be run by his daughters, Susanna Parker (1772–1856) and Mary Parker (1774–1859). Their mother was Mary Parker (1753–1820), whom ED had hired to look after his son Robert after the death of Robert's mother, ED's first wife Mary "Polly" Howard (1740–1770). In 1793, ED bought a house and grounds at Ashbourne for the school (and later left the property to Susanna and Mary in his will). The school opened in 1794. Susanna taught there until her marriage in 1809, and Mary until the late 1820s.

Selections are copied from *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools.* Derby: Printed by J. Drewry for J. Johnson, 1797.

[Title page, epigraph]

> Delightful task! to watch with curious eyes
> Soft forms of Thought in infant bosoms rise,
> Plant with nice hand Reflection's tender root,
> And teach the young Ideas how to shoot![1]

from Section I. The Female Character

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The advantages of a good education consist in uniting health and agility of body with chearfulness and activity of mind; in superadding graceful movements to the former, and agreeable tastes to the latter; and in the acquirement of the rudiments of such arts and sciences, as may amuse ourselves, or gain us the esteem of others; with a strict attention to the culture of morality and religion.

The female character should possess the mild and retiring virtues rather than the bold and dazzling ones; great eminence in almost any thing is sometimes injurious to a young lady; whose temper and disposition should appear to be pliant rather than robust; to be ready to take impressions rather than to be decidedly mark'd; as great apparent strength of character, however excellent, is liable to alarm both her own and the other sex; and to create admiration rather than affection.

There are however situations in single life; in which, after the completion of their school-education, ladies may cultivate to

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any extent the fine arts or the sciences for their amusement or instruction. And there are situations in a married state; which may call forth all the energies of the mind in the care, education, or provision, for a family; which the inactivity, folly, or death of a husband may render necessary. Hence if to softness of manners, complacency of countenance, gentle unhurried motion, with a voice clear and yet tender, the charms which enchant all hearts! can be superadded internal strength and activity of mind, capable to transact the business or combat the evils of life; with a due sense of moral and religious obligation; all is obtain'd, which education can supply; the female character becomes compleat, excites our love, and commands our admiration.

Education should draw the outline, and teach the use of the pencil; but the exertions of the individual must afterwards introduce the various gradations of shade and colour, must illuminate the landscape, and fill it with the beautiful figures of the Graces and the Virtues.

from Section XIII. The Heathen Mythology

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IS connected with the study of taste, and should therefore be taught in boarding schools; as without some knowledge of it the works of the painters, statuarists, and poets, both antient and modern, can not be understood. But as a great part of this mythology consists of personify'd vices, much care should be taken in female schools, as well as in male ones, to prevent any bad impressions, which might be made on the mind by this kind

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of erudition; this is to be accomplished by explaining the allegorical meaning of many of these supposed actions of heathen deities, and by shewing that they are at present used only as emblems of certain powers, as Minerva of wisdom, and Bellona of war, and thus constitute the language of painters; and are indeed almost the whole language which that art possesses, besides the delineation of visible objects in rest or action.

These emblems however are not to be so easily acquired by descriptions alone, nor so easily remembered by young pupils; as when prints of antique statues, or medallions, or when cameos, or impressions of antique gems, are at the same time shewn and explained to them.

from Section XIV. Polite Literature

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There are many, who condemn the use of novels altogether; but what are epic poems but novels in verse?—It is difficult to draw the line of limit between novels, and other works of imagination; unless the word novel be confined to mean only the romances of love and chivalry.

It is true indeed, that almost all novels, as well as plays, and epic poems, have some exceptional passages to be found in them; which might therefore be expunged, before they are allow'd to be read by young ladies. But are young women therefore to be kept in intire ignorance of mankind, with whom they must shortly associate, and from whom they are frequently to chuse a partner for life? This would be making them the slaves rather than the companions of men, like the Sultanas of a Turkish Seraglio.[2] And how can young women, who are secluded from the other sex from their infancy, form any judgment of men, if they are not to be assisted by such books, as delineate manners?—A lady of fortune, who was persuaded by her guardian to marry a disagreeable and selfish man, speaking to her friend of the ill humour of her husband, lamented, that she had been prohibited from reading novels. "If I had read such books, said she, before I was married, I should have chosen better; I was told, that all men were alike except in respect to fortune."

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If these [objectionable] passages, from which so few books are totally exempt, were expunged, it might raise curiosity, and induce young people to examine different copies of the same work, and to seek for other

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improper books themselves; it is therefore perhaps better, when these books are read to a governess, that she should express disapprobation in a plain and quiet way of such passages, rather than to expunge them; which would give a feeling of dislike to the pupil, and confirm her delicacy, rather than give impurity to her ideas.

Much therefore depends on the conduct of the governess in this respect, so long as they are under the eye of a judicious monitor, no real harm could probably arise from their seeing human nature in all the classes of life, not only as it should be, or as it may be imagined to be, but as it really exists, since without comparison there can be no judgment, and consequently no real knowledge.

It must nevertheless be observed, that the excessive study of novels is universally an ill employment at any time of life; not only because such readers are liable to acquire a romantic taste; and to return from the flowery scenes of fiction to the common duties of life with a degree of regret; but because the high-wrought scenes of elegant distress display'd in novels have been found to blunt the feelings of such readers toward real objects of misery; which awaken only disgust in their minds instead of sentiments of pity or benevolence.

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The works of the poets, as well as those of the writers of novels, require to be selected with great caution. The same may be said of painting, sculpture, and musick; which by delighting the imagination influence the judgment, and may thence be employ'd either to good or bad purposes: But as poetry, when thus selected, like painting, sculpture, and music, it's rival sisters,

is an object of refined taste, and affords an elegant amusement at least, it so far belongs to the education of young ladies.

Gay's fables,[3] Thomson's seasons,[4] Gisborne's walk in a forest,[5] are proper for the younger classes of pupils; afterwards Pope's Ethic epistles, and essay on man,[6] Goldsmith's poems,[7] Akinside,[8] Mason,[9] Gray,[10] and others, which are enumerated in the catalogue.[11] I forbear to mention the Botanic garden; as some ladies have intimated to me, that the Loves of the plants are described in too glowing colours; but as the descriptions are in general of female forms in graceful attitudes, the objection is less forceable in respect to female readers. And besides the celebrated poets of our own country, as Milton and Shakespear, translations from the antients, as from Homer and Virgil; and from the more modern poems of Tasso,[12] and Camoens,[13] may be read with pleasure and improvement, tho' some objectionable passages may perhaps be found in all of them.

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[…] it is perhaps better to teach young people select parts of many books, than a few intire ones; not only because the pupils will thus be acquainted with more authors in fashionable literature; but because the business of polite education is to give the outline of many species of erudition, or branches of knowledge; which the young ladies may cultivate further at their future leisure without the assistance of a teacher, as may best suit their tastes or their situations.

I cannot conclude this section on polite learning without mentioning, that some illiterate men have condemned the cultivation of the minds of the female sex, and have call'd such in ridicule

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learned ladies; as if it was a reproach to render themselves agreeable and useful. Where affectation is join'd with learning, it becomes pedantry, but this belongs oftener to the ignorant than to the cultivated; as is so well elucidated in "Letters to literary ladies," a small duodecimo published by Johnson, and written by one of the ingenious family of E—— in Ireland.[14]

from Section XV. Arts and Sciences

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BESIDES the acquisition of grammar, languages, and common arithmetic; and besides a knowledge of geography, civil history, and natural history, there are other sciences, an outline of which might be taught to young ladies of the higher classes of the school, or of more inquiring minds, before or after they leave school; which might not only afford them present amusement, but might enable them at any future time to prosecute any of them further, if inclination and opportunity should coincide; and, by enlarging their sphere of taste and knowledge, would occasion them to be interested in the conversation of a greater

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number and of more ingenious men, and to interest them by their own conversation in return.

1. An outline of Botany may be learnt from Lee's introduction to botany,[15] and from the translations of the works of Linnæus by a society at Lichfield;[16] to which might be added Curtis's botanical magazine,[17] which is a beautiful work, and of no great expence. But there is a new treatise introductory to botany call'd Botanic dialogues for the use of schools, well adapted to this purpose, written by M. E. Jacson, a lady well skill'd in botany, and published by Johnson, London.[18] And lastly I shall not forbear to mention, that the philosophical part of botany may be agreeably learnt from the notes to the second volume of the Botanic garden, whether the poetry be read or not.

2. An outline of Chemistry, which surprizes and enchants us, may be learnt from the Elements of chemistry by Lavoisier,[19] originally published in french; to which may be added a small work of Fourcroy call'd the philosophy of Chemistry.[20] The former of these illustrious chemists perish'd by the guillotine, an irreparable loss to science and to mankind!

The acquirement of Chemistry should be preceded by a sketch

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of Mineralogy; which is not only an interesting branch of science, as it teaches the knowledge of diamonds and precious stones, and of the various mines of metals, coals, and salt; but because it explains also the difference of soils, and is thus concern'd in the theory and practice of agriculture: But there is at present no proper introductory book, that I know of, on this subject for the use of children; as Cronstedt's,[21] and Bergman's,[22] and Kirwan's[23] mineralogy are too exact and prolix; nor could be well understood without a small collection of fossils.

3. An outline of the sciences, to which Mathematics have generally been applied, as of astronomy, mechanics, hydrostatics, and optics, with the curious addition of electricity and magnetism, may best be acquired by attending the lectures in experimental philosophy, which are occasionally exhibited by itinerant philosophers; and which have almost exclusively acquired the name of natural philosophy.

The books in common use for teaching these sciences are too difficult and abstruse for the study of young persons. Some parts of natural phylosophy are render'd not unentertaining in the notes of the first volume of the Botanic garden,[24] as the theory of meteors, and of winds; and an account of the strata of the earth;

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which nevertheless require too much attention for very young ladies; but may be read with pleasure after leaving school by those, who possess inquiring minds. It is to be wished that some writer of juvenile books would endeavour easily to explain the structure and use of the

barometer, and thermometer, and of clocks and watches, which supply a part of the furniture of our houses, and of our pockets.

4. In the same manner the various arts and manufactories, which adorn and enrich this country, should occasionally be shewn and explain'd to young persons, as so many ingenious parts of experimental philosophy; as well as from their immediately contributing to the convenience of life, and to the wealth of the nations, which have invented or established them. Of these are the cotton works on the river Derwent in Derbyshire; the potteries in Staffordshire; the iron-founderies of Coalbrooke Dale in Shropshire; the manufactories of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham; but these are not in the province of a boarding school, but might be advantageously exhibited to young ladies by their parents in the summer vacations.

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7. This section on arts and sciences may perhaps be thought to include more branches of them, than is necessary for female erudition. But as in male education the tedious acquirement of

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antient languages for the purpose of studying poetry and oratory is gradually giving way to the more useful cultivation of modern sciences, it may be of advantage to ladies of the rising generation to acquire an outline of similar knowledge; as they are in future life to become companions; and one of the greatest pleasures received in conversation consists in being reciprocally well understood. Botany is already a fashionable study for ladies; and chemistry is ingeniously recommended to them in the Letters to literary ladies.—Johnson, London.

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[1] These lines adapt a passage from James Thomson (1700–1748), *The Seasons*, first published 1726–1730, revised 1744.

> By degrees,
> The human Blossom blows; and every Day,
> Soft as it rolls along, shews some new Charm,
> The Father's Lustre, and the Mother's Bloom.
> The infant Reason grows apace, and calls
> For the kind Hand of an assiduous Care.
> Delightful Task! to rear the tender Thought,
> To teach the young Idea how to shoot,
> To pour the fresh Instruction o'er the Mind,
> To breathe th' enlivening Spirit, and to fix
> The generous Purpose in the glowing Breast. (*Spring*, lines. 1146–156)

[2] Harem; the area reserved for the women of a Muslim palace.

[3] John Gay (1685–1732), *Fables*, first published 1727.

[4] James Thomson (1700–1748), *The Seasons*, first published 1726–1730, revised 1744.

[5] Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846), *Walks in a Forest* (1794).

[6] Alexander Pope (1688–1744), *Epistles to Several Persons* (1731–1735), also known as *Four Ethic Epistles* or *Moral Essays in Four Epistles*; *An Essay on Man* (1733–1734).

[7] Oliver Goldsmith (1728?–1774), whose poems include *The Deserted Village* (1770).

[8] Mark Akenside (1721–1770), poet and physician, best known for *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744).

[9] William Mason (1725–1797), best known for *The English Garden* (1772–1781).
[10] Thomas Gray (1716–1771), whose poems include *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751), *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat* (1748), and *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* (1747).
[11] Darwin includes a "Catalogue of Books" at the end of *Female Education*. The books are arranged under several topic headings, and Darwin confesses that most of them "were recommended to me by ladies, whose opinions I had reason to regard, and not from my own attentive perusal of them; which has been prevented by my other necessary occupations. Such of them therefore, as are less generally known, a parent or governess will please to read, before they put them into the hands of their children" (pp. 118–19).
[12] Torquato Tasso (1544–1595), Italian author, known for his epic *Gerusalemme liberata* [Jerusalem Delivered], first published 1580, rewritten as *Gerusalemme conquistata* [Jerusalem Conquered], 1593.
[13] Luis de Camões (ca. 1524–1580), Portuguese author, known for his epic *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads] (1572).
[14] Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849, daughter of ED's close friend Richard Lovell Edgeworth), *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795).
[15] James Lee (1715–1795), *Introduction to Botany* (1760), a translation of Linnaeus's *Philosophia Botanica* (1751).
[16] The translations of Linnaeus's works are ED's own, as part of the Botanical Society of Lichfield: *A System of Vegetables* (1783) and *The Families of Plants* (1787). See *LOTP* Preface pp. vii–viii, editor's notes.
[17] William Curtis (1746–1799) founded the *Botanical Magazine* in 1781. In the "Catalogue of Books," ED does not specify an issue, but describes "Curtis's Botanical Magazine, with colour'd prints; many volumes of which are already publish'd, and which continues to be now publish'd at one shilling a number, 1797" (p. 125).
[18] Maria Elizabetha Jacson (1755–1829), *Botanical Dialogues, between Hortensia and her Four Children, Charles, Harriet, Juliette and Henry. Designed for the Use of Schools* (1797), published anonymously ("By a Lady").
[19] Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794), *Traité Élementaire de Chimie* (1789). Translated from the French as *Elements of Chemistry* (1790) by Robert Kerr (1757–1813).
[20] Antoine François de Fourcroy (1755–1809), *Philosophie chimique: Vérités fondamentales de la chimie moderne, disposées dans un nouvel ordre* (1792). Translated from the French as *The Philosophy of Chemistry, or Fundamental Truths of Modern Chemical Science, Arranged in a New Order* (1795).
[21] Axel Fredrik Cronstedt (1722–1765), *Försök till Mineralogie, Eller Mineral-Rikets Upställning* (1758). Translated from the Swedish as *An Essay towards a System of Mineralogy* (1770) by Gustav von Engestrom.
[22] Torbern Bergman (1735–1784), *Sciagraphia Regni Mineralis* (1782) Translated from the Latin as *Outlines of Mineralogy* (1783) by ED's fellow Lunar Society member, William Withering (1741–1799).
[23] Richard Kirwan (1733–1812), *Elements of Mineralogy* (1784).
[24] *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791): on meteors, I:115n and Additional Note I.—Meteors; on winds, Additional Note XXXIII.—Winds; and several notes to do with the strata of the earth and related topics, including II:35n and Additional Note XVI.—Calcareous Earth.