

FEMALE ROLES AND MORAL EDUCATION
IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S
WORKS

by

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In dedication to God, who has blessed me so much, and my loving parents who have been there and encouraged me throughout my life.

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ABSTRACT

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) devoted her life to educating her readers, children as well as adults, in a variety of genres—educational treatises, moral tales, novels, and children’s stories to name a few. Edgeworth’s career-long devotion to reforming the educational system of her time was a way for her to further her desire to improve women’s status in society. Edgeworth’s skillful techniques of changing, correcting, and questioning gender stereotypes from within the patriarchal system made her appear to her contemporaries as a dedicated educational reformist without an interest in larger political concerns, even as an outright conservative, but as this thesis shows, many of Edgeworth’s ideas on education are virtually indistinguishable from those advanced by eighteenth-century women writers often categorized as political radicals.

In order to develop this argument, this thesis engages Edgeworth’s major novel *Belinda* (1801) as well as several of her other novels and writings with the work of other women writers interested in similar concerns: Sarah Scott, Frances Burney, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The chapter on Scott is interested in teasing out the utopian dimensions of Edgeworth’s perspective on women’s education by comparing Scott’s utopian novel *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) to Edgeworth’s moral tale *Belinda*. The chapter on Burney considers both the strong literary influence of Frances Burney’s novel *Evelina* (1778) on *Belinda* and Edgeworth’s revisions and deliberate departures from *Evelina* in order to establish Edgeworth’s views on women’s social roles. Finally, the chapter on Wollstonecraft contextualizes Edgeworth within the 1790s debate concerning women’s

education and places her views in close relationship with those of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

MARIA EDGEWORTH IN CONTEXT

Writer of many educational books, children stories, and moral tales, Maria Edgeworth (1768?-1849), daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth and contemporary of Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft, was born into and actively participated in a society obsessed with the education of young people. Her father and several of his friends, including Dr. Erasmus Darwin and reformer of pedagogical practices Thomas Day, were members of the Lunar Society, established in 1765 and made up of intellectuals that met to share and experiment with new ideas. In *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young*, Mary Hilton claims that “women and children formed a vital part of the scientific Lunar circle, helping to develop its culture of education, observation, invention, literary and philosophical critique” (119). Edgeworth was influenced and affected by the intellectual culture around her, using much of what she learned and experienced from her father and his associates as material for her literary works. Thomas Day’s failed attempt at raising an ideal wife, for instance, appears in *Belinda* (1801), while Edgeworth’s time spent with her father at his Irish estate provides the setting for *Castle Rackrent* (1800).¹

1. In this thesis, I use the second edition of *Belinda* published in 1802, which was referred to as the “Corrected and Improved” edition. Edgeworth fixed many of her grammatical errors and minor mistakes that had appeared in the first edition of *Belinda* in 1801, but she did not make any radical changes until her third edition of *Belinda* in 1810,

As the eldest daughter, Edgeworth helped to raise and teach her younger siblings, an experience inspiring her to co-author with her father *Practical Education* (1798), which examines how to educate children. In the book's preface, Richard and Maria Edgeworth explain their methodology: "we have chosen the title of Practical Education, to point out that we rely entirely upon practice and experience" (5). That Edgeworth wrote the majority of *Practical Education* herself shows her early dedication to educating her readers (*Practical Education* 7). Edgeworth's concern for pedagogical practices continues into her writing for adults, appearing especially in *Belinda*, which she notably refers to as a "Moral Tale" rather than a novel ("Advertisement" 3). Edgeworth advocates in *Belinda* the importance of educating women to use their reason to guide their hearts rather than the other way around. Consequently, the "tale" is concerned with making moral choices. This thesis will provide a close examination of *Belinda* and several of her other literary works, such as *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) and *Helen* (1834), and reveal the ways in which Edgeworth participates in an intellectual culture of women writers on moral education.

Edgeworth's desire to develop and promote a theory of moral education that would benefit both adults and children started early in her life, and the influence that her father and those who influenced him had upon her should not go without discussion. Richard Edgeworth and his best friend Thomas Day were strongly influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). In fact, Day and Richard tried to practice Rousseau's

which eliminates all references to *Belinda* and Mr. Vincent's engagement and, notably, does not allow Juba, who is of African ethnicity, to marry Lucy, an English woman.

teachings with Day taking two girls and raising them in isolation (with the intention that one of them would become his ideal wife like Rousseau's Sophia) and Richard deciding to raise his first son, who was also named Richard, according to Rousseau's educational standards set forth in *Emile*. Even though his attempt failed, Day never stopped believing in Rousseau's teachings. However, Richard (due to the poor outcome of his son) decided not to raise his other children according to Rousseau's principles; thus, Maria Edgeworth was raised differently from her eldest brother, but she was still influenced greatly by Rousseau through her father and Day. Once Richard realized that his attempt to raise his son according to Rousseau's *Emile* had failed, he began to look for a better and more practical way to raise his other children, thus saving Edgeworth from being indoctrinated by Rousseau's teachings. Mary Jackson points out in her section on "English Rousseauists" that Richard "never openly refuted Rousseau's system, but he did not let Day dissuade him from educating Maria well, and he never forgot the bitter lesson of his eldest son's miseducation" (161). Jackson continues to discuss how Richard departed from Rousseau in several ways, stating "far from being banished, judiciously chosen books might actually replace human society; contrary to both Locke and Rousseau, discipline should associate pain with undesirable habits" (161). Hence, Edgeworth was raised much differently from Rousseau's teachings. In fact, in *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*, Marilyn Butler states, "[T]he breakdown of the experiment with Richard [the son], and [Richard] Edgeworth's growing preference for Lunar practicality, had turned his attention to an entirely different educational approach [from Rousseau]" (59). Butler goes on to explain that Richard "gave up Rousseau because he [Richard]

was powerfully under the influence of Lunar pragmatism—which meant that he did not want to waste time on a system which seemed to have little practical relevance, if indeed it was workable at all” (60). This idea of establishing a *practical* kind of education is what motivated Richard and Edgeworth to write *Practical Education*, which was published in 1798 (Maria and Richard Edgeworth 5-7).

Edgeworth’s wariness toward Rousseau’s educational theory permeates many of her works besides that of *Practical Education*. In *Belinda*, Edgeworth bases her character Virginia on Day’s failed Rousseauian experiment of raising the perfect wife in isolation. Edgeworth depicts how Virginia (who is sheltered from society like Day’s experiment), due to her poor education, unknowingly threatens the happiness of almost everyone in the novel, including herself. Virginia seems a rather pitiful character who does not even know the value of a diamond over a rose (*Belinda* 371-72). Hence, Edgeworth purposefully faults Virginia’s upbringing as the reason for her lack of knowledge and naiveté. Interestingly, in “My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority,” Mitzi Myers states, “In rewriting Rousseau’s, Saint-Pierre’s, and Day’s patriarchal narratives from a woman’s perspective, Maria Edgeworth undoes the commodification and objectification of Day’s two foundling pupils and gives her fictional girl a voice denied her prototypes” (117). Thus, Edgeworth chooses to play with Rousseau’s philosophy and Day’s practice of it in order to show its serious and pernicious flaws, namely that isolation and naiveté are not equivalents (or even proper substitutes) for good sense and understanding.

As Richard's best friend, Day had a strong influence on Edgeworth, and it was his belief that women should not be published which kept Edgeworth from publishing her writings while Day was alive since, as Butler suggests, a woman as a published author "did not coincide with his [Day's] ideal of feminine simplicity" (149). Of course, this belief in the importance of "feminine simplicity" can be traced back to Rousseau's *Emile* where he sets forth how "[t]he first and most important quality of a woman is gentleness" and that she should dress *simply* in order to let her natural beauty show (370-73). In addition, Rousseau explains that a woman should always defer to a man's reason on religion (and basically everything else for that matter) since women are less complex as well as less capable of reason than men (377-82). Thus, according to Rousseau, women are to be much simpler than men, which will add to their feminine charms. However, Butler points out:

[Richard] Edgeworth had never agreed with Day's views about the role of women, nor did he accept that women should not be authors, but he was too fond of Day to pursue a plan which aroused his violent disapproval. For the rest of Day's lifetime, therefore, he gave up his intention of turning Maria into an authoress. (149)

It is important to note that Day as a devout Rousseauist is the one who stops Edgeworth from being published earlier in her career. However, after Day's death, Edgeworth was free to publish her writing and chose to write for both children as well as adults.

In her fiction and nonfiction for adults, Edgeworth focuses most of her writing on informing her readers about the importance of properly educating both boys and girls. As

for her stories for children, Edgeworth offers her readers the chance to enjoy reading but still to learn a moral as well. Since her childhood background was filled with and centered upon education, it is not surprising that Edgeworth creates and emphasizes her view of the proper education for children. In fact, her choice to write stories for children seems to be a direct challenge to Rousseau's principles since, as Jackson points out, Rousseau's "first dictum was 'no books' for Emile till he was twelve" (153). Hence, Edgeworth's literary career was not only opposed by Day, a devout Rousseauist, but a lot of her writing was aimed at an audience that Rousseau himself would not have approved. Furthermore, in her book *Rousseau on the Education of Women* (1981), Helen Evans Misenheimer states, "The sole destiny that Rousseau accords to woman is that of wife and mother. Beyond the family, his theories include no place for her in society" (51). However, Edgeworth never married nor was she a mother (although she did help raise her siblings). Nevertheless, Edgeworth declined her one proposal of marriage from Abraham Niclas Clewberg-Edelcrantz (Butler 192-93). Hence, she chose to not have a life as a wife or mother but rather as a daughter, friend, sister, and more importantly as an author. Thus, not only was Edgeworth's literary career in direct opposition to Rousseau's principles, but she also refused to fit into Rousseau's mold of the ideal woman. Nevertheless, Edgeworth still benefited from her awareness of the educational principles of Rousseau and devoted many of her own works to correcting the misconceptions of those principles in order to provide her readers with the more practical pedagogy of educating both boys and girls to rely upon their intellects rather than their emotions.

Knowing the context in which Edgeworth was raised and began writing her literary works helps readers to better understand the reason behind Edgeworth's apparent obsession with education, which permeates her writing. In fact, much of Edgeworth's vision of her ideal education has a utopian dimension to it. The first chapter of this thesis investigates the many similarities between Sarah Scott's feminist utopian novel *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) and Edgeworth's novel of manners *Belinda*. Although there is a forty-year difference between the two, it is beneficial to note the many similarities that exist and how Edgeworth is picking up on an important trend that began much earlier: the belief that education could make the difference between a woman's happiness and unhappiness. Specifically, this chapter deals with the depictions of moral education in both texts and the theory that both authors are supporting, namely that a proper moral education for women (one that focuses upon intellectual accomplishments, reason, and moral values) will allow them to be better capable of dealing with or even escaping from a male-dominated world. Furthermore, this chapter considers the utopian aspects of arguing for women's education to be based upon reason and moral principles. By comparing the Bluestocking feminist Scott with Edgeworth, readers should begin to see the embedded feminism of Edgeworth and how education became the key to unlocking many freedoms and opportunities for women. In addition, this chapter will examine both the positive and negative depictions of men and women characters in Scott's and Edgeworth's texts, which will reveal the numerous threats and dangerous situations that many women during the eighteenth century were forced to face. More importantly, this examination will also show the difference a proper moral

education can make on whether women eventually overcome the male-dominated society they live in or become its victims.

The second chapter examines the influence of Frances Burney (1752-1840) on Edgeworth. Specifically, this chapter examines Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and Edgeworth's *Belinda*, noting where they are similar but, more importantly, where they are different. Edgeworth's decision to revise and change both the plot and characters of Burney's *Evelina* more than likely did not revolve around a desire to be original and write a best seller. Instead, Edgeworth's deliberate alterations allowed her to create and share her model of a proper moral education with her readers. Edgeworth demonstrates how a woman, such as the character Lady Delacour, could reform to be a better mother, wife, and friend; in addition, Edgeworth provides *Belinda* as the model of the proper young lady, who chooses sense over sensibility as a guide throughout life. Edgeworth offers *Belinda* as an example to be imitated by her readers, while Burney's *Evelina* is at the mercy of circumstances as to whether she will be happy or not, which does not offer her readers the idea that by imitating *Evelina* they will necessarily be successful. Edgeworth also depicts the Percivals as the utopian ideal of family (husband and wife working together to make a happy home). Furthermore, Edgeworth considers proper education and conduct as necessary for men as well. Clarence Hervey is only worthy of *Belinda* once he begins using his intellectual talents to help others and begins to choose a better moral community than his "friend" Sir Philip Baddely. Hence, Edgeworth offers her vision of the qualities both women and men should work to acquire. Burney's view is much more pessimistic with happy endings being more happy coincidences than

rewards for proper conduct. After all, *Evelina* is much more emotional and flawed than Edgeworth's *Belinda*. This chapter will also examine why Edgeworth's *Belinda* contains a much more optimistic picture of a young lady's world than Burney's *Evelina*. After finishing this chapter, readers should appreciate and recognize Edgeworth's revisionist tendencies as her way of revising and improving society at large.

The third chapter contextualizes Edgeworth with her female contemporaries, especially Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) had a major influence upon how writers, including Edgeworth, began to view and discuss "women's rights." This chapter examines the surprising similarities between Wollstonecraft's and Edgeworth's theories on women's education. Edgeworth's earlier and later works—such as *Practical Education*, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, *Belinda*, and *Helen*—are analyzed and shown to share many of the same views as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Strength of mind, reason, and an enlarged understanding become vital qualities for a successful and happy woman according to both Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth. This chapter also explains why Edgeworth may have seemed to criticize Wollstonecraft but in actuality supported many of the same ideas. After reading this chapter, readers should appreciate the many complexities involved in being a woman writer during this time period and have a better understanding of Edgeworth's embedded feminism and her vision of the ideal education for women, which would allow women to have the opportunities and freedom to make their own decisions and the independence to choose whether they married or remained single.

Though often considered a conservative writer, this thesis attempts to show Edgeworth as a revisionist, reformer, and educator who not only held feminist views but included them in her own writing. Edgeworth devoted her life to educating her readers and supporting the idea that education based on reason would allow women the chance to have the independence to live their own lives without being as reliant upon men. However, Edgeworth did not desire for her or her views to be criticized and rejected for being too “radical,” so she worked within the boundaries of what was considered “acceptable” during that time, but this did not stop her from including her feminist ideas in her writing and masking these views as “revisions” or “moral tales” or whatever would put them out there so that they would be listened to rather than shunned. Edgeworth is often underestimated and her work undervalued, but if given close attention, her ideas have a modern twist and her work a message that only needs to be read closely in order to be truly appreciated.

CHAPTER II

MARIA EDGEWORTH AND SARAH SCOTT:

EDUCATION AND UTOPIA

Though Sarah Scott published her novel *A Description of Millenium Hall* in 1762, which was several years before Maria Edgeworth (1768?-1849) was even born and almost forty years before Edgeworth's novel *Belinda* was published (1801), the similarities between both texts deserve special attention, specifically focusing on how both writers undermine traditional concepts of femininity and reform women's education by emphasizing the importance of a moral education that is based on intellectual accomplishments (such as reading) rather than superficial accomplishments (like dancing). Not only does Scott offer women a haven from the persecution of a male-dominated society in her utopia *Millenium Hall*, she also constructs an improved curriculum of education for women, placing more emphasis on their moral, intellectual accomplishments than their outer accomplishments (such as dressing stylishly). Likewise, in *Belinda*, Edgeworth emphasizes the necessity of educating women and encouraging them to be moral, reasonable individuals who use their intellect in order to find a place in society where they can be safe from being victimized by men. Scott was one of the first women writers who presented the problems women frequently faced and the potential solutions to those problems in a utopian context. Looking at Scott's and Edgeworth's depictions of the ideal education for women will help place Edgeworth in the larger context of women writers who were not only concerned with contemporary pedagogical practices but also viewed education as the means to providing women with a

better chance to be acknowledged as the intellectual equals to men. By examining Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Edgeworth's *Belinda*, this chapter argues that both writers view moral education as the key to opening the door of freedom for women and giving women the opportunity to reach their full potential or at least offering them a way to evade the male-dominated society in which they live by using their intellectual accomplishments and moral values.

Known as a "Bluestocking feminist," Scott offers women in *Millenium Hall* a utopian community that allows them to live happily and to be safe from the persecution of men. As Gary Kelly states, "Sarah Scott's novel [. . .] was the fullest literary expression of the first wave of 'bluestocking' feminism" (11). Kelly explains that "bluestocking feminism developed from the convergence of class and gender issues and interests within a particular coalition of the progressive gentry and the professional middle class" and was concerned with "gender issues and women's oppression from the viewpoint of that coalition, but it did so as a feminization of gentry capitalism that also addressed the interests of men of those classes" (11). Hence, it should not be surprising that Scott devotes the majority of her novel to freeing women from being victims of male domination and establishing an alternative feminist society where women can find safety and happiness. In fact, in "Biographical Sketches of Principal Bluestocking Women," Anna Miegou includes Scott and her utopian novel in her list of important Bluestocking women, stating that *Millenium Hall* is "a manifesto of Bluestocking feminism incorporating an idealized and feminist model of gentry capitalism and a critique of courtly culture" (33). Thus, as an embodiment of Bluestocking ideals, Scott offers in

Millenium Hall not only a home for troubled women but a condemnation of the immoral, male-dominated society that preys on its female victims.

Unlike Scott, Edgeworth is not included in Miegou's list of Bluestocking feminists (even though Edgeworth is in agreement with many of the Bluestocking feminist ideals). However, in "'Out Rushed a Female to Protect the Bard': The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare," Elizabeth Eger does mention Edgeworth's awareness and reference to "the Bluestocking defense of Shakespeare against the French assault in her novel *Patronage*" (150). Hence, Edgeworth is not only aware of the Bluestockings but alludes to them in one of her own novels. Despite her lack of inclusion in feminist conversations, in her novel *Belinda*, Edgeworth criticizes the society in which she lives (though not as directly as Scott) and offers women an alternative moral lifestyle as opposed to the traditional roles usually assigned to women. In her essay "My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority," Mitzi Myers claims that *Belinda* is her "candidate for at once the best and most misread (or underread) woman's fiction of the Revolutionary decade" due to the "rather spotty (and sometimes dotty) criticism" that commonly misconceives *Belinda* as a novel that supports patriarchal ideals (105-107). Myers points out how Edgeworth actually coincides with many of the arguments that her well-known feminist contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft argues in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which was published in 1792 (133). In fact, Myers discusses how Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) is like *Belinda* and "belongs to the feminist interrogation of patriarchal attitudes initiated by Wollstonecraft's 1792

manifesto for rational woman” (133).¹ Therefore, although *Belinda* is not typically recognized as a critique of the traditional patriarchal standards, Edgeworth carefully undermines and questions society’s roles for women throughout her work and offers a reformed and improved community that is built upon the principles of moral education.

Since Scott’s *Millenium Hall* is concerned with Bluestocking feminist ideals, it may prove beneficial to look at the connection between feminism and utopias. In her essay “On Feminist Utopias,” Anne K. Mellor defines utopian thinking as “inherently critical and prophetic. It is engendered out of a profound dissatisfaction with the way things are, a dissatisfaction that combines with an equally powerful hope that things may and can be changed for the better” (241). Not surprisingly, Mellor goes on to claim that “Feminist theory is inherently utopian [. . .] [and] is grounded on the assumption of gender equality, a social equality between the sexes which has never existed in the historical past” (243). Since feminism criticizes male-dominated society and hopes for a better alternative, the link between feminism and utopian thinking seems evident. Nevertheless, this connection may be a bit troubling due to the translation of the word *utopia*, which means “no place” (Sargent 5). Hence, a utopia is an imagined improvement, hinting that feminist thinking may be a dream as well. However, both utopias and feminist thinking offer potential improvements that do not currently exist but may at some point be acted upon and at the very least criticizes the flaws of current

1. The connection between Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth is discussed more fully in a later chapter. See “Radical, Conservative, Or Both?: Maria Edgeworth in the 1790s Debate on Moral Education.”

society. Interestingly, in “‘A Most Sensible Oeconomy’: From Spectacle to Surveillance in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*,” Nanette Morton argues that Scott is actually conservative rather than a radical feminist (186). She claims:

Although the women of Millenium Hall have started a satellite community, it is up to [the character] George Ellison to bring the Hall’s principles to a larger audience. [. . .] [T]he text is not so much revolutionary as it is reinforcing: women, given their proper place, are to act as bulwarks to shore up an already existing structure. (204)

However, Morton seems to forget that it is the place Millenium Hall that is utopian and not the male-dominated patriarchal society that surrounds it. In addition, the character Ellison does not intend to do as grand a job of creating an ideal society as the women, but he says, “For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a *smaller* scale” (Scott 249, my italics). Even though he may take what he has learned and apply it in some *small* way to his own life, it is the women who have affected him and not the other way around. In fact, they created this utopian community without him. Thus, Scott’s *Millenium Hall* remains a feminist utopia that shows how women can be happy and successful without being dependent on men.

Although not considered a utopian writer, Edgeworth uses utopian thinking by including feminist ideals throughout *Belinda*. Of course, *Belinda* is not a utopia in the technical sense of the word nor did Edgeworth desire it be called one; in fact, she requests the public to accept it as a “Moral Tale” rather than “wishing to acknowledge a Novel” (“Advertisement” 3). Nevertheless, *Belinda* does have a utopian dimension since

Edgeworth deals with feminist issues, criticizes society's traditional women roles, and offers a happier alternative for her women characters (except for Harriet Freke, who rejects feminine power and attempts to use masculine power instead). As Mellor points out, feminism and utopias are related (243). Hence, Edgeworth's feminism in *Belinda* brings a utopian dimension to the text.

Of course, if Scott did not depict men as significant problems or threats to women's peace and happiness in *Millenium Hall*, she would not have needed to create a separate feminist utopian society where women could be safe from the male-dominated society that surrounded them. Throughout *Millenium Hall*, Scott describes women narrowly (but not always) escaping the evil plots of men such as Mr. Hintman, Mr. Lenman, and Mr. Morgan (to name a few). In the case of Mr. Hintman, he supports and pretends to care for Miss Mancel for several years, sponsoring her education at Mademoiselle d'Avaux's school for girls (82). However, once she comes of age, Mr. Hintman plans to take Miss Mancel into the country and seduce her, but he fails only because he suddenly dies before he is able to act on his plan (100-101). In fact, Mr. Hintman is described as being "capable of no love that was not entirely sensual, and consequently selfish; all who knew him lamented the fate of a young woman, who by every account is so superiorly lovely" (101). Hence, Scott suggests that a woman could be victimized by a trusted male guardian. Not only does Scott depict a villainous guardian but she also describes the dangers and tricks of a woman's love interest as well. Disguised as a devoted suitor, Mr. Lenman asks Lady Mary to run away and marry him secretly, but in reality, he is already married and actually desires to take advantage of

Lady Mary's naiveté (175-78). Luckily, Lady Mary discovers Mr. Lenman's scheme and narrowly escapes "the object of general ridicule and disgrace, wedded to a married man" (177-78). Thus, Scott demonstrates how women could become victimized by their own suitors. In addition to guardians and fiancés, Scott shows how a powerful and wealthy man can force a woman to become his unhappy wife through her depiction of the elderly and uncaring Mr. Morgan. Despite telling Mr. Morgan that she did not and could not love him, Miss Melvyn is forced to marry him in order to save her good reputation (which is threatened by a young man who is being bribed by her stepmother to claim that he was having an affair with Miss Melvyn). Furthermore, Mr. Morgan continues to add to his wife's unhappiness by refusing to allow her best friend to live with them or to appreciate her rationality (130-35). Therefore, Scott uses Mr. Hintman, Mr. Lenman, and Mr. Morgan as examples of three different ways (guardian, suitor, and husband) that women could be persecuted and hurt by men.

In Edgeworth's *Belinda*, the eponymous protagonist also escapes marrying the wrong men. Sir Philip Baddely, a rich baronet, decides to ask Belinda's hand in marriage not because he feels any kind of true love for her but in order to "see how blue Clary [Hervey] would look, if I were to propose for her in good earnest" (150). Hence, Baddely's motive for marrying Belinda is based upon his own selfish desires. Once Belinda rejects his proposal, he lists his materialistic qualities such as his money and family (154). Despite Belinda's steadfastness against marrying him, Baddely decides to "write to Mrs Stanhope, whose influence over her niece he had no doubt would be decisive in his favour" (154). Like Mr. Morgan, Baddely is willing to manipulate and

force Belinda into an unhappy marriage. Unlike Mrs. Morgan, Belinda refuses to change her mind and does not marry Baddely. However, she does allow herself to become engaged to Mr. Vincent, who is a wealthy, good-natured man but lacks rationality and self-control. In fact, Mr. Vincent's lack of self-control (and reasoning abilities for that matter) causes him to lose a fortune gambling (a vice which he had been advised by his guardian to stop). Not only does Mr. Vincent gamble but he also refuses to listen to Lord Delacour's good advice of not becoming involved in a quarrel on the day before his wedding to Belinda. Mr. Vincent's rashness delays his marriage, and his decision to hide his gambling addiction from Belinda eventually becomes known, causing Belinda to end their engagement. Hence, Belinda is saved from becoming a partner in an unequal marriage. Thus, Edgeworth uses Baddely and Mr. Vincent as a way of demonstrating the potential dangers that men pose to women.

With one of her critiques of current society being the lack of equality in marriage, Scott uses the utopian genre to express her feminist views by depicting the utopian qualities of Millenium Hall's female community and the dystopian qualities of current male-dominated society. When discussing the marriage of Lady Melvyn and Sir Charles, Scott emphasizes how important it is for a husband and wife to be on the same intellectual and moral level. In fact, Scott accomplishes this claim through her depiction of Sir Charles, "who gave no proof of good sense, but the secret deference he had to his wife's judgment," and Lady Melvyn, who had "very superior understanding" and married Sir Charles due to her parents though it was "contrary to her inclination" (83). Scott writes about how Lady Melvyn desires a husband who would be a guide, "through all the

various paths in which she might be obliged to walk; an assistance she had always expected from an husband; and thought, even a necessary part of that character” (83). Scott suggests that what Lady Melvyn desires in a husband is what women should want and that forcing a woman to marry someone she could not possibly respect or love (like Mrs. Morgan is forced to do) is harmful and poisons the marriage.

Likewise, in *Belinda*, Edgeworth idealizes equality in marriage through her depiction of the moral Percival family (who seem to create their own utopian community). In fact, Lady Anne Percival is depicted as having “without pedantry or ostentation, much accurate knowledge, and a taste for literature, which made her the chosen companion of her husband’s understanding, as well as of his heart” (216). Hence, Lady Anne is depicted as being an educated woman, which makes her desirable, as opposed to ignorant and sheltered, which would make her an unequal companion for her husband. Since Lady Anne is well educated, Edgeworth explains that Mr. Percival was not forced “to reserve his conversation for friends of his own sex, nor was he forced to seclude himself in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge; the partner of his warmest affections was also the partner of his most serious occupations” (216). Rather than having to seek a fellow man to discuss intellectual matters with, Mr. Percival is able to include and converse with his wife on whatever problem he may be facing. Thus, instead of depicting a husband as a dictator, Edgeworth idealizes the partnership involved in the Percivals’ marriage since both husband and wife can rely on each other and discuss important matters together.

In addition to promoting equality in marriage, Scott addresses the feminist issues of how girls should be educated and whether teachers should emphasize intellectual or superficial accomplishments the most. Interestingly, Scott uses two wives, who were both married to Sir Charles and referred to as Lady Melvyn, as an example of the two different approaches (inner accomplishments versus outer accomplishments) to education. The first Lady Melvyn carefully raises and educates her daughter, being sure to “instill all the principles of true religion into her daughter’s infant mind; and, by her judicious instructions, gave her knowledge far superior to her years; which was indeed the most delightful task of this fond parent” (84). Hence, the first Lady Melvyn is concerned with intellectual accomplishments and making sure that she helps to cultivate her daughter’s mind by teaching her a moral education based on religion. However, the second Lady Melvyn (who marries Sir Charles after the first Lady Melvyn dies) desires to send her stepdaughter away, claiming that “Miss Melvyn’s education had been very imperfect; –that a young lady of her rank ought to be highly accomplished” (86). Of course, Scott makes it clear that the second Lady Melvyn simply does not care for her stepdaughter, but it is important to note what kind of education Lady Melvyn chooses to emphasize. Gary Kelly explains that what the second Lady Melvyn refers to as “accomplishments” actually means “certain skills such as dancing, the ability to sing and play music or draw and paint, and knowledge of modern languages, especially French and Italian; these skills were supposed to make a woman more attractive on the marriage market” (86, note 1). Obviously, the majority of this list is filled with superficial accomplishments and is not concerned with focusing on rationality, prudence, or morals.

In addition, the first Lady Melvyn chooses to raise her daughter at home, keeping her in the private sphere, but the second Lady Melvyn sends her stepdaughter away from home, training her in a much more public sphere with the intention of releasing her into the public marriage market. Therefore, Scott suggests that the successful, caring mother should focus on educating her daughter with intellectual accomplishments, which are cultivated in the private sphere, as opposed to a selfish, vain stepmother who focuses on outward accomplishments, which are meant for the public realm.

In *Belinda*, Edgeworth also depicts intellectual accomplishments as being much better than outward accomplishments. While in disguise at a masquerade party, the protagonist, Belinda, hears what men actually think of her Aunt Stanhope and the “accomplishments” of Stanhope’s nieces (24-26). In fact, the men discuss several of Stanhope’s nieces who were “successfully” married (but the marriages were not happy due to the inequality of the partners) and how each girl used an outward accomplishment to attract a husband (with one girl using her eyes, another niece using her musical abilities, and yet another girl who was “a mighty fine dancer, and had good legs”) (24-25). Edgeworth includes this discussion in order to show how men view these outward accomplishments and how this type of education for young women may lead to a marriage, but it will not lead to a happy marriage of equality and respect. In order to make her message even clearer, Edgeworth has Clarence Hervey (Belinda’s love interest) exclaim to his friends, “[D]o you think I could be taken in by one of the Stanhope school? Do you think I don’t see as plainly as any of you, that Belinda Portman’s a composition of art and affectation?” (26). By having Hervey refer to the “Stanhope

school,” Edgeworth emphasizes how Stanhope teaches her nieces outward accomplishments and suggests that this type of education is pernicious to a woman’s character and reputation. Furthermore, Belinda realizes how her aunt, nieces, and herself are viewed due to their emphasis on outward accomplishments (28). After having this epiphany, Belinda starts to focus on improving her intellect and begins to associate herself with the moral Percival family, which helps to direct her moral education and intellectual growth. Thus, Edgeworth uses Belinda as an example of the positive reformation of education that can take place if outward accomplishments are replaced with intellectual achievements.

In addition to her depictions of the two wives of Sir Charles, Scott uses the character of Lady Sheerness to show the dangers of a woman who bases her life on outward accomplishments and refuses to reflect and reform her morally depraved ways. In fact, Lady Sheerness is described as lacking a proper moral education, which (most likely) leads to her vain and unfulfilling life. Scott describes that Lady Sheerness “had received a genteel education; no external accomplishments had been neglected; but her understanding and principles were left to the imperfection of nature corrupted by custom. Religion was thought too serious a thing for so young a person” (173). Hence, Lady Sheerness did not receive the important nutrients of a healthy focus on intellectual and moral development. The result of having such a poor education affected her character, and “she became a victim of dissipation, and the love of fashionable pleasures; destitute of any stable principles, she was carried full sail down the stream of folly” (173). By not being firmly grounded upon a moral education, Lady Sheerness falls prey to the vain

community that surrounds her. Due to her choice to associate herself with a society concerned with superficial accomplishments, Lady Sheerness becomes extremely busy and had “neither leisure nor inclination to think, her life passed in an uninterrupted succession of engagements, without reflection on the past, or consideration on the future consequences” (173). Thus, Lady Sheerness chooses to immerse herself into a community that is not based on moral principles but is instead concerned with being amused. When she falls ill and should be preparing to die, Lady Sheerness continues to refuse to have “a moment’s time of reflection” and takes “care not to have leisure to think” (187). Not surprisingly, she dies not considering the vanity of her life. Therefore, Scott suggests that the tragedy of Lady Sheerness’s life was caused by her poor education, which did not educate her on essential moral principles.

Interestingly, Edgeworth depicts Lady Delacour (much like Scott depicts Lady Sheerness) as being a morally depraved and vain socialite. However, underneath the facade of fame and happiness, Lady Delacour lives a life of physical and emotional pain. Believing that she is going to die, Lady Delacour desires to be viewed as a popular, happy, and successful woman by concentrating on her outer accomplishments and her immoral community. Ironically, by continuing in vain pursuits of entertainment, she makes herself more miserable, which shows how it is futile to acquire true, inner peace and happiness by focusing on superficial amusements. However, Belinda encourages Lady Delacour to change her ways and to reflect upon her life and past conduct. Lady Delacour, unlike Scott’s character Lady Sheerness, eventually reflects and reforms herself (and her “disease” heals as well). By reflecting, thinking, and surrounding herself

within the moral community of Belinda and Hervey, Lady Delacour improves her own moral character and is able to help to save the day at the end of the story by using her ingenuity to reveal which couples belong together. Without her reformation, the happy ending of *Belinda* may never have happened. Therefore, Edgeworth emphasizes the importance of how reformation and reflection can help a character to improve upon his or her moral principles and use his or her intellect to help others.

Similar to Edgeworth's protagonist Belinda, Scott depicts the character Lady Mary as being, at first, surrounded by a society concerned with outward accomplishments but comes to realize the dangers and dissatisfaction of living such an immoral life (by witnessing the sad conclusion of her aunt Lady Sheerness's life) and begins to acquaint herself with the more moral community of Lady Brumpton where she learns the importance of reasoning and learning. In fact, Lady Brumpton is described as having a generous nature, a good temperament, and an excellent mind (189). Scott writes that Lady Brumpton "had been educated with great care, was very accomplished, had read a great deal, and with excellent taste; she had great quickness of parts, and a very uncommon share of wit" (189). Hence, Lady Brumpton's education helped to develop her mind. Interestingly, it is her intellectual achievements that her friends admire even more than her beauty (189). Inspired by Lady Brumpton's example, Lady Mary desires to improve her reasoning abilities and increase her learning (191-92). Lady Mary realizes how her education has lacked emphasis on intellectual achievements and hopes "for some improvement to her understanding, too long neglected" (192). However, despite her many virtues, Lady Brumpton is depicted as being vain, and on her deathbed, she relates

to Lady Mary that she “saw how much a desire to gain the applause of a few people, had made her forget the more necessary aim of obtaining the approbation of her Creator” (194). Nevertheless, Lady Mary benefits both materially and morally since she not only receives a fortune after Lady Brumpton’s death but also learns the importance of reasoning and learning. In *Novel Relations*, Ruth Perry discusses how “[t]he preoccupation [. . .] with an older woman who is not the biological mother, but whose love and support is critical to the success of the protagonist, is not easy to interpret” (366). However, Perry suggests that “[m]ore symbolically, the trope of a powerful older woman who stands in the place of a mother could be read as a re-imagining of the maternal role at this historical juncture, an alternative to male-dominated social relations” (366). Hence, Scott’s Lady Brumpton—and other independent female characters in the novel, such as Lady Emilia—may be viewed as yet another way to undermine male-dominated society and offer her protagonist, in this case Lady Mary, a chance to be motivated and educated by an older lady who can teach important lessons to a younger and less experienced woman. Therefore, Scott emphasizes reasoning and learning as being essential characteristics to a moral education.

Like Scott’s Lady Mary, Edgeworth depicts Belinda as improving her reasoning abilities and surrounding herself with the moral community of the Percival family, who helps to direct her learning. Interestingly, the entire Percival family looks at reason within a moral context as their guide; in fact, Edgeworth writes, “In conversation, every person expressed without constraint their wishes and opinions; and wherever these differed, reason and the general good were the standards to which they appealed” (215).

Thus, Belinda places herself within a family that prizes reasoning abilities, which motivates Belinda to improve her learning. In her introduction to *Belinda*, Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick states, “Edgeworth’s emphasis on Belinda’s developing rationality locates her novel in the tradition of Enlightenment feminism, which had long maintained that the education of women in the right use of reason produced the best wives and mothers” (x). Hence, Edgeworth incorporates her feminist ideals in her character Belinda. Although Lady Percival helps to mold Belinda into a moral, reasonable individual, she does encourage Belinda to marry Mr. Vincent (who does not use reasoning abilities). However, as Kirkpatrick points out, “Faced with these glaring limits in the judgement of others, Belinda decides to think for herself” (x). In fact, Belinda uses her reasoning abilities throughout the novel to help other characters—specifically, saving Juba and Lady Delacour from the villainous character Harriet Freke. Therefore, Belinda improves upon her reasoning abilities to the extent that she surpasses the reasoning of the Percival family and uses her logic to help others.

In addition to gaining intellectual accomplishments and reasoning abilities, Scott includes moral reading as a necessary part of a woman’s moral education. Desiring to improve herself, Lady Mary “told Lady Brumpton how much she was concerned at her own ignorance, and begged she would give her some directions what she should read” (192). Hence, Lady Mary realizes that reading can help her to increase her knowledge and improve her character. Interestingly, it is not just any kind of reading that will reinforce moral values but a specific type of literature. Lady Mary is advised to read “some moral essays, just published; then a new play; after that the history of one short

period; and ended with a volume of sermons then much in fashion” (192). However, Lady Mary realizes that this is a kind of “miscellaneous reading” and begins to think for herself and chooses to “begin a regular and improving course” (192). Thus, Lady Mary recognizes that in order to become a better individual that she needs a steady diet of literature that will allow and motivate her to improve herself.

Likewise, Edgeworth uses reading as a tool to help further develop Belinda’s moral character. In fact, Edgeworth strategically has her antagonist Harriet Freke argue with her protagonist Belinda on the importance and benefits of reading. Freke explains that she used to read but does not anymore, claiming that “Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for those who can’t think for themselves—but when one has made up one’s opinions, there is no use in reading” (227). In response, Belinda asks, “But to make them up [. . .] may it not be useful?” (227). Hence, Belinda considers reading as a helpful tool to acquire knowledge that will enable her to make informed and prudent decisions. However, Freke rejects this viewpoint and states that it is “[o]f no use upon earth to minds of a certain class. You, who can think for yourself, should never read” (227). Thus, Freke refuses to use books as a way of improving herself, and by doing so, she cuts herself off from the advice and knowledge that reading has to offer and does not allow herself the chance to grow as a moral individual. In Belinda’s short but insightful reply, she states, “But I read that I may think for myself” (227). Therefore, Belinda views reading as a way to develop her reasoning abilities and to draw her own conclusions. In addition, Edgeworth emphasizes the importance of moral reading since three of the texts that Belinda chooses to read are specifically mentioned: *The Theory of*

Moral Sentiments (1759) by Adam Smith, the travels of John Moore (1729-1802), and *The Characters, or the Manners of the Age* (1699) by the French moralist Jean de La Bruyère (228, 496). It is also important to note that Belinda chooses to read what Mr. Percival recommends (228). Thus, Belinda allows herself to be guided by a moral individual who encourages her to read moral-based literature.

The culmination of Scott's feminist ideals concerning equality in marriage, intellectual accomplishments over outer achievements, reason, and moral reading in *Millenium Hall* comes together in order to form Scott's picture of the perfect type of moral education. Interestingly, the one character that escapes the suffering and dangers that fall upon many of Scott's other characters is Miss Selvyn, who receives Scott's ideal type of moral education. Mr. Selvyn focuses on "cultivating his little girl's mind" and is concerned with teaching his daughter the value of inner achievements rather than superficial accomplishments (199-200). In fact, Scott writes, "Thus Miss Selvyn was bred a philosopher from her cradle" (200). In addition to her moral learning, Miss Selvyn was also taught religious values, making her education complete (200-203). Due to having such an excellent education, Miss Selvyn shares her wisdom and gives good advice to Lady Mary concerning a dangerous courtship (204). Also, Miss Selvyn lives her life happily, making friends with Lady Emilia (who turns out to be her mother) and finding pleasure in reading and living "several years in the country with great rational enjoyment" (205, 210). Furthermore, she realizes her happiness and chooses to remain unmarried, rejecting society's idea that she needs a husband in order to be truly happy. Thus, Scott depicts Miss Selvyn as having the ideal education and hints at how this kind

of education may allow women to make wise decisions and live happier and more fulfilling lives.

In a similar manner, Edgeworth uses Belinda as an example of how a proper moral education can lead to wise decisions that lead to happiness. Once Belinda realizes that a life based on outer achievements along with the fickle praise of an immoral society does not lead to true inner peace and happiness, she begins to follow the advice and guidance of moral individuals, like the Percivals, and chooses to improve herself and help others by reading moral-based literature and using her reasoning abilities. By combining education, reasoning, and moral values together, Belinda becomes a rational, caring woman who is able to change the lives of other characters in a positive way. Her true love interest Clarence Hervey also reforms himself into a better moral individual by associating himself with Mr. Percival and Mr. X, which allows him to be worthy of Belinda's company (unlike the rash Mr. Vincent who is banished from Belinda's society). Together, Belinda and Hervey are able to bring about Lady Delacour's reformation. Belinda uses her intellect to discover Freke's harmful pranks on Juba and Lady Delacour. In addition, Hervey uses his intellect to save Mr. Vincent from financial and physical ruin (since Mr. Vincent had been cheated out of a fortune and was going to commit suicide until Hervey discovers the truth and stops Mr. Vincent from ending his life). Therefore, by reaping the benefits of a moral education, Belinda improves herself and helps others to escape the persecution of an immoral society (such as Freke and Sir Philip Baddely), choosing to associate herself within a moral community where she can live peacefully.

After examining Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Edgeworth's *Belinda*, it should be evident that both are concerned with feminist ideals throughout their texts. More importantly, both writers depict moral education as the starting point in order for utopian feminist ideas to become reality. Unless women are given an education that emphasizes moral and rational behavior, Scott and Edgeworth argue that society will continue to become more depraved and that the women will stay the victims of a male-dominated society due to their inadequate education. Therefore, by giving their female protagonists a good education based on moral principles, Scott and Edgeworth show how their protagonists can use their feminine powers of reason to escape persecution, save others, and live happily.

CHAPTER III

EDGEWORTH'S *BELINDA*:A REVISION OF BURNEY'S *EVELINA*?

The many similarities between Frances Burney (1752-1840) and Maria Edgeworth (1768?-1849) in both their personal lives and published writings are striking. In *Mothers of the Novel* (1986), Dale Spender lists several of the commonalities between Burney and Edgeworth, such as their closeness to their fathers, their writing for their fathers, their use of mimicry to entertain their families, their rejection of suitors who were approved by their fathers, their talent as writers of letters, their frequent adherence to the literary advice (not always for the better) of their fathers, their serious view of fiction, and their support “of a doctrine of human responsibility” among other similarities, which are too numerous to be listed here (272-73). With so much in common, it should not be surprising that both held similar views toward writing, seeing it as a liberating way for them to share their ideas with the world, thereby entering the public sphere that was usually restricted to men. Burney’s first novel, *Evelina* (1778), which she wrote at the age of 26, was printed more than fifteen years before Edgeworth’s first published work, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795). Burney’s work had a direct impact on Edgeworth, and its role in the development of the latter’s own literary work should not be underestimated. In fact, Marilyn Butler shares in her biography of Maria Edgeworth how the author was extremely taken with Burney’s *Evelina* to the extent that she inquired as to whether Burney would be interested in a correspondence despite the fact that Edgeworth’s father would not allow her to read Burney’s second novel *Cecilia* (1782); however, “Burney

was apparently not interested, and Maria [Edgeworth] had to content herself with self-improvement through the printed page” (Butler 150). Although Edgeworth did not benefit from such a correspondence, Burney’s influence remained strong, and Edgeworth’s love for *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, which she did eventually read since her father finally decided to allow novel reading, impacted Edgeworth’s own fiction, especially in her first novel of manners, *Belinda* (1801). Butler states, “The action of *Belinda* is fundamentally the same as that of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, namely the adventures of an *ingénue* making her début in high society” (308). Although Butler does acknowledge that Edgeworth obviously adapted the plot of *Belinda* from Burney’s *Evelina* and made it her own, Butler does not delve into a deep analysis of the two texts (understandably so, since Butler is not concerned with an analysis but of sharing Edgeworth’s life history and writings in general); nevertheless, such an analysis could bring much more insight into both texts and especially into Edgeworth’s goals for women and their education. By looking at Burney’s *Evelina* and Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, readers will be better able to see Edgeworth as an independent, creative thinker and reformer who had her own vision and beliefs as to how to improve society. Contextualizing Edgeworth with Burney allows readers to have a better appreciation of Edgeworth’s covert feminism and the positive, utopian nature of her writing. A close examination of Burney’s *Evelina* and Edgeworth’s *Belinda* will demonstrate not only the striking and seemingly purposeful similarities between the two but will also reveal Edgeworth’s deliberate departure from Burney, revising Burney’s novel to fit her own ideas on education and women’s roles in society.

In both *Evelina* and *Belinda*, the eponymous protagonists struggle to find their place in society and to discern between proper and improper company. This idea of struggling to balance between society's demands on what constituted appropriate conduct for young ladies and establishing one's own views toward women's proper roles in society is not only what Burney's and Edgeworth's protagonists must learn to master (both *Evelina* and *Belinda* must determine for themselves how they should behave, whom they should listen to for advice, and why they should conduct themselves in a certain way) but also what the authors themselves faced as young *women* writers writing *novels* for the *public* sphere. Not wishing to embarrass or tarnish their reputations as ladies from respectable families, Burney and Edgeworth took a risk when they decided to become published authors, knowing they would be scrutinized by society. Of course, both authors published their first literary works anonymously. Burney, in fact, waited to accept credit of authorship until *Evelina* was received by the public with admiration and praise—not even acknowledging her accomplishment to her father until six months after the publication of *Evelina* (Doody 39). Edgeworth even attempts to separate *Belinda* from being referred to as a novel by requesting readers to accept it as a moral tale (“Advertisement” 3). Part of Burney's and Edgeworth's fear of being considered as authors of novels was most likely due to the low status of the novel during this time period. In *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (1988), Margaret Anne Doody explains, “Novel reading and novel writing were officially considered below the sphere of the truly serious man of letters” (37). Since both Burney and Edgeworth wanted to be taken seriously by both men and women, their hesitation to accept their authorship of

novels is not strange. In fact, it does not seem as though Burney and Edgeworth were as worried about what they had written as they were about how their writing would be perceived.

Similarly, in *Evelina* and *Belinda*, both heroines must concern themselves with how they are being perceived by others. Evelina is frequently worried with being seen with her volatile grandmother Madame Duval and her ill-mannered relatives the Branghtons. By constantly being seen with such poor company, Evelina worries, and understandably so, that she will be considered as a poor judge in character and perhaps, even worse, as being like them. In *Belinda*, the heroine learns at a masquerade how her conduct and her relationship to her Aunt Stanhope, a famous matchmaker, have caused her reputation to be questioned, and she quickly learns to adapt her behavior accordingly (24-26). Hence, Burney and Edgeworth, who as women and especially as women writers understood the importance of being viewed favorably by society, share with their readers the insecurity of a woman's reputation. Burney, more than Edgeworth, pushes to see how far her heroine can be with the wrong kind of company and in dangerous situations without destroying her reputation. Evelina is seen with prostitutes, holds private meetings with a mysterious man (who is actually her brother, Mr. Macartney), and places herself in dangerous and easily misunderstood situations with Clement Willoughby. In "And What Other Name May I Claim': Names and Their Owners in Frances Burney's *Evelina*," Amy J. Pawl points out that despite these dangerous situations Evelina's love interest Lord Orville "is able to recognize her" true character, which makes him worthy "to call her all his own" (296). Hence, Burney places her heroine in compromising

situations but presents her heroine with an ideal hero who can see her inner, good nature. Though Burney is not known for her optimism, Orville's gift at understanding and valuing Evelina's true character may be Burney's way of sharing her hope that her audience will value her novel despite the fact that she is writing about a woman's entrance into the world and does not depict men in general in a positive light (the two exceptions being Orville and Evelina's guardian Mr. Villars). Edgeworth, on the other hand, desires to employ Belinda as an example of the ideal moral character who makes wise decisions and models good behavior. Instead of pushing the limits to see how far a young lady could come close to ruin like Burney does, Edgeworth attempts to provide her readers with a trustworthy heroine who will use her reason to make good decisions, such as choosing the good moral company of the Percivals, that will eventually lead her to happiness. Belinda does not allow her sensibility to control her actions but relies on her reason to distinguish between the immoral company of Harriet Freke and the moral community of the Percivals. By knowing whom to listen to for advice and whom to associate herself with, Belinda demonstrates the importance and the reward of choosing good friends. Thus, Edgeworth desires for her readers to adopt Belinda's morality and reasoning abilities in order to make prudent choices and increase the chance of building a happy life. Obviously, both Burney and Edgeworth desire for both their heroines and themselves to be accepted by society for themselves and their decision to be authors of novels not to be misunderstood or attacked by society at large.

Nevertheless, the fear of being misperceived by society was most likely not the only reason for Burney's and Edgeworth's uneasiness about authorship. Writing was a

struggle to share their independent voices, and this desire to be independent could be viewed as rebellious. For Burney, writing was rebellious, and Doody shares that “on her [Burney’s] fifteenth birthday (13 June 1767) she burned all her writings, including at least one complete work of fiction, *The History of Caroline Evelyn*” (35). Doody claims:

But the supposed inferiority of fiction on the literary scale seems never to have bothered Frances herself, nor can she have believed that the Burney men did not read novels. The true cause of her concern and guilt seems to be the independence of the compulsion to write, to engage in a private and self-sustaining activity. (37)

Hence, one of the major causes of Burney’s concern most likely was her desire to write in secret—in her mind, this was a way of rebelling and sharing her own thoughts without having to censor them for an audience. Burney addressed her private diary to “Nobody,” and not surprisingly, “Nobody” was female (Doody 41). In “‘Oh Dear Resemblance of Thy Murdered Mother’: Female Authorship in *Evelina*,” Susan C. Greenfield points out that Burney “transforms Nobody into an implicitly female figure who exists even though she has no body and no name. [. . .] Burney also implies that by addressing Nobody she is actually addressing herself” (305). Greenfield posits, “Both the novel [*Evelina*] and the autobiographical accounts reiterate the idea that if a woman wants to own her writing—or indeed herself—she must be nameless, must divorce herself from the father’s language” (304). By deciding to publish what had originally been written in secret, Burney was sharing her own story and voice with the world. She was no longer writing to Nobody. It

is not surprising that she would be worried over how her novel would be viewed by society and, more importantly to her, by her father.

Although Edgeworth was encouraged by her father to write, she was prohibited from being published by her father's best friend Thomas Day, who did not believe women should be authors (Butler 149). After Day's death (1789), Edgeworth decided to disregard his wishes and to become a published author. Furthermore, Edgeworth's love for writing novels was her own and not her father's (Spender 293-95). In fact, Edgeworth was frequently sidetracked from her passion by her father, who desired for her to write what he believed was more substantially important work, such as educational treatises like *Professional Education*—which was published under her father's name (Spender 293-95). Nevertheless, Edgeworth still found time to write and publish several novels throughout her lifetime. Thus, both Burney's *Evelina* and Edgeworth's *Belinda* were bold moves for these authors.

By publishing their writing and by writing about women's roles in society from the perspective of a woman, Burney and Edgeworth helped to further the literary tradition of the novel. Despite their initial fears, Burney and Edgeworth were widely accepted.

Spender claims:

The success of Fanny Burney (1752-1840) and Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) represents the full entry and recognition of women in the literary world in that they were both admired rather than maligned for their achievement. [. . .] Partly because few wanted to contest the greatness of their achievement – for they were clearly without peers – and partly

because of the exemplary womanly – and domestic – behaviour of the authors themselves, the issue of whether women *should* write was overshadowed by the issue that women *had* written, and that the work and the women were worthy of congratulation. (270, italics in original)

Hence, Burney's and Edgeworth's decision to share their writings and views with the world helped to further the literary tradition, making women the top competitors in the writing of novels but also establishing respectability for women who decided to write novels. The publications of *Belinda* and *Evelina* did more than share women's views of the world since they also elevated the status of women writers and novels. Spender posits, "When Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth reached the heights, women constituted *the* literary tradition" and that Burney and Edgeworth "are both magnificent writers and they provide the incontrovertible evidence that women had forged a full, fascinating – and fantastic – literary tradition, before Jane Austen" (271, italics in original). Both Burney and Edgeworth brought respectability for women writers and novels by their decision to publish *Evelina* and *Belinda*, which helped to pave the way for future female novel writers.

Not only were Burney and Edgeworth responding to society's views toward women writers but they also were reacting to their society's views toward women's education and conduct. In "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books," Joyce Hemlow explains:

[T]he problem of conduct of the young lady was investigated so thoroughly that the lifetime of Fanny Burney, or more accurately the years

1760-1820, which saw also the rise of the novel of manners, might be called the age of courtesy books for women. (732)

Since young ladies' reputations were extremely fragile, especially when they were on the marriage market and first entering society (which is the plot of both *Evelina* and *Belinda*), how they conducted themselves in public, their choices in company, their behavior, etc., were of utmost importance for determining their future happiness or unhappiness. Conduct books attempted to guide young women through the confusing world of courtship and high society. Hemlow states:

[T]he courtesy books attempted to inculcate good morals. They were for the most part semi-philosophical or semi-religious; they attempted to establish first principles first, then a code of behavior based on these principles, that is a system of morals, and only as a last consideration manners insomuch as they were the visible result or expression of such morality. (733)

It is within this context that Burney and Edgeworth were writing. Knowing this background, *Evelina's* and *Belinda's* concern with behaving themselves according to proper conduct and their worries about being misunderstood becomes even more understandable. Furthermore, it is important to look at how Burney and Edgeworth depict not only their heroines' behaviors but the other characters' conduct as well. Burney forces her heroine *Evelina* to face multiple embarrassing situations throughout the novel and not necessarily respond perfectly. For example, at her first ball, *Evelina* makes the mistake of rejecting Mr. Lovel, an ill-mannered individual, but accepting Lord

Orville without waiting the appropriate amount of time between the two. Although she correctly distinguishes between poor and proper company, Evelina's conduct itself is still incorrect. Furthermore, Evelina becomes flustered and cannot respond to Lord Orville in the intelligent manner she is actually capable of, causing her intelligence to be doubted. As a consequence of her inadequacy of knowing how to respond to social situations, Evelina is emotionally upset throughout most of the novel. Nevertheless, her good judgment and her willingness to learn the correct social rules reward her in the end. On the other hand, once Belinda learns to correct her conduct early on in the novel, she makes wise choices throughout the rest of the three volumes and is saved from many of the compromising situations Evelina finds herself in frequently. At the end, both Evelina and Belinda are rewarded for their good conduct and for navigating through the social world correctly—or close enough, in Burney's case. Therefore, Burney and Edgeworth provide their heroines as examples of proper conduct and use their novels as an educational tool and guide for young ladies.

However, it should not be assumed that Burney and Edgeworth were simply reaffirming society's standards for women's conduct. Rather than restating the messages found in conduct books, Burney and Edgeworth employ their novels as a way of revising, challenging, and undermining the commonly held views toward women's proper roles in society. In *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*, Julia Epstein argues:

Surface propriety was purchased at the price of internal rage; that the cauldron was covered only made it boil with greater heat. It is these

reservoirs of rage in Burney's prose – fictional, epistolary, and journalistic – that I wish to mark. [. . .] It is my contention that the chaos, ferocity, and violence of Burney's prose allow us to unravel the constrained cultural situation not just of her own but of women's writing in general during a period crucial for the entrance of women into the mainstream literary marketplace, the turn of the nineteenth century. (5)

Hence, at the surface level, *Evelina* and *Belinda* may seem to restate societal values, but beneath the surface, Burney and Edgeworth question and critique society.

Burney shares the dangers posed by a male-dominated society and faults society for not looking beneath the surface in order to see the true nature of a young lady's character. Burney does so by providing a heroine who has received the ideal Rousseauian education. *Evelina* is taught by the moral Mr. Villars in a secluded location. In fact, Lady Howard, a close friend of Mr. Villars, describes *Evelina*'s character as seeming “truly ingenuous and simple; and at the same time that nature has blessed her with an excellent understanding, and great quickness of parts, she has a certain air of inexperience and innocency that is extremely interesting” (111). All of these qualities are ideal since *Evelina* is capable of learning but is not filled with affectation or corrupt morals. She is pure and innocent. In *Woman as 'Nobody' and the Novels of Fanny Burney*, Joanne Cutting-Gray states, “Though *Evelina* incarnates artlessness in a world of duplicity and evil, she nonetheless requires ‘observation and experiences’ to make her ‘fit for the world’” (10). Since *Evelina* has been kept from learning the ways of the world, she is not prepared to enter the world and makes many mistakes that could have—and if

this had been real life most likely would have—caused her reputation to be blemished and have ruined her chances at a happy ending. Burney makes it clear that no matter how good Evelina is that she is still at the mercy of the men and the situations—which are in the favor of men—that surround her. Burney is not only criticizing Evelina’s education for not preparing her for her entrance into society, but she is also attacking society as being a place that oppresses innocence and women. Instead of blaming Evelina for her mistakes, Burney makes it evident that it is society’s fault for her blunders in two ways: by not educating Evelina properly and by the male-dominated society which threatens Evelina’s innocence. Throughout the novel, men attempt to seduce, rape, and court Evelina. When at Vauxhall Gardens, she is literally caught by a group of men who mistake her for a prostitute and then “saved” by Willoughby who then desires to seduce her, but she refuses and amazingly works her way back to her original company of relatives (317-20). In *Frances Burney: The World of ‘Female Difficulties,’* Katharine M. Rogers points out that Evelina’s “world is distinctively a young lady’s world: it is one in which women are forced into passivity and men constantly encroach on their territory” (26). Evelina’s continual persecution from men throughout the novel demonstrates how society and social rules, such as those found in conduct books, are in men’s hands; women must do their best to evade being hurt—whether physically, emotionally, or both—by a male-dominated society that holds all of the important playing cards.

Edgeworth’s *Belinda* is much better prepared for dealing with society than Burney’s *Evelina*. *Belinda* receives a rational education (not secluded or based on sensibility) and learns from the tragic experiences of Lady Delacour, a woman successful

in society but not in her private life. Belinda learns to reject the false and dangerous society of Lady Delacour and Harriet Freke, deciding to join the blissfully happy family of the Percivals. Belinda learns that a successful social life like Lady Delacour's is not an equivalent for a successful private life like Anne Percival, who epitomizes the ideal mother (well educated, good natured, and the equal companion of her husband).

Although Belinda is not attacked by men in the same way as Evelina experiences, men who are unworthy of her, like Mr. Vincent and Sir Philip Baddely, do still attempt to manipulate her into marrying them. Mr. Vincent hides his addiction to gambling, and Sir Philip attempts to apply social pressure (from his high rank in society and appealing to her Aunt Stanhope) to force Belinda into marriage. Thus, men are still a threat to Belinda's happiness. Nevertheless, Belinda's rejection of immoral society allows her to accept morality and to then use moral judgment, which in turn places her on the right path toward achieving happiness. Edgeworth employs Belinda as a way of revising society by replacing the immoral community of Lady Delacour and Harriet Freke with the moral community of the Percivals, emphasizing reason and morality as the basis for a successful society.

One of the major ways Burney and Edgeworth criticize society is through the use of comedy. In *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen*, Audrey Bilger discusses how Burney, Edgeworth, and Austen employ comedy in order to criticize society. Bilger states:

As members of middle-class families, they identified with the laughter of a privileged group; but the confidence they gained by joking within this

group enabled them to apply critical humor to their situation as females in a sexist society and thereby challenge the necessity of women's subordinate status. (61)

Hence, as Bilger points out, humor was both a coping mechanism and a criticizing tool that Burney and Edgeworth learned in their private lives and applied in their public writings (61-62). However, Burney and Edgeworth differ on how they use humor. Discussing this difference, Bilger claims, "Burney used humor as a channel for her aggression whereas Edgeworth learned to employ humor instead of aggression to obtain the attention she desired. Both chose humor as a method of expressing hostilities and establishing solidarity with others" (67). Much of Burney's humor in *Evelina*, especially when dealing with Madame Duval, is extremely violent, whereas Edgeworth's humor is usually expressed through dialogue, such as with the wit-bouts between Freke and Mr. Percival.

This idea of suppressed anger and violence in Burney has received a lot of attention by various scholars, especially Julia Epstein, who was discussed earlier, and Barbara Zonitch. In *Familiar Violence*, Zonitch argues:

Many times Burney figures violence as a sexual harassment that is often associated with aristocratic rule and the gradual decline in its authority. At the opposite end of the spectrum of sexual and physical abuse is an activity I will describe as a cruel social shaming; this form of emotional violation is most often affiliated with bourgeois authority and with those women who are implicated in the maintenance of aristocratic patriarchal rule. (14)

For Zonitch, Burney's inward outrage at societal wrongs comes through in the frequent violence depicted throughout the novel. However, in *Frances Burney: The World of 'Female Difficulties'*, Katharine M. Rogers points out that "Burney's need to express anger and scorn, together with her inhibitions about where it could be directed, sometimes cause her to lose artistic control in mocking a permissible target, so that hostility is more evident than instruction or diversion" (30). Thus, Burney may attack Madame Duval for foolishness, selfishness, and poor manners, but the moral may become overlooked due to the extremity of violence, or even worse, the audience may sympathize with Duval.

Edgeworth, on the other hand, often uses violence as a moral punishment and the relief from pain or physical hurt as a reward for proper moral conduct. For example, the ill-mannered, plotting, and mischievous Freke is punished by a smashed leg that will not allow her to wear masculine clothes anymore. Hence, evil will be punished by violence. Mr. Vincent is hurt in a fight with Sir Philip Baddely and is eventually sent off to Germany, a punishment for his lies and manipulation of Belinda. Lady Delacour's breasts are hurt to the extent she thinks she is dying, but once she reforms herself, she learns that she is not going to die and her breasts are healed; her decision to reform is rewarded by a relief from pain. Belinda is not physically injured anywhere in the novel, which reinforces the idea that physical pain is a punishment for immorality while relief from pain—or even better, the escape from pain entirely—is a reward for proper moral behavior.

Although *Evelina* and *Belinda* contain similar plots—both are about young women’s entrances into society and how they must choose their future husbands carefully—, Edgeworth differs from Burney in more ways than her depiction of the ideal heroine and her use of violence and humor. Stylistically speaking, Burney chose to write *Evelina* as an epistolary novel while Edgeworth composed *Belinda* using the third person narrator. Since Burney had written in a journal addressed to “Nobody” for years, it only makes sense that she would feel comfortable writing her first novel in epistolary fashion. In “Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property,” Irene Tucker complicates Burney’s decision: “In choosing the form of the epistolary novel to tell the story of *Evelina*, Burney generalizes the paradox of owning letters into a paradox about property, representation and, ultimately, the nature of the self” (421). Tucker goes on to claim:

Moreover, Burney, who published the novel anonymously, refigures her relationship as author to her own artistic production and to the audience that would receive it in ways that generalize the particular vulnerabilities of her position as a woman writer into a critique of the liberal notion of property. (421)

Tucker’s analysis helps to show how, more than likely, Burney deliberately chose the epistolary form as a way of playing with the idea of womanhood, identity, and property. Furthermore, Tucker’s argument sheds insight into the instability of actual identity for women during the eighteenth century. It is important to note that Edgeworth’s first published work, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) was also written in epistolary form

with the first section sharing the common debate about whether a woman should be a writer. However, Edgeworth rejected the epistolary form for her three-volume novel *Belinda*, choosing to write as an omniscient third person narrator instead. The obvious question arises: why the change? More than likely, Edgeworth privileged a more direct approach in the respect that she did not wish to complicate or draw into question the accuracy of the narrator, which would have also brought into question her moral message. Furthermore, by writing in the third person, Edgeworth was able to describe and share each character's actions, thoughts, motives, etc. without causing readers to doubt whether the narrator was reliable. After all, if written as letters, the characters could misconstrue events so as to appear in a certain light for their intended readers and would be limited to the perspectives of those characters' writing. Edgeworth, a moralist at heart, did not wish to be ambiguous about what happened or what the audience should learn from her story. Hence, while Burney embraced the ambiguity and complexities of the epistolary novel, Edgeworth realized that these were the exact reasons why she should reject the epistolary form and choose a more direct form that would allow her to move the plot and the moral forward without worrying about following the constraints of letter writing.

Another major difference between Burney and Edgeworth are their depictions of "masculine" women. In *Evelina*, Mrs. Selwyn is a strong, well educated, independent woman who accompanies Evelina and is eventually the one who brings her to meet Sir John Belmont, Evelina's biological father. Evelina describes Mrs. Selwyn in one of her letters:

Mrs. Selwyn is very kind and attentive to me. She is extremely clever; her understanding, indeed, may be called *masculine*; but, unfortunately, her manners deserve the same epithet; for, in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex, she has lost all the softness of her own. (400, italics in original).

Before Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Burney differentiates between a masculine understanding and masculine manners with the former quality being viewed as a positive and the latter as a negative. Bilger points out how Mrs. Selwyn employs her wit to gain the upper-hand when conversing with men (101).

Bilger states:

Many of Mrs. Selwyn's witticisms target the notion that men possess superior intellects by virtue of their maleness. Rather than keeping her learning a 'profound secret' as Gregory and other conduct-book writers advised women to do, Mrs. Selwyn flaunts her wit and understanding. (101)

Not only does Mrs. Selwyn bravely demonstrate her wit (so much so that the men in the novel become afraid to respond to her) but Bilger points out that she also reaches "beyond innuendo in her indictment of the male monopoly on higher education; her interrogation of Mr. Lovel on the mysteries of a university education derives its comic force from exposing the ignorance of at least one product of the system" (101). Thus, Burney allows Mrs. Selwyn to make fun of men who stereotype and limit women's

intellectual abilities and by doing so comments on the unfairness and common unfounded assumptions about women's "proper" roles in society.

Since Edgeworth's character Harriet Freke was after Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, it is important to realize that Edgeworth would, understandably, be much more careful in her treatment of a clearly masculine mannered woman. Freke is not masculine in understanding in the same way as Mrs. Selwyn. In fact, Freke has even stopped reading (227), which Edgeworth and her readers would obviously view as an anti-intellectual stance. Nevertheless, the similarities between Freke and Mrs. Selwyn are striking. Bilger claims, "Like Mrs. Selwyn, Mrs. Freke plays out her trickster role by scoffing at masculine authority and reveling in unconventionality" (103). However, Freke's unconventionality is immorality in Edgeworth's mind since Freke rejects a masculine understanding, preferring masculine manners. Her preference for manners over morals is what she is punished for at the end of the novel. Bilger argues:

Edgeworth incorporated female grotesques into her fiction as rampant feminists. Mrs. Freke in *Belinda* is the most fully developed of these comic butts, and her name betrays Edgeworth's ambivalence toward contemporary radical feminism. [. . .] Edgeworth clearly understood the dangers inherent in radical feminism, and her feminist grotesques reveal a degree of conservatism in the author. (207)

Although Freke claims to be a feminist, she is not what Edgeworth considers to be the ideal feminist since her outlandish and masculine-mannered behavior along with her anti-

intellectual stance hurt the argument that Edgeworth is trying to make, namely that morality and rationality should be the basis of women's education, which will in turn provide women with more opportunities in society and will help guide them in a male-dominated world.

Burney's aptness to include violence, anger, ambiguity, and humor to attack and question society's standard of appropriate decorum for young ladies is prevalent throughout *Evelina*, leaving the novel with a dark, overhanging threat of the many dangers that young women could and most likely would run across. After all, Evelina was extremely lucky to find Lord Orville—or perhaps, she was lucky Lord Orville found her—and many of the dangerous situations she placed herself in could have become scenes from a nightmare instead of a happily ever after ending. In “Renegotiating the Gothic,” Betty Rizzo argues:

Burney is most impressed by the manner in which the cards are stacked against women by providing them no chance of managing alone. [. . .] She is markedly the most pessimistic of women writers about the prospects of a woman surviving by use of her reason alone, but she indicates how very heavy the attack on a lone heroine must be before she breaks, and her intentions might be claimed as the most proto-feminist of all the women writers. (83)

Although Rizzo might claim Burney's intentions as pro-feminists, Burney's pessimistic outlook seems to suggest a certain hopelessness in improving the actual situation of women in society—in other words, if you're lucky enough to find a Lord Orville, then

great, if not, then too bad. In Doody's biography of Burney, she states, "Unlike, for instance, Maria Edgeworth, she [Burney] does not lay reassuring moral cards on the table" (389). Although Doody views this in a positive light, this lack of reassuring morality is what Edgeworth deliberately wants to correct in *Belinda* since, unlike Burney, Edgeworth has a much more positive outlook and views morality, especially a moral education, as the key to improving society. Hence, Edgeworth does not accept Burney's pessimistic attitude. If anything, Edgeworth's writing is utopian in nature. For Edgeworth, equality in marriage (like Mr. and Mrs. Percival in *Belinda*) was possible along with a woman being well educated, strong minded, and independent (Edgeworth does not depict an "old maid" in a negative light but as a potentially happy option). Spender claims, "Maria Edgeworth never did subscribe to the thesis of separate virtues, values or spheres, for the sexes: if a particular quality or characteristic of human existence was considered to be good – it was good for both sexes" (288). Spender goes on to argue that "Edgeworth's women talk politics (independently and responsibly) and her men raise and educate children and as both are to be taken equally seriously there is a peculiarly modern twist to much of her writing" (288). What Spender calls a "modern twist" was for Edgeworth a hopeful vision. Edgeworth employed her novels as a way of sharing her vision with the rest of society. In comparing *Belinda* to *Evelina*, Butler makes several excellent observations:

Belinda is not so much a mere imitation as an effort to present the same material more intelligently. In choosing between her various suitors, Evelina is supposed to be looking for true politeness; Belinda's criteria,

moral seriousness, strength, and integrity, are a great deal more intellectually impressive. *Evelina* pretends to be a critic of Society, but really falls in with its assumptions, whereas *Belinda* is intelligent and independent. Maria Edgeworth's fresh attitude to convention is always being demonstrated; there could scarcely be a more refreshing dismissal of eighteenth-century pastoral idylls than her brisk comment when Virginia prefers a moss rose to a pair of diamond ear-rings. (309)

Hence, Edgeworth's *Belinda* should not be confused as simply an imitation of Burney's *Evelina* but an improved revision. As a moralist and as a revisionist, Edgeworth desired to improve society and improve her readers through the moral instruction embedded throughout her literary works.

Both Burney and Edgeworth purposefully chose to depict a young woman's entrance into society—a society dominated and manipulated by men—in order to share with their readers the many threats and unfairness in that society, but they also desired to demonstrate to their readers how these heroines could navigate this confusing world successfully. Furthermore, both authors help to establish the literary tradition of the novel and to make that tradition a woman's tradition. Edgeworth goes further with *Belinda* than Burney does with *Evelina* by providing *Belinda* with a better education and reasoning abilities so as to make wise decisions throughout the rest of the novel, demonstrating how reason and morality are the keys to escaping tragic mistakes. Burney's *Evelina* obviously influenced Edgeworth's writing of *Belinda* greatly, and the similarities between both the authors and their novels are numerous. Nevertheless, as

Spender points out, “While seeing herself as a *woman* writer and the inheritor of a tradition that Fanny Burney had helped to create, she [Edgeworth] nonetheless extended the boundaries of the world that Fanny Burney had described” (289, italics in original). Edgeworth took Burney’s subversively angry world and revised it, thereby creating a vision of an improved society that elevated women’s status and allowed them to be the equal and rational companions of men.

CHAPTER IV
RADICAL, CONSERVATIVE, OR BOTH?:
MARIA EDGEWORTH IN THE 1790S DEBATE
ON MORAL EDUCATION

In the 1790s, writers such as Hannah More, Catharine Macaulay, Maria Edgeworth, and Mary Wollstonecraft were all, despite their different political stances, concerned with women's education, arguing that contemporary pedagogical practices for educating women were severely flawed and were devaluing women's potential and desire to learn and think rationally, thereby hindering them from further developing their intellectual talents. Edgeworth tends to be considered a conservative in the 1790s women's debate on moral education while Wollstonecraft is viewed as a feminist radical who attacked the traditional patriarchal order. However, in several of her literary works, Edgeworth includes feminist ideas that are similar to many of Wollstonecraft's liberal views set forth in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Edgeworth's skillful techniques of changing, correcting, and questioning gender stereotypes from within the patriarchal system made her appear to her contemporaries as a dedicated educational reformist rather than a threatening radical, but many of her concepts on education coincide well with those of Wollstonecraft, demonstrating that Edgeworth was a radical in some areas, such as advocating rational education for women, and conservative in others, such as believing that a woman is happiest in the domestic sphere. In addition, Edgeworth's reformatory approach helped her views to be more quickly accepted and promoted by her peers than Wollstonecraft's bold challenges. Both writers, though,

address how improving the current educational system for women will help to achieve an intellectual community founded upon strong morals, thereby emphasizing moral education as the key to improving the status of women in society. An analysis of Wollstonecraft's and Edgeworth's views on women's education will reveal Edgeworth's radical feminist positions, while also explaining their "conservative"—compared to Wollstonecraft—presentation. Furthermore, readers should be able to value Edgeworth as a contributor and advocate of improving the educational system for women and that her reasons, like Wollstonecraft, were feminist in nature, providing women with the educational basis needed in order to be a better and happier citizen and, even more importantly, individual. An examination of Edgeworth's and Wollstonecraft's theories of moral education will reveal both the similarities of their seemingly so different innovative approaches to women's education and also will demonstrate what both writers considered to be essential qualities of a proper moral education within the context of the 1790's debate concerning how to effectively educate young girls to become thoughtful and rational individuals.

Wollstonecraft's and Edgeworth's goal for women to receive an education based upon reason—their awareness of the moral danger of an inadequate education for women—is the result of their grappling with eighteenth-century arguments concerning the differences in methodologies for educating boys and girls. In her essay "Gender and 'Method' in Eighteenth-Century English Education," Michèle Cohen analyzes the "methodology" used for educating boys in that time period and the "unmethodical" technique of teaching girls. She also shows how women during that time period viewed

their education versus men's education. Cohen uses the conservative Hannah More and the radical Wollstonecraft as examples of women who, though normally in disagreement, both saw women's education as lacking the methodology of men's education (585). In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), More argues:

It is a singular injustice which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a very defective Education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct;—to train them in such a manner as shall lay them open to the most dangerous faults, and then to censure them for not proving faultless. (ix)

More complains that it is due to their defective education that women are not as morally upright as they should and could be. Likewise, in her well-known and influential *Letters on Education* (1790), Macaulay claims, “The situation and education of women [. . .] is precisely that which must necessarily tend to corrupt and debilitate both the powers of mind and body” and that women's “moral education is, if possible, more absurd than their physical. The principles and nature of virtue, which is never properly explained to boys, is kept quite a mystery to girls” (207). Hence, Macaulay, who seems to have had a positive impact on Wollstonecraft, also concerns herself with addressing the problems of women's education, noticing how boys' education (which she thought could also use improvement) offered more explanation of the elements of virtue than that of girls.

Picking up on this note, Wollstonecraft claims:

To do everything in an orderly manner, is a most important precept, which women, who, generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of

education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe. (*A Vindication* 32)

Wollstonecraft, like many of her contemporaries, recognized women's education as inferior to men's and desired to rethink it in order to help improve both women's character and their situation.

Likewise, Edgeworth devoted the majority of her life to addressing how to properly educate women to be happy individuals, whether married or single. In *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), which is composed of three pieces—the first being a fictional correspondence between a father of a newborn daughter and his friend on how to properly educate a young girl, the second a fictional correspondence between the characters Julia and Caroline, and the third “An Essay on the Noble Science of Self Justification,”—Edgeworth emphasizes the importance of a woman using reason in order to make wise decisions. In the second piece, “Letters of Julia and Caroline,” Edgeworth involves her eponymous protagonists in the debate of reason versus sensibility, with Caroline arguing for the former and Julia for the latter. Edgeworth allows Caroline to win the argument by depicting her as enjoying a successful marriage and life by following her philosophy of reason, which is presented as the superior intellectual position, while Julia is described as suffering from her poor choices (due to her reliance on sensibility) that eventually lead her to the destruction of her reputation and happiness. Edgeworth makes it clear that reason is the key for a woman to know how to live successfully and that a moral education provides the proper foundation for obtaining this vital quality. In *Belinda*, Edgeworth further emphasizes that the school of sensibility is

dangerous by demonstrating how Virginia, who is obsessed with romantic novels and relies too heavily upon her emotions rather than using her reason to make decisions, threatens the happiness of herself and others, due to her secluded and limited education, by agreeing to marry her benefactor Clarence Hervey out of misplaced feelings of loyalty. Cohen points out that women were not taught with the same disciplined methods as men, since girls were required to learn outward accomplishments, such as dancing, while boys concentrated on academic studies, such as Latin, more in depth, leaving women feeling that their education was hopelessly inferior to men's (585-95). Furthermore, Cohen explains that women felt their education was "unmethodical" compared to that of men; in fact, this "methodology" was what helped to gender education in the eighteenth century (593). Hence, Edgeworth's and Wollstonecraft's concerns with educating women fit into this larger cultural conversation about the pedagogical practices and theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Not only were most women restricted to this flawed methodology of education but they also were limited in the subjects they were allowed to study, since the three most respectable occupations for women were wife, mother, or governess, and their education was limited to preparing them for these "predestined" roles. In fact, certain subjects were viewed as masculine—for example, science—or feminine (Watts 282-302). Edgeworth, working within her society's dominant views, begins to alter these perspectives in *Practical Education* (1798), written with her father, where she not only addresses education for both sexes but also includes science as an appropriate subject for girls as well as boys, though she blunts the radical edge by placing science within a domestic

sphere like cooking (Watts 289). Thus, Edgeworth works within the accepted views of gendered education but alters the system enough to allow girls to learn “masculine” subjects. Similarly, Wollstonecraft argues for women to obtain an education that would help them to acquire jobs that were currently only available to men, such as business and medicine (*A Vindication* 183-84). In fact, Wollstonecraft argues for women to “study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses” and even claims that women might also pursue “[b]usiness of various kinds” so that “[w]omen would not then marry for a support” (183-84). By allowing women to obtain more choices for respectable occupations, Wollstonecraft believes that women can then choose more freely whom and if they want to marry, which will in turn allow them to acquire more opportunities for happiness (184-85).

Edgeworth also desires women to have a choice as to whether they want to be married or single. Unmarried herself, Edgeworth often depicted her female protagonists as being content with the idea of a single life and only choosing to marry for the “right” reasons, such as for love and happiness. In *Helen* (1834), Lady Davenant explains, “Every girl in these days is early impressed with the idea that she must be married, that she cannot be happy unmarried [. . .] it requires some strength of mind to be superior to such a foolish, vain, and vulgar belief” (150). Like Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth desires women to view marriage as simply an option rather than the only chance to attain happiness. In fact, the protagonist Helen states:

“It will require no great strength of mind in me [. . .] for I really never have formed such notions. They never were early put into my head; my

uncle always said a woman might be very happy unmarried. I do not think that I shall ever be seized with a terror of dying an old maid.” (150)

In this passage, Edgeworth is making several important claims. First, an unmarried woman can be happy. Second, with a proper early education, like the one Helen received from her uncle, a woman can enjoy greater independence and will not feel forced into thinking marriage her sole and ultimate goal (which Wollstonecraft complains about as well). Finally, for a woman who did not receive a proper education, it will take strength of mind to avoid the popular assumption that her only source for true happiness is in marriage.

Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft also address how a mother’s education will affect her children for better or worse. Since, in *Belinda*, Lady Anne Percival has a well-grounded education, she is able to share her knowledge with her children, demonstrating the beneficial influence that a well-educated mother can exert on her family. Edgeworth writes that Lady Anne’s “sympathy and approbation, and the daily sense of her success in the education of their children, inspired him [Mr. Percival] with a degree of happy social energy, unknown to the selfish solitary votaries of avarice and ambition” (216). Both her children and her husband, Mr. Percival, are able to be happy and abstain from vices, since Lady Anne provides an intelligent, moral, and comforting home environment. In a similar manner, Wollstonecraft writes in her dedication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an

orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind. (4)

Hence, Wollstonecraft also emphasizes the important influence that a mother can have on her children, claiming that in order for children to understand a principle, such as patriotism, their mother must demonstrate that principle in her own life. Wollstonecraft goes on to lament that “the education and the situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations” (4). Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft both view the link between women’s education and children’s education as being of vital importance.

Due to the significant influence that a mother has on her children, Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft concern themselves with establishing the necessary qualities that a mother needs in order to be an effective educator for her children. Complaining about how mothers lack reason in their affections, Wollstonecraft claims, “To be a good mother -- a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands” (189). Wollstonecraft views the importance of reason and independence (or strength) of mind as vital qualities of a good mother. Wollstonecraft adds that “unless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly” (188-89). Thus, Wollstonecraft views a strong character and an enlargement of understanding as essential qualities of a well-educated mother. Finally, Wollstonecraft posits that a mother must obtain parental affection and should suckle her children (189). Wollstonecraft views reason, independence or strength of mind, enlarged understanding,

strong character, and parental affection as the necessary qualities of a caring mother who is also to be a good educator.

Edgeworth desires for women, especially mothers, to acquire the same or similar qualities that Wollstonecraft argues for as well. For over four decades, Edgeworth argued for women to use reason to guide them throughout their lives. In “Letters of Julia and Caroline,” the latter pleads with her friend to use reason to guide her life. Both Caroline and Julia become mothers. The former is depicted as a successful mother and wife, whereas the latter is described as a poor mother (devoid of parental affection) and wife who abandons both her husband and child, eventually dying with a ruined reputation and many regrets. Edgeworth makes it perfectly clear that reason is necessary for a woman not only to be a good mother but also to live a happy life. Edgeworth emphasizes throughout *Helen* that strength of mind is a vital quality for a woman. In fact, Lady Davenant praises Helen for her “strength of mind and courage[,]” explaining that “[m]oral courage is, believe me, uncommon in both sexes, and yet in going through the world it is equally necessary to the virtue of both men and women” (34-35). Obviously, Edgeworth considers strength of mind and moral courage as essential qualities for both men and women, which coincides with Wollstonecraft’s argument for women to obtain a strong character and independence of mind. Also like Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth views an enlarged understanding in a mother as beneficial for the entire family. In *Belinda*, the narrator describes Lady Anne as a thoughtful individual who “had, without any pedantry or ostentation, much accurate knowledge, and a taste for literature,” demonstrating how her enlarged understanding made her a great wife and mother (216). Furthermore,

Edgeworth considers parental affection as a necessary quality in a mother. In *Helen*, the moral and kind Mr. Collingwood deplors the “Bad arrangement which separates mother and daughter” (13). Likewise, in *Belinda*, Lady Delacour suffers physically (from what she believes is an incurable disease) while she refuses to acknowledge her parental affection for her daughter, but once she reforms herself and learns the importance of being with her daughter, she recovers. In the article “Breast Cancer and the ‘Unnatural’ Woman in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*,” Leah Larson points out that when Lady Delacour participates in “unnatural” activities or makes “unnatural” choices for a woman, such as sending her child away and dressing up as a man for a duel, she becomes an “unnatural” woman and her injured breast is symbolic of this “unnaturalness” (195-98). However, once Lady Delacour begins to reflect and learn (thanks to Belinda), she reforms and is reunited with her daughter and husband. Consequently, her breast is healed as well. According to Larson, that “Lady Delacour’s breast cancer appeared and disappeared so easily indicates that Edgeworth was aware of the accepted medical concept of the time that breast cancer could be both caused and cured by changes in the patient’s emotional state” (198). Hence, Lady Delacour’s “unnaturalness” and her injured breast are healed with the cleansing that comes from introspection, realization, and reformation. Although Edgeworth reinforces traditional roles of motherhood and emphasizes the significance of the domestic sphere by rewarding Lady Delacour for embracing her responsibility as a mother, Edgeworth nevertheless considers (like Wollstonecraft) reason, strength of mind, moral courage (or what Wollstonecraft views as a strong character), enlarged

understanding, and parental affection as essential qualities for a reputable woman, a good mother, and an effective educator.

Both Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth were also concerned with the dangers of an improper education. Wollstonecraft argues that women are similar to soldiers:

The great misfortune is this, that they both [women and soldiers] acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have, from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. (34)

Wollstonecraft desires for women to receive a rational education that will “[s]trengthen the female mind by enlarging it” so that “there will be an end to blind obedience” (34). Wollstonecraft addresses the dangers of naïveté in women throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, arguing vehemently against Rousseau’s educational treatise *Emile* (1762) and his views of the ideal woman, which would require a woman to be submissive, dependent on man, naïve, and live to please her husband. Specifically, Wollstonecraft supports the philosophy of reason and attacks the overemphasis on the philosophy of sensibility, stating that “I may be allowed to infer that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly, and I must again repeat, that sensibility is not reason” (82-83). Wollstonecraft, as does Edgeworth, views the popularity of a woman’s sensibility as a danger to reason and attempts to point out to her readers the foolishness of this attitude: “Yet, when the sensibility is thus increased at the

expeñce of reason, and even the imagination, why do philosophical men complain of [women's] fickleness?" (83). Of course, Wollstonecraft supports the cultivation of the heart and the understanding (85). For Wollstonecraft, it was the sacrifice of reason (or the lessening of its importance) and the unhealthy focus on sensibility that was dangerous.

Similar to Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth supports the school of reason and attacks the school of sensibility. Not only do Caroline and Julia illustrate this debate in *Letters for Literary Ladies*—as has been previously discussed—but Virginia in *Belinda* also demonstrates the dangers of a naïve education that nourishes sensibility to the exclusion of rationality. In Virginia, Edgeworth provides an example of a woman cut off from the public, intellectual side of life and raised to be naïve and ignorant. Virginia is left completely unprepared to know how to monitor her emotions and make wise decisions since she is fed an overabundance of romantic novels, which overemphasizes the role of sensibility, and is only allowed to talk to her benefactor Clarence Hervey, her clergyman Mr. Moreton, and her governess Mrs. Ormond. James Newcomer comments on the realism of Virginia's unusual upbringing in his biography of Maria Edgeworth: "[t]his situation is less absurd for Maria than it is for her readers, for Mr. Edgeworth's good friend Thomas Day had once taken two young girls to rear with the intention of making one of them his wife" (53). Although Edgeworth was familiar with the concept of molding an ideal wife, Elizabeth Harden states in her biography of the author that Edgeworth "admitted that in the Hervey-Virginia experiment her attempt to join truth and fiction did not succeed, since the contrast between the fictional Hervey and the real-life

Thomas Day was much too pronounced” (55). While the character of Virginia may seem unbelievable, Edgeworth drew it from real life in an attempt to make her point that limiting a woman’s education, as Clarence did with Virginia, could potentially destroy not only the woman’s happiness but also the happiness of the man to whom she is to be married, as well as that of others around her. Due to her lack of an appropriate education, prudent advice, and reason, Virginia almost causes Hervey, Belinda, and herself to lose their true loves and be destined for an unhappy life, indicating that, like Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth views the reliance that many women placed in sensibility as a threat and desires women to use reason to guide their hearts.

Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft saw another problem in women’s education: the overemphasis on superficial accomplishments at the expense of acquiring a cultivated understanding. Discussing the early education of girls, Wollstonecraft explains, “For the little knowledge that they are led to acquire, during the important years of youth, is merely relative to accomplishments; and accomplishments without a bottom, for unless the understanding be cultivated, superficial and monotonous is every grace” (211). For Wollstonecraft, superficial accomplishments consisted of dancing, music, dress, and “*coming out* in the fashionable world” (212, italics in original). Wollstonecraft argues that by focusing on their outward appearances women’s minds become vain and empty (211-12). Instead, Wollstonecraft desires for both boys and girls to learn “as life advanced, dancing, music, and drawing [. . .] as relaxations” rather than as their main accomplishments (212). Wollstonecraft views a focus on reason and a cultivation of the understanding as the best kind of education. In fact, Wollstonecraft claims:

The woman who has dedicated a considerable portion of her time to pursuits purely intellectual, and whose affections have been exercised by humane plans of usefulness, must have more purity of mind, as a natural consequence, than the ignorant beings whose time and thoughts have been occupied by gay pleasures or schemes to conquer hearts. (153-54)

Hence, Wollstonecraft considers an emphasis on intellectual accomplishments as much more beneficial for the well-being of a woman than an unhealthy focus on superficial accomplishments that destroys the usefulness of a woman's mind.

Like Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth prizes intellectual accomplishments over superficial accomplishments. In "Answer to the Preceding Letter" from *Letters for Literary Ladies*, a father (whose arguments and views were, more than likely, similar to those of Edgeworth's own father) replies to his friend's letter (representative of Thomas Day's conservative views on women) and discusses his plans for his newborn daughter's future education. Summing up his educational plan, the father states:

I should rather, in female education, cultivate the general powers of the mind than any particular faculty [. . .] I wish to give her the habit of industry and attention, the love of knowledge and the power of reasoning: these will enable her to attain excellence in any pursuit of science or of literature. (73-74)

Thus, early on in her career, Edgeworth desired to cultivate the understanding by improving a woman's knowledge and increasing her desire to learn. Edgeworth, furthermore, desires for women to learn "the power of reasoning" and that by acquiring

these intellectual accomplishments women would receive more opportunities to follow pursuits that would make them and their friends happy (74). Also, by using their reason, women would be more prone to make wise choices rather than basing many decisions on their momentary feelings. In “Letters of Julia and Caroline,” Julia is aghast at the thought of her friend Caroline’s advice to use reason. Julia writes, “In vain, dear Caroline, you urge me to *think*, I profess only to *feel*. `Reflect upon my own feelings! analyze my notions of happiness! explain to you my system!’” (1, italics in original). Edgeworth depicts Julia’s dependence on sensibility and her refusal to reflect and to use reason in order to examine herself and her motives as responsible for her eventual demise. Similar to Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth considers the use of reason and the cultivation of understanding—i.e. intellectual accomplishments—as the foundation of a proper moral education, which will enable girls to mature into responsible women with happy and successful lives.

By arguing for women to learn how to use their reasoning powers instead of relying on their feelings, Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth were attempting to help women expand their freedom and power. In fact, Wollstonecraft argues that in order for women “[t]o become respectable, the exercise of their understanding is necessary, there is no other foundation for independence of character; I mean explicitly to say that they must only bow to the authority of reason, instead of being the *modest* slaves of opinion” (67, italics in original). Hence, Wollstonecraft views reason as the key to releasing women from the bond of slavery to men. Wollstonecraft acknowledges that “[w]omen, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil [sic]; but they are *human* duties, and the principles that

should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same” (67, italics in original). Allowing women to learn how to cultivate their own understanding and reasoning powers gives women the opportunity to use their own intellect to make better decisions rather than being forced to rely upon men. Wollstonecraft states, “Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens” (186).

Wollstonecraft desires for women to receive a rational education that will enable them to escape from the bondage of relying on their sensibility and man’s intellect.

Edgeworth also wants women to be viewed as the equal companions of men rather than as inferior and weaker beings. Lady Anne Percival in *Belinda* dramatizes Wollstonecraft’s main argument for how a woman should be the rational companion of man and not be excluded from intellectual conversations. Lady Anne is depicted as the perfect wife by accumulating “much accurate knowledge, and a taste for literature, which made her the chosen companion of her husband’s understanding, as well as of his heart” (216). Well educated and well read, Lady Anne makes it unnecessary for Mr. Percival “to reserve his conversation for friends of his own sex, nor [is] he forced to seclude himself in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge; the partner of his warmest affections [is] also the partner of his most serious occupations” (216). Lady Anne is not excluded from her husband’s intellectual debates but on the contrary becomes an active participant in them.

Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth posit that by allowing both women and men to benefit from a rational education not only would husbands and wives be more likely to enjoy a happier marriage but the children also would prosper from being instructed by such rational parents. Attempting to emphasize how much men and women influence each other, Wollstonecraft claims, “The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other. This I believe to be an indisputable truth, extending it to every virtue” (174). Not surprisingly, Wollstonecraft desires for parents to be good, rational examples for their children. In fact, she states that “the parent, who sets a good example, patiently lets that example work; and it seldom fails to produce its natural effect -- filial reverence. Children cannot be taught too early to submit to reason” (193). Wollstonecraft argues for parents to model appropriate behavior to their children. In addition, Wollstonecraft believes that parents should reason with their children rather than force them through parental authority into blind obedience:

It is easier, I grant, to command than reason; but it does not follow from hence that children cannot comprehend the reason why they are made to do certain things habitually: for, from a steady adherence to a few simple principles of conduct flows that salutary power which a judicious parent gradually gains over a child’s mind. (194)

Wollstonecraft argues that children should be explained the reasons why parents ask them to behave a certain way and that parents should take the responsibility to set a good example for their children.

Likewise, Edgeworth desires for parents to treat children like rational beings so that the children may begin to acquire reasoning powers at an early age. In *Practical Education*, Edgeworth argues that parents need to have a proper plan “with regard to the understanding and the moral habits” in order to provide a proper education for their children (282-83). Edgeworth claims that if parents choose to use “rational instruction” to teach their children, then if sent to public school the children’s “superiority in intellect and in conduct will quickly appear” (282-83). Thus, Edgeworth views rationality and moral instruction as vital qualities of a proper education and posits that including them should produce a virtuous and intelligent child. As though illustrating this point, in “The Birth-Day Present,” one of her children’s stories, Edgeworth depicts the loveable protagonist Rosamond as being taught reasoning by her father, who explains to Rosamond both her cousin Bell’s naughtiness and what constitutes true kindness (2114-21). Rosamond’s mother and father use the strategy of asking her several thought-provoking questions, such as why she does certain actions and whether these actions are useful or not. When Rosamond shows the beautiful but fragile basket that is to be her cousin Bell’s present, her father asks, ““But what is the use of *the poor handle* [. . .] if we are not to take hold of it?”” (2114, italics in original). Her father continues to ask questions in order to help Rosamond come to the conclusion that it is foolish both to give a present that does not serve a purpose and to give a present only because other people are going to (2115). Rosamond is taught the importance of reasoning by her parents and how this skill can help her to reach logical conclusions, demonstrating how parents

should not underestimate their children but ought to teach them how to acquire their own reasoning powers.

As has been mentioned previously, Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth believed the benefits of obtaining a rational education would allow women to attain more freedom in society and more control over their own lives; interestingly, one of the opportunities that would become more available to women was that of female authorship. Of course, there were many female writers prior to Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth; however, women writers were usually under close scrutiny and their literary works were often undervalued by men. In fact, some men, such as Thomas Day, believed that women should not even be published (though Edgeworth's father did not agree with Day on this topic, Day's influence hindered Edgeworth from being published until Day's death). Hence, simply by being published (both by the radical publisher J. Johnson) and especially under their own names rather than under pseudonyms, Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth were reacting against the belief that women should stay away from the public eye and from being published authors. Throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft attacks overly conservative male and female authors who undervalue women's ability to reason. She states, "Indignantly have I heard women argue in the same track as men, and adopt the sentiments that brutalize them, with all the pertinacity of ignorance" (128). Wollstonecraft concerns herself with the dangers of how women were accustomed to being treated. Attempting to appeal to her female readers rationally, Wollstonecraft states, "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of

perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone” (13, italics in original). Not only did Wollstonecraft’s act of publishing place her in a position where she was scrutinized by society, but her approach of rational argumentation also could have been viewed as a threat to men’s authority, since it was traditionally a man’s role to reason and a woman’s role to be pleasing. It should not be surprising that Wollstonecraft was shunned by many writers (both men and women) as a radical feminist author. However, her literary works, especially *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, had a significant impact on her society with several women being inspired by her example either to adopt some of her theories or to react strongly against them. Either way, Wollstonecraft’s views became well known and helped to introduce her society to a new perspective of women and their roles.

Though Wollstonecraft was much bolder in voicing her opinions concerning women’s rights, Edgeworth still desired to improve women’s status by encouraging them to acquire a proper moral education that emphasized the importance of rationality. Furthermore, her decisions to be published under her own name, knowing this was an act that was against the deceased Day’s wishes, and to argue in her first published work, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, for women to have the right to be authors were bold moves, since she (like Wollstonecraft but not as directly challenging to the status quo) was also placing herself in a position where she could be praised or criticized for her arguments. Most likely due to her kind, reformatory approach, readers reacted in a positive manner to her literary work. As she continued to improve as a writer and develop her educational philosophy, she became a popular and respected author. Published only a few years after Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Edgeworth’s *Letters for Literary*

Ladies does not address her readers directly since it is written in an epistolary fashion, but she also uses a rational approach and argues against excluding women from science and literature (74). In *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*, Marilyn Butler points out that Edgeworth “joined the group of rational women writers of this period whose first novels were so to speak anti-novels” (307). Edgeworth, of course, disapproved of sentimental novels that encouraged women to trust their feelings rather than their common sense, so it is not surprising that she chose a rational approach (similar to Wollstonecraft). Hence, many of Edgeworth’s views in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (and in many of her later literary works) agree with Wollstonecraft’s ideals set forth in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Admittedly, Edgeworth most likely would have recoiled at the thought of being called a radical feminist like Wollstonecraft, but odds are, the motivating factor behind her aversion to the comparison would be due to how her contemporary society would have attacked her reputation, which, for women, was considered *most* precious and if lost would destroy their station and respectable prospects in society. Nevertheless, Edgeworth’s views are rather similar—some are almost identical—to Wollstonecraft’s.

Interestingly, one of the most popular attacks on Wollstonecraft was based on a misunderstanding (or a deliberate distortion, perhaps) of her argument that women should be more masculine. In her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft explains what exactly she means by trying to encourage women to be more masculine:

I presume that *rational* men will excuse me for endeavouring to persuade [women] to become more masculine and respectable. Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life. (15, italics in original)

Wollstonecraft does not desire women to become masculine physically (though she does not want them to be excessively weak to the point at which they are ill, which was a popular trend in the eighteenth century), but she wants women to acquire a “masculine” understanding, i.e., a rational understanding, and to act accordingly.

Edgeworth also distinguishes between masculine manners and masculine understanding. In her article “The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth’s Female Philosopher,” Deborah Weiss claims that “Edgeworth’s innovative theories of sex and gender constitute a contribution to Enlightenment moral philosophy that has not yet been recognized” (443). Weiss concludes that Edgeworth contrasts two types of female philosophers in *Belinda*: the “false female philosopher” Harriet Freke and the “true” female philosopher Belinda (444). Although many readers may believe that Harriet Freke is a caricature of Wollstonecraft, Weiss explains that “the intellectual distance between the two [Freke and Wollstonecraft] is enormous” (445). In fact, Weiss explains further that Freke is the “false female philosopher” because she is masculine in manners, not in understanding, and Wollstonecraft herself acknowledges the differences between masculine manners and manly virtues in her introduction to *A Vindication of the*

Rights of Woman. Weiss suggests that “Edgeworth uses the false female philosopher to separate manners from morals, external characteristics from internal principles” (448). Since Freke, obviously, exemplifies the negative qualities of masculine manners as a false female philosopher, Belinda becomes the example of the true female philosopher “with her principled mind and rational self-control, [which] clearly exhibits the virtues that the culture believed stemmed from a masculine understanding” (Weiss 448-49). Freke has masculine manners, an unappealing quality, but Belinda has a masculine understanding (in other words, a reasonable mind), which Edgeworth presents as appealing. Weiss comments on how Edgeworth uses Belinda’s analytical and reasonable mind (her “masculine understanding”) to show how a woman who has become educated and accumulates a good amount of knowledge can employ her understanding to help those she cares about; Belinda is not only capable of refuting Freke’s arguments, but at the end of the story, she is able to reveal Freke as being the “ghost” that haunts Lady Delacour. Although some parts of Freke’s arguments, such as claiming to be “a champion for the Rights of Women,” do seem to be aimed at Wollstonecraft, it seems as though Edgeworth undercuts this possible allusion by making Freke a hypocrite—which might mean that though advocating that she desired to help women, Freke’s rude way of attempting to reach this goal was actually hurting their cause (*Belinda* 229). In fact, it seems as though Edgeworth faults Freke’s harsh approach to improving the status of women more than Freke’s goal (*Belinda* 230). More than likely, if Edgeworth was criticizing Wollstonecraft, it was not her views that she saw as flawed but her brutal frontal attack on society, since Edgeworth was a faithful believer in the power of

reforming, whether it was pedagogical practices or women's roles in society. Edgeworth rejected bold challenges in favor of a strategically reformatory approach.

As if making it clear that Freke is not Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth depicts Freke as refusing to reform her masculine manners, reflect upon her conduct, or read in order to improve her mind—all of which Wollstonecraft considers as vital in order for a woman to become a rational individual. In fact, when Freke is talking and debating with Belinda, she exclaims, “I did not know you were a reading girl. So did I once! but I never read now. Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for those who can't think for themselves—but when one has made up one's opinions, there is no use in reading”

(227). Belinda replies in calm defense, stating that “I read that I may think for myself”

(227). Belinda's response is more reasonable, since if people chose to follow Freke's argument, the decision not to read anymore once a conclusion has been reached would limit them from considering other thoughts, approaches, and opinions, which would stop them from changing their minds in order to reach a better conclusion. In addition, Freke appears to be exactly the kind of woman Wollstonecraft denounces in her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

[F]rom every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry. (12)

Edgeworth depicts Freke as exactly this kind of masculine character, who encourages dueling (in fact, she was the one who helped manipulate Lady Delacour into a duel),

enjoys dressing as a man, and likes to hunt. Instead of reflecting and reforming, Freke's stubbornness continues, and she refuses to change her mind and to become a member of a better society. As a result, she is the one character who is punished by being physically injured. In fact, Freke's leg is injured to the extent that she can no longer wear men's clothing, which was one of her immoral, masculine mannered tricks that she would use to perform various mischievous acts, such as haunting Lady Delacour and frightening Juba. Hence, Freke's refusal to reflect and reform eventually causes her physical pain and embarrassment, which coincides with Wollstonecraft's desire for women to reflect and use their reason.

Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft not only view reasoning and reflecting as important to a proper moral education but also consider strength of mind as a vital quality as well. Wollstonecraft claims, "I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body" (13-14). Throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft attempts to encourage women to strengthen their minds and argues that the current system of education is flawed and that "women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue" (28). Placing herself in the category of one who has attained a reasonable mind, Wollstonecraft states, "Thanks to that Being who [. . .] gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex" (49). Wollstonecraft believes that strength of mind can help women to have the moral courage to use their reason.

Similar to Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth views strength of mind as a necessary quality as well. In *Helen*, the importance of attaining strength of mind is a dominant theme. The eponymous protagonist learns the benefits of a strong mind and the consequences of lacking moral courage. Helen's friend Cecilia lacks the moral courage to tell her husband the truth about a past admirer, and due to Helen's inconsistent strength of mind and her friend's lack thereof, both women attempt to hide the truth from Cecilia's husband, causing much unhappiness for both them and their love interests. However, once Cecilia summons the courage and strength of mind to tell the truth, a happy ending not only becomes possible but basically occurs: Helen is married, it is hinted that Cecilia is going to be reunited with her husband, and the only unhappy part of the ending is Lady Davenant's death. Interestingly, Edgeworth traces Cecilia's fear of telling the truth to her early childhood education in which she learned to be excessively fearful of her mother's harsh disapproval. Edgeworth explains that the common moral of *Helen* was of course the "wish to abide by truth," but that the moral she is concerned with can be found in the character of Lady Davenant:

[T]hat mothers talented mothers should take care not to make their children afraid of them so as to prevent them from telling the truth & trusting them with their faults & secrets at the time when youth most want another's counsel & assistance. (qtd. in Butler 475-76)

Edgeworth goes on to summarize that "In short the moral of Lady Davenant's character is that talents should make themselves objects of Love not fear" (qtd. in Butler 476). Hence, Edgeworth had in mind throughout *Helen* the powerful effects that a mother has

on her children and how a mother who educates her child through fear rather than love does the child serious injury. Having learned to fear at an early age, Cecilia does not confide in her mother—thereby, not benefiting from her mother’s advice—and lacks sufficient strength of mind to tell the truth, thereby harming both herself and others. For Edgeworth, an early education can determine whether a child will mature into an adult who will attain the necessary strength of mind in order for a woman (or man, for that matter) to act rationally and morally.

Although Edgeworth may not have been as “radically” daring as Wollstonecraft, she still challenged the prevailing attitudes toward women and their education. Instead of criticizing the current pedagogical practices of the time from outside commonly accepted social bounds like Wollstonecraft did, Edgeworth kindly reformed from within the patriarchal system in which she lived, correcting the misconceptions of her society about domesticity and the importance of a woman’s education. Edgeworth was concerned with giving children and adults alike a moral, rational education, and she used her fictional and nonfictional works to further this goal. Reasoning, reflection, and strength of mind were valued by both Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft as important practices necessary to construct an intelligent, moral individual and to improve women’s status in society. Edgeworth’s didacticism and concern with educating her readers proves Edgeworth’s dedication to the moral development of her readers no matter their age or gender.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION:

EDGEWORTH'S EDUCATIONAL UTOPIA

After examining in chapter one the similarities between Edgeworth's and Scott's vision of a place where women could be independent and free from the male-dominated society that surrounded them, it becomes obvious that Edgeworth also had utopian leanings that were feminist in nature. In both Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Edgeworth's *Belinda*, moral education is depicted as the means to achieving a happy, prosperous society for women. In "Sarah Scott's 'Attick School': Moral Philosophy, Ethical Agency, and *Millenium Hall*," Deborah Weiss posits that the two visitors of Millenium Hall were to experience a specific result: "The outcome of the experience, the product of this voyage in and out of the philosophical realm, is to be moral transformation, not just of the gentleman and his traveling companion, but of the reader as well" (460). Many of Edgeworth's heroes and heroines learn to be better, moral individuals (such as Belinda, Lady Delacour, Clarence Hervey, Cecilia, Helen, Lord Glenthorn, and many more). Nevertheless, Edgeworth, like Scott, did not wish for her vision to only exist in the written word; Edgeworth desired for her readers to gain new insights by reading her novels, or "moral tales," and to experience a "moral transformation" as well. By demonstrating how women could live happily and independently—all thanks to a proper moral education—, Scott and Edgeworth model for their readers the ways women could improve both themselves and their situations in society.

Once the positive, utopian aspects to Edgeworth's writing are acknowledged, the Burney and Edgeworth chapter allows readers to see where Edgeworth agrees with and differs from one of her favorite authors, whom she respected immensely. Although Edgeworth implements many of the same plot elements as Burney's *Evelina*, Edgeworth's *Belinda* departs from Burney in its hopeful tone, practical solutions, and clearly moral message. By noting where Edgeworth separates herself from Burney, this chapter shows that readers should see that Edgeworth not only criticizes society but also offers a plan to improve it. Burney critiques men harshly in *Evelina*, but Edgeworth reforms them (like Clarence Hervey in *Belinda*). Furthermore, Burney questions *Evelina*'s secluded education, but Edgeworth not only attacks Virginia's similar educational experience as a clearly inefficient education for a woman but also offers *Belinda*'s education under the guidance of the moral Percival family as the ideal way to educate young women. Thus, Edgeworth was a devoted reformer who did not see criticism as sufficient in itself but believed that a practical plan, one based on reason rather than emotions, was needed in order to ameliorate both society and women's positions in that society.

Knowing that Edgeworth was not only aware of but also involved in the 1790s debate concerning women's moral education allows readers to see her in a new light. Rather than considering her as a conservative in the camp of Hannah More, this chapter argues that Edgeworth was actually a covert feminist who was more on the side of Wollstonecraft. Both Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft viewed education as the way to liberate women. Although Wollstonecraft was much more vocal and harsh in her

approach to speaking about women and the contemporary educational system, Edgeworth also criticized the current pedagogical practices of the time and argued for women to be taught as the intellectual equals to men who should rely upon sense rather than sensibility to guide them throughout life. Hence, this chapter helps place Edgeworth in the larger context and debate of the 1790s concerning women's education. It also pulls from several of her texts, which helps to show how Edgeworth's theory of moral education continues in her later literary works as well, such as *Helen*.

The feminist undertones and the role of moral education as a way to further feminist views are throughout Edgeworth's works. In another study, it would be beneficial to examine how Edgeworth depicts her male protagonists, such as in *Ennui* and *Castle Rackrent*, and the role moral education plays in those characters' lives. Would men's moral education be the same as women's? Most likely, Edgeworth would answer with a resounding yes. Nevertheless, in order to more fully appreciate Edgeworth's theory of moral education, an in-depth analysis on men's roles in Edgeworth's works would be a rewarding endeavor. Furthermore, such an analysis would allow readers to see how Edgeworth remained consistent and true to her belief that a proper moral education based upon reason for both men and women was the way to make utopia a reality. Edgeworth was a practical writer and thinker, who did not believe in giving up on society and what it could achieve *if* it were filled with properly educated citizens.

Other aspects of Edgeworth's work that deserve to be studied in the context of her focus on education that could prove to be a productive area of research on Edgeworth would be on the role of moral education in Edgeworth's literature for children. Often

called a “children’s writer,” Edgeworth wrote both stories for children and educational treatises for how to educate children; she even included child characters in her adult fiction. As an educator, Edgeworth desired for children—both boys and girls—to receive the best education possible. An examination into Edgeworth’s educational theories would be a great place to see how a moral education is depicted in both her adult literary works and her literature for and about children.

Contextualizing Edgeworth and understanding how she not only fits into the contemporary debate concerning moral education but also how she contributes to that debate allow readers to see and appreciate how Edgeworth brings her own views on the ways to improve the educational system to the forefront of her literary works. For Edgeworth, writing was not just for entertaining; it was for educating her readers no matter their age or gender. By placing her within the context of other women writers such as Scott, Burney, and Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth’s contribution to the debate about moral education reveals embedded feminist ideals. Like several of her fellow women writers, Edgeworth saw education as the means to women’s intellectual equality to men and women’s right to be happy, independent individuals. Though she is frequently viewed as a conservative or reactionary writer, this thesis finds Edgeworth to actually be a devoted educator, a social reformer, and a covert feminist.

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