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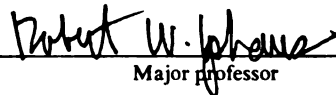
**Maria Edgeworth: Power, Authority and Didacticism
at the Margins of the Enlightenment**

presented by

Andrea Alice Kaitany

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Ph.D degree in English


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MARIA EDGEWORTH: POWER, AUTHORITY AND DIDACTICISM
AT THE MARGINS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

By

Andrea Alice Kaitany

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

MARIA EDGEWORTH: POWER, AUTHORITY AND DIDACTICISM AT THE MARGINS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

By

Andrea Alice Kaitany

This study presents evidence for viewing Edgeworth as a major figure in Enlightenment thought through a consideration of her educational theory and didactic fiction. Through the rhetoric of science Edgeworth created an authoritative writing voice for herself as a rational domestic observer. Using the authority gained from her minute observations of domestic life, Edgeworth explored the ways in which gender and class figured in the power arrangements of both the domestic and the public spheres.

Edgeworth exploited the established rhetorics of science and politics to question the exclusion of women from rational discourse. The power relationships within the family, Edgeworth suggests, are the model and the mirror for public relationships. But rather than a comfortable picture of the middle class family, Edgeworth shows us a family in which a gender-based dichotomy of virtue and values is at the root of confusion, deception and incomprehensibility.

Through an examination of Practical Education, Letters for Literary Ladies, Leonora, Belinda, and Helen the study demonstrates Edgeworth's deft interrogation of Enlightenment views of power, authority and didacticism.

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Dr. Robert Bataille, Dr. Kathleen Hickok and Dr. William McCarthy at Iowa State University first led me to the neglected work of early women writers, an interest that eventually inspired this project.

Finally, as Edgeworth often reiterates, the domestic is central. My family provided support both personal and epistolary. My three delightful children, Kip-chumba, Kibor, and Jerotich provided company and distraction along with the effects of their touching trust. It is impossible to express

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of feminist criticism, and particularly the insistence of feminist critics that "minor" women writers hold crucial information on the understanding of intellectual history, has resulted in new life for Edgeworth and her contemporaries. Some women writers, like Aphra Behn and Frances Burney, have even gained grudging acceptance into the academic canon. As work on women writers gains academic legitimacy, book chapters, articles and dissertations on Edgeworth gradually proliferate, along with those devoted to other "minor" women writers. Yet, as Mitzi Myers has noted, Edgeworth's work continues to suffer in comparison to some of her contemporaries due in part to twentieth-century literary tastes (Myers 70). Many critics seem to avoid careful study of Edgeworth, assuming as Dale Spender has commented on Edgeworth's status as a "didactic" writer: "When William Shakespeare explored the flaws of character it was called tragedy; when Maria Edgeworth undertakes a similar exploration it is called didacticism" (Spender 241). Elizabeth Harden paraphrases the attitude of many twentieth-century critics when she notes that Edgeworth's strong social concerns may have lessened the "artistic" value of her work. "Since she utilized fiction largely as a teaching device for propagating

her father's educational theories and methods, a study of her art may at first seem a useless undertaking" (10).¹

Edgeworth was never as thoroughly "forgotten" or repressed as some of her contemporaries, as may be noted by the selections of letters and brief biographies beginning with Frances Edgeworth's Memoirs (1867) and continuing to appear up to the publication in 1972 of Marilyn Butler's exceptional literary biography. But the publication of Butler's work, coinciding with a general resurgence of interest in early women writers, marks the commencement of a new phase in Edgeworth scholarship. Butler's work is carefully researched and concisely written. The author's main intent is to re-open critical consideration of Edgeworth. Butler's biography predates much of the feminist and new historical theory and criticism that underpin my own work and make Edgeworth's combination of social and cultural circumstances with her literary career so fascinating to me. As Butler herself mentions in her introduction to the 1987 reissue of Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, contemporary critical context is crucial to any project and she notes that specific consideration of or engagement with issues raised by Marxist and feminist criticism would have modified her previous projects, including her biography of Edgeworth. Nevertheless, Butler's careful examination of Edgeworth's political and cultural contexts has created a solid foundation for further readings and discussions of Edgeworth, including my own.

My goal in the present study is not to vindicate Edgeworth's reputation as an "artist." Rather, following Butler's lead, I would like to demonstrate Edgeworth's importance to our understanding of many issues that we now view as crucial in developing our own world view. Critics are continuously elucidating the many ways in which fiction explicates a particular time and particular social and cultural values.² Recently, Nancy Armstrong has constructed a coherent theory for explaining the interaction between women writers of didactic fiction and the development of a whole society's world view. Armstrong's argument, that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the setting for crucial developments in Western cultural history (Armstrong 37), is in fact the starting point of my argument. The coincidence of the French Revolution, industrialization and the development of modern scientific paradigms was the crucible of not only the English Enlightenment, but of the modern liberal humanist perspective.³ Edgeworth's educational theory and fiction, written at the center of this paradigmatic shift, provides us the opportunity to explore the shift in world views through the applied observations of a highly conscious, deliberate and insightful thinker. Through careful reading of Edgeworth's works, one can gain insight into the interrelationships among the issues of gender, class and scientific and political authority as Edgeworth explores and exploits her own position and that of her female characters.

Armstrong's theory that "women's fiction" of the late eighteenth century is deeply implicated in the development of modern forms of power and political organization is itself a powerful tool. I must note, however, that I am attributing to Edgeworth a far greater individual role in dissecting and examining the real application of social theory than I think Armstrong allows. Armstrong states that in women's fiction of the period, "gender collaborates with class to contain forms of political resistance within liberal discourse" (26). I will demonstrate how Edgeworth did indeed use the rhetoric of political liberalism to legitimize her own views on social organization. But I disagree with Armstrong when she characterizes the work of Edgeworth along with other women writers as having "worked together in an unwitting conspiracy that would eventually authorize modern institutional procedures" (37). Edgeworth must be given credit for her unusual ability to use common generalizations about gender and class at the same time that she questions and explores the limits of those concepts. As I will illustrate through careful reading of Practical Education and several of Edgeworth's "domestic" novels, Edgeworth continually examines her own reasoning and that of others for evidence of hypocrisy or even "unwitting" complicity with systems of thought that would diminish women's intellectual and moral capability or responsibility. Her insistence on examination, in fact, leads her to doubts and ambivalence concerning the liberal

scientific political agenda as her career progresses. Therefore, I have deliberately suggested in my title that Edgeworth's work explores the margins of Enlightenment thought, those places where confusion and discontinuity become most evident. Acknowledging these differences from Armstrong, however, only emphasizes my conviction that she is correct in assigning major political importance to late eighteenth-century women's fiction.

An illustration of the difficulties of categorizing Edgeworth within Enlightenment thought may be found in Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's study Their Father's Daughters. Following the established critical tradition of attributing much of Edgeworth's ideology to the direct interference of her father, R.L. Edgeworth, Kowaleski-Wallace makes the case for Edgeworth as a promoter of "new style patriarchy" that educated women and children in deference to patriarchal authority "without any visible coercive force" (17). She argues that this new patriarchy is particularly effective because "no obvious signs of tyranny or repression exist and, on the other hand, the girl child has internalized the voice of paternal authority as her own" (21). Kowaleski-Wallace argues that when educational theorists such as the Edgeworths hold out for women the possibility of near social equality with men, it is always at the price of accepting and supporting the legitimacy of the patriarchal dichotomy of rational versus irrational. Women may be accepted as

"rational," but "the categories that resulted in the problematic categorization of the female character in the first place" (107) are never questioned. It is clear that Edgeworth is committed to the Enlightenment ideal of rationality. However, it is unfair to argue, as Kowaleski-Wallace does, that this commitment is a sign that Edgeworth's only project is to "make claims for women in response to an agenda already set by the fathers" (108). In order to understand Edgeworth's response to gender issues, one must also account for her class and political affiliations. Gender is an important component of identity, but for Edgeworth, as for most people, gender identity interacts with other measures of identity such as her association with the non-aristocratic scientific reformers of the Birmingham Lunar Circle. The Edgeworths and others clearly saw themselves as members of an emerging "rational" class. Further, Edgeworth herself was aware of the ways in which various levels of authority - familial, social, and political- could interact. As she wrote to an American friend in 1831, at the time of the Nat Turner rebellion, "The instructors of the people do not seem to consider sufficiently that it is not sufficient or rather it is too much to set the intellect marching unless they clearly know and can direct to what good purpose it is marching; to give power without the certain and good direction of that power is most dangerous either in mechanics or education--or legislation" (Education of the Heart 213). This comment

clearly indicates that Edgeworth was aware that there were parameters of power within which a writer of educational theory and fiction "should" work. She was also aware of the greater social and political issues implicated in writing didactic fiction. My project will be to examine Edgeworth's concept of those "parameters of intellect" as she uses the rhetorics of science and politics to explore the education of the individual.

The rhetoric of science is of particular interest. Edgeworth's father was an inventor and theorist who suggested the use of a "scientific" model involving direct observation for the formulation of Edgeworth's educational theory.⁴ As I will detail in my reading of Practical Education, Edgeworth used the emerging rhetoric of science in ways parallel to Priestley and other "natural philosophers" who were also social reformers. While Edgeworth's gender may seem a liability when considered in light of our general understanding that female authorship was not widely accepted at this time,⁵ early modern science did in fact legitimize rhetorical space for women in two ways. First, as women educated the young, it gradually became expected that mothers and other educators should have at least some basic knowledge of the natural sciences to ensure that they passed on accurate information to their children. Second, as Anne Shteir has documented, a general knowledge of science was seen as "an antidote to frivolity and an alternative to the dangers of the

card table" (2). Many women, as Shteir illustrates, published "conversations" or "letters" that explained basic scientific facts and principles, presumably to be read by other women. Edgeworth's Practical Education, however, is something quite different and more charged with specific political references than the work of such popularizers of science as Sarah Trimmer or Priscilla Wakefield. Edgeworth's work does more than explain scientific principles. Using her supposedly gender-specific opportunities for close domestic observation of children, Edgeworth creates new scientific theory about the most effective and useful methods of education. She claims the authority of a scientific observer and theorist for herself. Edgeworth's successful adoption of a voice of authority traditionally reserved for men is an area that has been overlooked for too long by critics. In assuming this voice of cultural authority, Edgeworth creates a new status for herself: the woman as scientific domestic observer. As a number of critics have noted⁶, the observer is a politically and culturally powerful icon in late-eighteenth-century culture. Having assumed this authority in Practical Education, Edgeworth explores both the powers and limitations of this status through many of her fictional works.

In exploring the interlocking themes of gender, class and scientific authority in Edgeworth's works, I have chosen to focus on Practical Education, Letters for Literary Ladies, Leonora, Belinda, and Helen. These works deal directly with

hierarchy. Edmund Burke is the leading spokesman for this group. They saw the French Revolution and its aftermath as illustrations of the result of the breakdown of traditional civil order. On the other hand, reform-minded Britons such as Joseph Priestley saw the French Revolution as an example of man's ability to rearrange and restructure his political organization to better meet his social needs. Even when disillusioned by the events of the Reign of Terror, these reformers tended to trust that man's inherent rational abilities would allow people to eventually reformulate their political systems on a more equitable basis. Rather than trusting to accepted wisdom, the reformers wished to use "objective" observations of physical and social occurrences to analyze causes and consequences. They used the metaphor of unveiling and exposure that dominated the newly emerging scientific rhetoric to explain their impatience with traditional political hierarchy. The basis of traditional social hierarchy was obscure, and therefore not available for direct examination. Using the "natural philosopher's" argument that causes should be discoverable through direct rational observation, the reformers argued that only political and social authority that could withstand rational scrutiny could be considered legitimate. To prepare the young men of the manufacturing classes to make these observations accurately and rationally, Priestley and others advocated

specific educational programs focusing on practical subjects such as accounting and modern languages.

Although the educational concerns of Priestley and other proponents of "rational" liberal political and economic reform were generally focused on the education of the young men of the manufacturing class, the increased status they accorded to individual observation opened new possibilities for women writers. Association with revolutionary sentiment could be dangerous for any writer, but particularly for a woman, as evidenced in the personal attacks leveled at Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams. But the rhetoric of scientific observation could provide a relatively safe entry for women writers into discussions of power and authority. Maria Edgeworth, along with Priscilla Wakefield, Sarah Trimmer, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and a number of other female educational theorists, found an authoritative writing voice in the discourse of scientific rationality. Edgeworth developed this strategy in Letters for Literary Ladies and Practical Education and then explored ways of applying it to didactic fiction in her later works.

My examination of Belinda and Leonora emphasizes Edgeworth's concern with the use of domestic observation to empower individual women. Belinda is able to help both herself and Lady Delacour to establish satisfactory domestic relationships through her reliance on rational observation and prudent analysis. While Leonora's rational judgment cannot

control her husband's attraction to Olivia, Leonora's determination to follow her own rationally formulated moral principles gives her a powerful sense of self-esteem. In the end, Mr. L-- is forced to recognize and submit to his wife's greater moral authority. But the sense of the power of women's domestic observation and consequent moral authority to control women's circumstances became more problematic in Leonora than it was in Belinda. Leonora illustrates Edgeworth's growing doubts about women's ability to use rationality and observation to order their social circumstances. Mr. L--s behavior suggests the difficulties created by the unmerited authority granted to men in the domestic setting, as well as their greater physical mobility and access to economic and political power. This male authority is what tempts women like Olivia to use their sexual attractiveness to gain illegitimate power. The dangers of men's domestic power, and its implications for women's access to legitimate authority both in the domestic and public spheres was to become an increasing concern for Edgeworth.

In her final novel, Helen (1834), Edgeworth remains faithful to her Enlightenment ideals of rational judgment and individual perfectibility through education. However, through her portrayal of the gradual moral disintegration of Cecilia, and of Helen's inability to act according to her own judgment to assist her friend, Edgeworth reveals an increasing pessimism about the power of women's rational abilities to

affect circumstances in a domestic sphere in which all real power and authority belong to men. While individual women in the novel possess substantial moral and rational capacities, in Helen women are systematically denied access to authoritative language. Further, women's powerless circumstances encourage them to exploit illegitimate means of affecting change.

My examination of Edgeworth in terms of her views on power, authority and language admittedly arises from an attempt to understand the dynamics of our own time as well as her own. In "The Madwoman and Her Languages," Nina Baym questions whether some modern feminist critics are actually supporting the suppression of women's voices in their insistence that language is a male domain. Baym accuses these critics of restricting women to a "non-linear, exploded, fragmented, polysemic idea of our speech [that] is congruent with the idea of the hopelessly irrational, disorganized, 'weaker sex' desired by the masculine Other" (158). It is this very conflict, the difficulty of negotiating between male control of the "tools" of rational thought⁷ and the need for women to express concerns that are uniquely their own, albeit in the common language of rationality, that Edgeworth addresses with inspiring vigor and clarity. Edgeworth speaks for the liberal humanist tradition in feminism that is as alive and vital today as it was in her own time. In fact, Annette Kolodny's definition of feminist criticism could be

criticism could be read as a description of the elements of Edgeworth's thought that I wish to explore: "an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed or encoded..."(111). Edgeworth's work was dedicated in large part to reclaiming the language of rationality to describe women's experience, a project shared by many women writers of her time whose fiction is overly "didactic" for our taste. In her attempt to create an authoritative female voice through rational and scientific observation and judgment, Edgeworth also succeeds in carefully cataloging and examining the workings of male power in the domestic and public spheres. As a feminist critic in an era of resurgent political conservatism, I read Edgeworth with the hope of discovering the roots of current debates concerning the power relationships that connect gender and rationality.

Chapter 1

MARIA EDGEWORTH AND THE RHETORIC OF PERFECTIBILITY

Maria Edgeworth is a major cultural figure of the rich and turbulent period in England from the start of the French Revolution to the end of the Napoleonic era. As a widely read author of both didactic fiction and education theory, Edgeworth was personally concerned with the debates surrounding the aims of education for women and the relationship of education to emerging issues of legitimate political authority, the increasing precedence of middle class domestic and economic values, and the growing prestige of the rhetoric of science. Through her father, a member of the Birmingham Lunar Society, Edgeworth met and corresponded with Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Day, Josiah Wedgwood and other early scientists and "natural philosophers" who not only investigated the physical world but took an active and often radical part in political debate. These men combined a keen interest in empirical investigations of the physical world with boundless optimism about systematic "rational" changes in England's political and social structures. Through her familiarity with the reformist politics and enlightenment rhetoric of scientific perfectibility espoused by Priestley and his circle, Maria Edgeworth developed her view of

While Priestley and others applied their political and scientific theories to educational projects for young men, such as the dissenting academies, and to the education of the lower classes through regulation of working conditions and wages, Maria Edgeworth concentrated on acceptably "feminine" concerns, the domestic education of children and young women. Yet, Edgeworth used her subject matter as both a point of entry into political debate and as a lens for viewing the larger issues of social authority. Through attention to domestic concerns and gender relations, Edgeworth created an authoritative writing voice for addressing issues of economic and political power and authority. Her focus on education provided a site for viewing the roots of political and social theory in domestic relationships. Through her educational theory and didactic fiction, Edgeworth explored the social implications of the emerging rhetoric of scientific and political perfectibility. By assuming the scientific authority of the rational observer, claiming her familiarity with the domestic as the source of her rational authority, Edgeworth was able to create a powerful voice for exploring and criticizing the arrangements of power and authority that extended from the domestic into the public sphere.

In this study, I will examine Edgeworth's educational theory and didactic fiction to reveal her attitudes toward issues of social authority and political power. Nancy Armstrong has argued persuasively that we should consider

"sexual relations as the site for changing power relations between classes and cultures as well as between genders and generations" (10). However, contrary to Armstrong's argument, Edgeworth did in fact use fiction to break down "the rule that separated moral authority from political authority on the grounds that each sprang from separate, gendered spheres of knowledge" (Armstrong 44). Therefore, I do not agree with Armstrong in her assessment of the causal relationship between women's fiction and middle class hegemony, but I think it is important to follow Armstrong's lead in taking didactic fiction seriously as both art and as a social force. Like many of her contemporaries, Edgeworth wrote with conscious social intent. Furthermore, her wide exposure to critical intellectual debates of the time informed her social theory and her fiction in ways that give her unique options for viewing her society and the status of women.

Any project designed to consider Edgeworth's position relative to gender must consider how that position is affected by cultural and economic factors as well as emotional ones. Edgeworth's sense of herself as an acute observer is firmly grounded in her belief that her own social class and educational experiences helped to create her point of view. Therefore, in examining Edgeworth's work, one must assume the existence of an author who has already traversed the ground of historical and social context that one proposes to criticize. Edgeworth was acutely aware of and interested in her own

psycho-social and political position and its attendant privileges, obligations and restrictions.

In order to prepare for an examination of Edgeworth's first major work, Practical Education (1798), it is necessary to begin with the historical and social background which formed the basis for the educational theory presented in that work. My examination of Edgeworth's later works will consider the ways in which she not only supported the ideas presented in Practical Education, but diverged from those ideas as her later experience and understanding of historical and cultural events modified her earlier views.

The ideas shared by Maria and her father were firmly grounded in the late eighteenth-century culture of liberal optimistic belief in the perfectibility of the individual and society. Specifically, many of their major ideas were derived from R. L. Edgeworth's lifelong association with the group of midland industrialists and "natural philosophers" who called themselves the Birmingham Lunar Society. This group of intellectuals, mainly wealthy but untitled dissenters, were linked through a complex set of beliefs concerning human perfectibility. Generally, they believed that science, industry, and the social leadership of untitled industrialists could lead to the rational reform of individuals and of society.

Joseph Priestley exemplifies the combination of concerns with science, education, and political authority that

characterized English Enlightenment thought, particularly that which characterized the Birmingham Lunar Circle. A dissenting minister, Priestley is perhaps best remembered today for his scientific experiments involving oxygen. But in his time the most notorious aspect of Priestley's reputation was his radical political stance (Kramnick 73). Despite his clerical status, Priestley expressed publicly and specifically that temporal happiness and contentment were his major concerns, as they should be those of every Christian. A religious life was one lived according to the middle class values of hard work, regularity, frugality and temperance (76). God's purpose for mankind was that they be useful and productive in life to prove their value and worthiness. With this goal in mind, Priestley felt each person should look for the best means of attaining this happy and productive situation. The means he believed in most firmly were social reform and the cooperative advancement of science and industry. Many of Priestley's educational and political concepts, like those of the Edgeworths, can be traced to Locke, who saw, as would Priestley, a clear relationship between the materialist psychological theory Locke developed and the belief in a "rational" or "scientific" government (Kramnick 86). Locke's theory of psychology argued that each individual is born, not with inherited ideas, but with a mind capable of receiving sense impressions and associating various sense impressions with each other to create chains of "association" that

constituted the beginnings of abstract thought. Therefore, each individual was not born but "created" or formed by his or her experiences. As was implied by Locke's pupil and later critic, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, if one's ideas of goodness and morality are not inborn but learned, "birth" no longer can be accepted as legitimating the class system. Of course, the legitimation of political authority is addressed in Locke's Two Treatises of Government in which he argues that the ruler's power is conditional on that ruler's ability to preserve the common good, that is, the property and safety rights of individual subjects.

Like Locke, Priestley believed that individuals were formed by their experiences, that is their deliberate or accidental education, and that government, in turn, was not a hierarchy ordained by God, but a system created by individuals for their mutual benefit (Kramnick 87). Thus, Priestley became intensely interested in the dual issues of individual education and the role of the individual in shaping the government. Individuals educated to understand "rational" and "scientific" values would be able to insure that their government was likewise rational and would in fact be so able to conduct their own lives that government need only assume the most limited role of "keeping order and protecting individuals from harm" (Kramnick 87). All other functions (religious, cultural and economic) were to be the province of the individual.

This view of the state led Priestley to enthusiastic support of the French Revolution and its overturning of what he saw as the "superstitious respect for kings and the spirit of chivalry." But Priestley was not an anarchist. He had very definite opinions about the necessity for order in society and the means for attaining it. Science and rationality would allow for continuous improvement in mankind's physical and moral state; therefore, those who were most rational could best direct the ordering of society. In Priestley's schema, the upper middle class who were applying themselves to the development of industrial and scientific knowledge and the "logical" reform of society were the ideal model. Order in society would no longer be created through belief in Burkean values of hereditary loyalty and authority. Rather, by virtue of the knowledge of scientific principles, men of Priestley's class would gradually assume social authority currently held by the aristocracy, and would reform the poor by instilling in them values of the mercantile middle class. Privately funded education would be the means to this reform.

For young men of the manufacturing class (Priestley was relatively unconcerned about young women's education) education would begin at home and be completed at one of the dissenting academies, which he helped to found, emphasizing "practical" subjects such as accounting and modern history instead of classical subjects. In addition to learning the

skills needed for the "business of civic life," the young man of the middle class would learn about science so that he could use his leisure time to make discoveries for the material comfort of mankind. Priestley argued that the upper classes had a moral obligation to devote their leisure to scientific research to improve the life of all members of society, since this leisure was the result of the middle and upper classes having others "do all the drudgery of life for them" (Priestley 19). Clearly, Priestley did not envision a classless society, but one in which a more "rational" relationship among the classes would obtain. The young middle class "gentlemen" who would reform society would gain from their study of science not only the ability to master and control the natural world, but a more properly humble attitude than that which was cultivated by the typical aristocratic education in classics and literature. In comparing the study of the arts to that of science, Priestley elaborates on the moral benefits of scientific study. "It is only an acquaintance with the more liberal and manly science, and an extensive view of what has been attained, and what yet remains to be attained by man that inspires true dignity and generosity of sentiment; which is always accompanied by an humility and diffidence, that is inconsistent with anything like pride or contempt of others" (Priestley 59).

In the reference to "manly" science here, as well as in the emphasis on self-deprecation, one can find suggestions of

reference to what Priestley and others saw as the decayed aristocracy, full of false pride and "effeminized" by its reliance on traditional authority rather than action. Throughout his writing, Priestley makes frequent reference to the idea that aristocrats, who do not have to "work" for a living, can never be as happy or as good as the "middle classes" since "...an obligation to the constant but moderate exertion of our faculties, even for our support, at least for an easy support, is generally much more favourable to the real enjoyment of life...it is a greater obligation to virtue" (130). The middle ranks would gain political authority not through aristocratic force or lower class mob violence, but through the sheer superiority of their ideas and their energy in promoting them. As Ludmila Jordanova has noted of men like Priestley, "Many shared a view of science and medicine as motors of social advance, and hence as harbingers of a rational future to be managed by people like themselves" (Jordanova 40). But it was this managerial ability, this legitimate authority to define the common good, that Priestley attributed to scientific principles and that created a paradox in his scheme of universal improvement.

As Kramnick notes, for Priestley reform was "a passion more pressing even than freedom" (97). He had no confidence that the poor, generally so deficient in moral and rational educational opportunities, would freely choose to take part in their own improvement. In order for the lower class to

benefit from the improvements that science would make in the political and economic realms, they must learn middle class values. The poor must be educated out of their old habits of laziness and profligacy to new habits of "industry, sobriety, honesty..." (Priestley 128), in short, all the values necessary to reliable workmen in the factories of the new industries. For Priestley and his associates in the Birmingham Lunar circle, this education of the poor could take a variety of forms. In the factories of the new industrialists, time clocks, bells and whistles would encourage the workers to regulate their time, arriving punctually and limiting breaks to the allotted time. Priestley even suggested that to teach workers the unfamiliar habit of putting money aside for savings, factory owners might make saving compulsory, withholding part of each workers' wages as part of an owner-regulated savings plan (Kramnick 95). Priestley also supported Thomas Percival, whose reformed fever hospitals included plans for enforced hospitalization of the infected with solitary confinement and strictly regulated sanitation as a large part of the treatment (Kramnick 94). Priestley and his associates, including R. L. Edgeworth, saw traditional poor relief as an encouragement to vice and laziness, as it did nothing to change the habits and beliefs that supposedly caused one to become impoverished. The paradox, as Kramnick notes, was that such regulation did not fit the liberal political ideal of a free people choosing the

government and regulations that they felt would be to their greatest benefit. But Priestley and others felt that this regulation was a necessary intermediate step in order for the poor to be taught what was truly in their own best interest. Their goal was for the poor to eventually become "truly autonomous individuals who internalized the values of a truly free and therefore human person" (Kramnick 95).

Nevertheless, the paradox in the liberal ideology, that only the truly educated could be "truly" free, was indicative of the persistent and unavoidable darker side of social revolution that Priestley and his circle never fully recognized, much less resolved. This was that in order for the social engineering projects of the reformers to succeed, poor individuals would need to be more closely controlled and supervised than ever before. To gain the social benefits of middle class values, they would have to be educated into relinquishing most of their personal freedom. The complicated and unpleasant class issues that shadowed the liberal ideology of the rising middle class were not the only difficulty. The issue of gender, one that Priestley tried consistently to ignore, played a major role in the formation of the liberal progressive agenda.

One way to shed more light on the complex interconnections of the ideas of science, revolution and gender that informed the ideology of men like Priestley and that strongly influenced R. L. and Maria Edgeworth is by

examining the highly visible development of these ideas in France during the same period. While French and British ideas differed in a variety of ways, Britons of all political persuasions saw France's political and cultural fate as symbolically and literally interconnected with their own. Conservatives like Edmund Burke feared that the breakdown of civil order that characterized the French Revolution would "infect" Britain, encouraging civil unrest and disrespect for authority among lower class Britons. Reformers, on the other hand, used the French Revolution to bolster their criticisms of the British political and economic systems. As Thomas Paine argued in his famous defense of the French Revolution, both the French and the British people retain the right to change their government. "The circumstances of the world are continually changing, and the opinions of men change also; and as government is for the living, and not for the dead, it is the living only that has any right in it" (Paine 281). British radicals and reformers viewed the French Revolution as an illustration of one form of the process that could exchange obsolete forms of social organization for new, more rational ones. Because of these perceived interconnections, an understanding of some of the major ideas concerning the interrelated issues of politics, gender and education current in France before and during the Revolution is extremely useful in understanding how members of Edgeworth's reformist group formed their world view.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is an obvious starting point for discussions of these topics. The contractual nature of his political theory as expressed in The Social Contract, which implies a universal right to citizenship, presents for us today a startling contrast to the sexist essentialism of his educational novel Emile. Rousseau exploited gender issues to support his political and social schemes, but he did so in a way that reinforced gender hierarchy while it collapsed other forms of societal order. In his political and educational writings, Rousseau adopted the position of the scientist, then an emerging voice of authority in France and England. In selecting this voice for his writing, I will show that Rousseau, like Priestley and many other writers who followed him, attempted to give his writing the aura of objective truth. Like many of his contemporaries, Rousseau represented scientific metaphor as transparent and, therefore, incapable of error while the content of his works reveals the way that the scientific metaphor could be enlisted in the service of gender biases.

In Rousseau's work, one can find some of the complicated interconnections of freedom and repression which would haunt the French Revolution from its euphoric beginnings to its deep descent into the Terror, interconnections that would likewise confuse the liberal progressive ideology in Britain. In Emile, his major educational treatise, Rousseau establishes contradictory aims. He contends that Emile must be given

perfect freedom to develop as nature intends, and yet for this development to take place he states a variety of demanding and complicated requirements to be met by the child's governor (or for the governor to demand of others). In order for Emile to grow up without the typical vices of society, he must not be taught, as most children are, to love dominion. Therefore, his nurse (Rousseau assumes that in the absence of the mother the child must be cared for by some other woman) must meet the child's physical needs as perfectly as possible, giving him wholesome milk from her breasts, clean comfortable clothing, and freedom of movement. But she must never do anything for Emile that is unnecessary. The nurse, who is clearly to be dominated by the child's father or governor, must never soothe or restrict the child for her own convenience. She must not allow him [sic] to develop regulated periods for sleeping, waking or eating (Book I, 63). Thus, in order for the child to have perfect freedom, the nurse must have no freedom at all. Rousseau states, "Do not reason with nurses. Give orders, see that they are followed..." (Book I, 61). Only a social order centered around the needs of the upper class male could assume that a woman, particularly a lower class woman, would, in a "natural" state have no desires that might be in conflict with the continuous needs of an infant. That the infant is never made aware of the personal autonomy of his female care giver is itself a form of social ordering.¹ The further one examines Rousseau's philosophy of "natural"

education, the more one realizes its constructed and "artificial" nature, each "natural" experience being dependent on the cooperation and planning of a number of individuals.

In Book II and in subsequent books, as Rousseau deals with the education of the male child and male adolescent, the governor takes the place of the nurse, becoming the direct but invisible controller of the child's experiences such that the child learns what the governor desires without becoming aware that his experiences are being carefully directed toward particular outcomes. While Rousseau refers frequently to the fact that his pupil will learn only from necessity, this necessity, like that experienced by the worker in the "scientific" factory, is carefully controlled and crafted by the governor. Yet, while one may wonder at Rousseau's apparent deception of the child whom he wishes to educate "according to nature," the basic premise here that one must learn through direct experience and observation is perfectly in line with ideas about pure science that were emerging at this time. One should not accept as true what one learns from authority, but only what one learns from personal experience.

In Book IV, Rousseau explains that as the child's passions begin to develop, the child is able to truly feel for others' suffering and to understand the value of others' care for him. Emile is then brought through his new understanding to see with gratitude all that his governor has done for him and to put the direction of his new desires into the

governor's care. Thus, the governor still retains control, but it is now through the pupil's consent. If this is reminiscent of contractual political theory, it is also similar in some ways to the benevolent direction which Priestley and others saw as the duty of the factory owner, hospital manager or landlord. The passions of the poor, whether these be expressed through their desire to spend their money on alcohol, their (presumed) desire to live in unsanitary conditions, or their desire to spend their leisure time on things other than land improvement, must be carefully governed and directed, at first without their having any choice about it and eventually, when they are well-educated, through their consent.

It is not until Book V, that the governor turns his attention to the education of Sophie, Emile's female counterpart. As has been noted by many critics, Rousseau's paradigm of male/female difference is not original. Londa Schiebinger, for example, has demonstrated the ways in which contemporary anatomists and other "natural philosophers" were using their emerging disciplines and the supposed unquestionable truth value of direct observation to support cultural views of women as passive, weak and yet ironically more "natural" because less capable of abstract generalizations than men. Scheibinger's study details the development between the 1730s and the 1790s of the "female skeleton" (191). Anatomists, aiming to produce the most

"accurate" representations of the male and female skeletons, selected the models for their drawings with great care, with the result that their drawings, while based on the "objective" evidence of real skeletons, reinforced current ideas about inborn sexual characteristics, such as the "fact" that women had smaller skulls in relation to their body size and narrow ribs in comparison to wider pelvises as compared to males (Scheibinger 196). The skewed nature of the "scientific" evidence about sexual difference is important because Rousseau uses some of this evidence to support his widely influential discussion of male\female difference. Even more important, he uses personal observation from universal nature, a form of evidence which the anatomists and other natural philosophers were promoting as the sure road to "truth," to support his views of male and female. Thus, Rousseau's discussion of Sophie, and of women in general, should not be seen only in terms of the emerging values of sensibility² but should also be seen as an influential example of the use of the scientific voice of authority to establish sex differences which would provide the basis for the theory of separate "spheres."

The woman, Rousseau argues, is naturally weaker than the man. To compensate for this physical weakness the woman learns to manipulate men, in other words to deceive, in order to make herself more desirable. Paradoxically, her weakness, her ability to create desire in men, causes the woman to be able to control men's actions. Women govern men through the

use of their "femininity" which consists mainly of weakness, inability and deception. If women abandon these natural characteristics to cultivate "masculine" strength, vigor and reason, they will never be able to match men, but they will lose their ability to control male behavior. "The more women want to resemble them, the less women will govern them, and they will truly be the master" (Book V, 363). However, in the course of his argument, Rousseau succeeds in having it both ways. Women cannot ever really give up their supposed "dominion" over men because their power over men is "natural." "Women possess their empire not because men wanted it that way, but because nature wants it that way" (Book V 360). In exchange for this involuntary "dominion," a woman is obligated to be sexually faithful to the father of her children. This is a "natural" moral obligation because without the father's absolute certainty that all the children of his spouse are also his own, the family, the core of society, will disintegrate. Rousseau thus elides the patriarchal family with nature, the source of authority. However, in order for the man to have perfect faith in his partner, she must give "the most scrupulous attention to [her] conduct, manners, and bearing" (362). Thus, Rousseau prescribes for women an existence of continual attention to appearance and effect as opposed to the man's attention to action and concrete objects. The increasingly authoritative rhetoric of science privileged the supposedly detached observer's familiarity with physical

objects. As this rhetoric gained cultural ascendancy, the assignment of women to the province of artistic effect would provide a clear basis for excluding them from scientific discourse. If women were associated with false appearances, and distinguished for their ability to conceal reality, then they could have no voice in a discourse that values fact over "appearance," making the greatest virtue the ability to separate the two. One whose whole attention is focused on creating false appearances cannot claim authority as an objective observer.

Thus, in Emile, Rousseau combines a concern for emotional sensibility in women with an appeal to the rationality of science in education and, by extension, politics. The Edgeworths and others who, like them, saw individual education as an important component of social change did not always agree with Rousseau. In fact, among those concerned with women's education, rejection of many of Rousseau's assumptions about "natural" woman was typical. Nevertheless, Rousseau articulated three important theses that, in various combinations, were to become crucial to British cultural debates in the next century. First, Rousseau's works illustrate the connection between contractual politics and individual education that was to become crucial to men like Priestley and Josiah Wedgwood in the foundation of the dissenting academies and the formulation of educational theory. Second, Rousseau privileges information gathered

through first hand observation. The ability to observe and judge accurately from primary evidence of the senses is, in Rousseau, the distinguishing characteristic of a rational, well-educated man. For Maria Edgeworth, the status of the objective observer was to become a major intellectual preoccupation. Finally, in his portrayal of Sophie, Rousseau combined new scientific terminology with ancient stereotypes to exclude women from the ability to act as observers. With the "objective" justification of their smaller and weaker bodies, Rousseau placed women in the category of object, equating femininity with irrationality, deceptive appearances, and, paradoxically, with nature.

The new philosophers in both England and France believed that observation and experimentation could lead to understanding and improvement of both the natural and the political worlds. "Human beings and social institutions were, like the human body, material contrivances whose operations were knowable and manageable" (Kramnick 95). To "know" a thing was to be able to control it, and for the new natural philosophers the essential process of knowing was observation. In a fascinating exhibition of Western thought's gendering of experience, both the political and the scientific were expressed in terms of revelation of female bodies to the eyes of the male observer. For example, the exposed female breast is one of the most prevalent images associated with revolutionary rhetoric. As one critic has noted, "In

imagery... the ideal woman was Liberte', fertile, sensual, her supple breasts exposed, evoking the natural order, whatever that was meant to be, or she might be seen as the fountain of regeneration of 10 August 1793, the colossal statue of Egyptian antiquity, clasping her breasts from which a renewing water flowed" (Connor 226).³ In Britain, revolution was often depicted by conservatives as a half-naked, "unnatural" woman (Bindman 157,159). The way in which the discourses of both "new" science and revolutionary politics developed along lines of gender dichotomy is one example of the pervasiveness of the theses described above. Both relied heavily on metaphors of openness and revelation. This use of metaphor allowed for the expression not only of the attitude of the active scientist or revolutionary and his passive subject, but it could also, as can be seen in conservative reactions to these ideas, elide into fears of the new revelations as the opposite of rationality. The traditional association of the female with the uncontrollable and insatiable could be used to subvert the revolutionary rhetoric which relied on the metaphor of exposure and unveiling for its legitimacy.

One cannot, of course, ignore the fact that many British advocates of education and political rights for women, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, used the opportunity offered by revolutionary rhetoric to push open the doors of human rights for women. These writers, and others, including women such as Olympe de Gouges in France, saw the

possibilities of the new theories for improving the status of women and put those possibilities in writing. These women founded their claims on the new political rhetoric of revolution. Unfortunately, the reactionary period in England that followed the euphoria of the 1770s and early 1780s led to much of this work being discredited in the 1790s. Not surprisingly, much of the criticism of Wollstonecraft and Williams centered around their failure to behave as properly "domestic" women. As Gary Kelly has pointed out, the role of women in the category of "woman" was never unproblematic for English radicals and liberals. While the domestic woman could represent the ideal of the genteel middle class family, the domestic woman's greater "sensibility" was always threatening to overcome the confines of her appropriate sphere. While the virtuous mother should be sensitive and feeling, this very quality contained the threat of "social transgression, crime or 'madness'..." (Kelly 8). Thus, women like Wollstonecraft, who argued that given their rationality women ought "naturally" to put their reasoning abilities to use, even in opposition to men, threatened the delicate balance between individual freedom and feeling and social order that men like Priestley attempted to construct.

Within this debate, as within all Enlightenment thinking, the issue of education became the site where contested meanings were played out. If one were to assume certain things as naturally given, as did Rousseau, then education for

men and women must "naturally" differ. Implied in Locke's theory, however, is the suggestion that the mind is originally blank, that culture is what determines the mind's characteristics. Wollstonecraft, in opposition to Rousseau, draws out the possibilities of this argument in Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Like Priestley, Wollstonecraft feels that her own group, the middle class, "appear[s] to be in the most natural state" (81). She carefully flatters the middle class disdain for aristocratic "affectations" in attempting to create a dichotomy in which the middle class woman can share the superior traits of the middle class man. With maxims such as "elegance is inferior to virtue" Wollstonecraft appeals to the desire of a middle class audience to see themselves as morally superior to the upper classes, even if they do not have command of the same social graces. As Thomas Paine does in The Rights of Man, Wollstonecraft attempts to create a parallel between her supposedly "simple" and "rational" prose style and that of others (presumably Burke) who are concerned about "rounding periods, or in fabricating turgid bombast of artificial feelings" (82). Likewise, she sets the stage for discrediting Rousseau's view of women's nature by asserting that Rousseau's preference for a "state of nature" or solitude is the result of his not considering the need for systematic social reform. She implies that society properly organized can be the source of, rather than an impediment to virtue. This, of course, correlates with the liberal position,

discussed earlier, that sees benevolent social control as the route to universal virtue. Having established her social position of authority as a member of the "rational" class, Wollstonecraft goes on to claim full membership in that class for women as well as for men. Following Lockean psychology, women as well as men can become rational if properly educated. Wollstonecraft's ideas met with strong reaction at the time, and citing them eventually became socially unacceptable, particularly after the posthumous publication of her memoirs by Godwin. However, her combination of middle class values with the idea of rational education for women to prepare them for useful and virtuous lives was found to be a useful strategy by many later writers on education for women. As I shall examine in the next chapter, Wollstonecraft's strategies were one of a number that were employed to delineate the place of women in the discourse of rationality.

Up to this point I have attempted to illuminate some of the interconnections of politics, science, education and gender that were influential in the liberal and radical middle class circles inhabited by Maria Edgeworth and her father and which seem important in shaping Maria's identity as a woman writer of didactic fiction and educational theory. Edgeworth's major statement of educational theory, Practical Education, which will be examined in detail in the next chapter, clearly bears the impress of this time period, as, to a certain extent, do all her works. But although Maria

Edgeworth's writing career began in the French Revolutionary period, by the time she published her last major work, Helen (1834), reaction and counter-reaction had substantially altered both the rhetoric of British politics and, likewise, the place of a woman writer within society.

Chapter 2

PRACTICAL EDUCATION AND POWER RELATIONSHIPS

In the previous chapter I have explored the way in which the topic of education became the site of political argument in Edgeworth's time. For the writers I have discussed, education is of crucial importance because the individual's education produces the social organization. For Rousseau, only the "natural" man such as Emile is properly prepared to enter into the social contract. For Priestley, an education appropriate to each individual's social class ensures the adoption of middle-class values in society. Mary Wollstonecraft uses the class characteristics outlined by Priestley and other middle class reformers to create a space for women as members of the "rational" class. Thus, although each of these three authors focuses on different aspects of the educational process, they all demonstrate ways in which the political issues of class and gender could be organized around the topic of education.

While a number of critics have pointed out the often overlooked political component of eighteenth and nineteenth-century women's fiction, women's nonfiction educational writing of the same time period has often been read as an example of women working in an acceptably "feminine" genre.¹ The underlying assumption is that children's education is a domestic issue residing safely outside the male sphere of

politics and broad social activity. However, if one accepts the evidence I have provided from Priestley and Rousseau that education is not a tangential issue but actually a central focus of cultural debate, works such as Edgeworth's Practical Education can be viewed as a major means by which women expressed their opinions not only about childrearing but about the ways in which society should be molded politically and socially.

Wollstonecraft's educational writings have received a great deal of attention from recent scholars, but contemporary readers, such as the Edgeworths, would have been familiar with a wide range of educational writings by women that contained material with political implications. One of the most respected women of letters who produced educational theory, Catherine Macaulay, was glowingly reviewed by Wollstonecraft in the Analytical Review, providing a major influence for Wollstonecraft's own work. It is clearly established that Maria Edgeworth also read Macaulay's letters by the fact that Edgeworth uses an anecdotal example from her Letters in Practical Education. The basic assumptions underlying Macaulay's Letters on Education (1790) formed the basis of most writing on education by women of liberal political views like those of Edgeworth.

Macaulay's basic premise could, in fact, stand as a motto for most of the liberal dissenters of the time. "I shall insist, that God has made man capable of arriving at a high

degree of perfection; but that the progress we make to excellence needs must be slow, as it solely depends on experience, and is liable to interruption from ignorance and passion" (186). The purpose, then, of education is to eliminate ignorance and allow an individual to control his or her passions so that perfectibility can proceed. This was considered a radical line of argument. It should be borne in mind that in the eighteenth century, the idea of human perfectibility was seen as contradicting some religious doctrine. According to Augustinian arguments of the time, man is inherently flawed through original sin; therefore, to argue that man can reach a state of perfection, or even aspire to such, is to deny the need for divine grace.

The reformer's view of man's potential, however, led easily into the need for social and political reformation. Macaulay ultimately argues against mass educational schemes and in favor of private (home) education, but she outlines the unsatisfactory state of modern society which leads one to contemplate such wide educational systems. She holds the upper classes largely responsible for the state of society as they have neglected their duties of public service, causing the poor to languish without the benefit of education. She speaks thus of the poor: "when I have beheld a multitude of little wretches consigned to care and penury and wickedness, and educated for the purposes of destruction; I own to you that I have turned my thoughts from the disgusting contemplation, and

have endeavoured to amuse myself with speculative systems of public education" (16). But Macaulay rejects large public education schemes because she sees the individual as the major force in society and she feels that only through individual responsibility and virtue is reform possible. Personal virtue, she argues, is best taught at home, on an individual basis. Like Priestley, Macaulay sees the basis of social reform as the retraining of individuals of all social classes in the adoption of appropriate middle class values of hard work, honesty, sobriety, and cleanliness.

Macaulay faults Rousseau for his failure to emphasize the role of duty and service, suggesting that his focus in Emile on casual rather than formal learning may encourage "inveterate habits of idleness." She argues that, "We were not born to play all our lives; industry, both corporal and mental, is necessary to our happiness and advancement, both in this, and a future state..." (46). Rousseau is also deficient, according to Macaulay, in his lack of attention to the matter of honesty in children. Macaulay disagrees with Rousseau's premise that children practice deceit unintentionally. She instead suggests that, "children will frequently promise, with an intention to deceive; and this kind of deceit ought never to go unpunished" (87). Furthermore, in support of her underlying assumption that deceit is a negative social skill children acquire at a very early age through experience, she states a decidedly upper class view of the lower classes'

ignorance; "among the common people, the vice of lying is prevalent to such a degree, as to destroy in great measure that confidence which is necessary to the purposes of social life" (84). Thus, lack of education leads to deceit. Both children and members of the lower classes become so deceitful that they are not only untrustworthy and in need of correction, but ultimately incomprehensible because they are completely untrustworthy to the "rational" and "mature" upper classes. Edgeworth will explore how power, both social and economic, leads to this situation in which persons seek intentionally to be incomprehensible to those with authority over them. She will also argue that it is the duty of the more mature and rational individual to seek to understand the motivations of both children and members of the lower classes. However, for Macaulay it is enough to note deliberate incomprehensibility as a fault of education that can be corrected through proper educational experiences (punishment, in the case of children).

In addition to stressing the importance of the work ethic and honesty, Macaulay identifies specific class differences in her educational plan. Because the upper and lower classes have different lifestyles and duties, they need different sorts of education. The lower classes need only be "civilized in such a manner as to be innoxious in their conduct as citizens," that is, they must be able to understand and obey the laws, since the hard work of earning a living

will "tame the turbulence of the imagination" (236). On the other hand, Macaulay identifies upper class leisure as a danger because it allows time "to indulge all the caprices of fancy" (237). Along with this greater opportunity for corruption by excessive "fancy," the wealthy also have greater duties, as they are responsible for drafting laws, setting an example for the lower classes, and establishing national customs (237). Macaulay, while arguing against "political distinctions" among citizens, believes that "inequality of property" is an unavoidable result of living in an organized society (167). Thus, in economic terms, Macaulay argues for a laissez faire arrangement, in which some people will inevitably accumulate greater wealth than others. In social terms, on the other hand, she argues for greater responsibility and the adoption of middle class values such as the work ethic, honesty and moderate habits on the part of the upper classes. Members of the upper class can then use careful direction of their charity and social influence to encourage the adoption of these same values by the lower classes. In some ways this role modeling and social control by the middle and upper classes takes over many of the traditional duties of the sovereign, altering the perception of who or what represents the values and interests of "the people." Further, Macaulay's emphasis on the moral and social education of the lower classes suggests a broader definition of who "the people" are as compared to an earlier view which

would have counted only property owners as individually important. In her views on the need for social reform and her discussion of the means for attaining that reform, Macaulay presents an eloquent summary of the logic of most of the British industrialist class reformers such as Priestley and the Edgeworths.

Class differences are important to Macaulay, but her views on gender are perhaps her most radical and interesting contribution to the field of educational theory. As noted earlier, Macaulay feels that the ability to regulate the passions and to appropriately fulfill one's social duties are two of the most important goals of education. She argues that the current system of female education does neither of these things and causes women to suffer greatly due to their poor preparation for life. Macaulay bases her discussion of women's education on the premise that mentally women and men are the same. She supports this by reference to Lockean psychology, which posits that the mind has no innate ideas or affections and is, therefore, wholly formed by the individual's experiences (203). Dismissing Rousseau's description of female character as flawed by "enthusiasm and the love of paradox," Macaulay blames women's intellectual inferiority, as well as a great part of their physical weakness, on their "absurd" educations (207). This education teaches women that the purpose of their lives is to attract male attention, and that the only sure way to do so is through

physical attractiveness (208). As a result, women are too morally and mentally weak to protect their own interests through legitimate means, or even to understand where their best interest lies. Therefore, they use their sexual attractiveness to manipulate men and gain illegitimate authority. Thus, Macaulay's discussion of female education moves into the overtly political realm as she identifies the corrupted women of "all the courts of Europe," and states that "By the intrigues of women, and their rage for personal power and importance, the whole world has been filled with violence and injury..." (213). In contrast to the illegitimate power of the "court woman," ordinary English women suffer from "a total and absolute exclusion of every political right to the sex in general" (210). Women's lack of legitimate political rights, along with their poor education, leads them to develop a self-concept solely based on sexual attractiveness, which in turn leads them to the illegitimate exercise of power. The power of this argument derives from its linkage of the irrational, effeminized power structure of the royal court as seen by English reformers with the issue of education, also a preoccupation of the liberal dissenters. Thus, Macaulay ties the education of women to the necessity for political and social reform, creating an apparently common interest between the two. This line of reasoning was to surface repeatedly in the work of those supporting educational and political rights for women. It is one of the underlying assumptions of the

second correspondent in Edgeworth's Letters for Literary Ladies. By the twentieth century, the linkage of women's education with political liberalism has become so commonplace that it is necessary for us to reflect on the fact that this connection was not always considered self-evident, nor is it "natural." Like most political commonplaces, it has a history, and that history is a part of the idea's strengths and weaknesses.

To prevent women from developing the sexualized identity that leads to the illegitimate use of power, Macaulay outlines a similar educational program for men and women. Both sexes should be taught virtue based on "immutable principles" (198) so that their virtue cannot be corrupted by the accidents of circumstances. They should have very little learning from books until they are ten or twelve; up until that time they should be engaged in active sports to build bodily strength and in the of study Latin, French, geography, physics, writing and arithmetic without books (128). More abstract studies and more literature are to be introduced as the child grows older. "Accomplishments" such as dancing and needlework can be retained in the education of both sexes as long as they are seen as amusements and not serious occupations. If given a rational mental, moral and physical education, Macaulay argues, women will be better able to fulfill their social duties and will be happier. "The social duties in the interesting characters of daughter, wife and mother, will be

but ill performed by ignorance and levity..."(49). Further, the separate education of girls and boys not only leads to girls receiving an inferior education, and thus being ignorant, but it also leads the sexes to inordinate curiosity about each other, thus exciting the passions. The antidote is clear, "Let your children be brought up together; let their sports and studies be the same; let them enjoy, in the constant presence of those who are set over them, all that freedom which innocence renders harmless and in which Nature rejoices. By the uninterrupted intercourse which you will thus establish, both sexes will find, that friendship may be enjoyed between them without passion"(50). Boys educated with their sisters will learn to see women as thinking subjects like themselves, and instead of being the "dupes" of coquettes will "look for something more solid in women, than a mere outside"(50). Thus, Macaulay ultimately represents better education for women as a means of reform rather than revolution. She does not envision a change in the social system which would allow women equal access to political power with men. She rather wishes to see them more "rational and happy" in the roles they are called upon to fill. Yet, her equation of female irrationality (caused by poor education) with illegitimate political authority clearly links domestic education with the political realm. She introduces the issue of gender into the political discourse in a way that cannot be

ignored, given the gender-loaded imagery of both monarchy and revolution.²

Macaulay's Letters were published in 1790, at the height of British liberal excitement about the French Revolution. Maria Edgeworth's major treatise on education, Practical Education, came out in 1798, when British attitudes toward the French Revolution had undergone significant changes, accompanied by changes in the overall social climate and attitudes about gender and politics. Edgeworth relied upon and developed the liberal theory of female education laid out by Macaulay, and yet one can also see ways in which the lapse of eight years from 1790 saw a change in perspective on the part of British liberals. One can also clearly see the influence on Edgeworth of the practical "natural philosophers" as well. Unlike the reformist politics which suffered from its associations with what most Britons saw as the ill-fated French Revolution, scientific discourse and scientific philosophy grew ever more prestigious and authoritative, gradually assuming predominance in Western thought and metaphor.³ Reformist politics and scientific authority emerge as crucially important in Practical Education, although I will argue that Edgeworth's relationship to these issues continued to evolve throughout her career. Edgeworth's attitude toward gender is likewise both similar to Macaulay's and modified to better appeal to the changed political and social climate.

1798, the year in which Practical Education was published, was an eventful one both in politics and in literature. It can be seen as a turning point for social attitudes as many of the publications that both illustrated and helped to produce ideas that would dominate nineteenth century debates were published in that year. Perhaps best known is T.R. Malthus' An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, in which the author uses the rhetoric of science to argue that "unchecked" population will always increase faster than will the means of subsistence. From this, Malthus argues that poor relief should be administered in such a way as to encourage the poor to hold their rate of reproduction within their ability to support themselves and their families. Malthus' essay illustrates the sort of engineering approach to social administration which was to become increasingly important in the early nineteenth century. Another example of the concern with forming a better society by reforming the poor is Pricilla Wakefield's Reflections On the Present Condition of the Female Sex also published in that year. Finally, in considering the important publications of 1798, one should note the appearance of William Godwin's publication of the Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft. Along with British reaction against anything which seemed related to "revolution," the revelation in the Memoirs of Wollstonecraft's unconventional lifestyle and Godwin's attempts to portray Wollstonecraft as

a revolutionary heroine of sensibility contributed significantly to conservative reaction against women writers in general and their association with sensibility and fiction in particular (Kelly 65). In addition to literary productions, 1798 saw the French attempt to invade Britain through Ireland. For an Anglo-Irish woman writer, responsible for the distribution of charity and other sorts of relief in her capacity as her father's secretary, 1798 was probably more important for the influences its events would have on her later ideas and writing than even for the publication of the educational treatise her father had long anticipated.

Practical Education itself bears witness, however, to Edgeworth's political and social concerns, not only in its content, but in its rhetorical strategies. Edgeworth's father sets the tone in his preface when he states, "We shall not imitate the invidious example of some authors, who think it necessary to destroy the edifices of others, in order to clear the way for their own"(v).⁴ Although this statement refers specifically to educational plans, the tendency in this first sentence of the book is for the authors to distance themselves from any form of revolutionary action. In the chapter "On Public and Private Education," Maria also attempts to define herself and her project in terms which will not threaten those concerned with social order. "We do not set up for projectors, or reformers: we wish to keep steadily in view the actual state of things, as well as our own hopes of progressive

improvement; and to seize and combine all that can be immediately serviceable; all that can assist, without precipitating movements" (501). Here Edgeworth integrates the reformers' past emphasis on utility with a nonthreatening emphasis on gradual nonrevolutionary change. In fact, this sentence illustrates that the term "reformer" was no longer necessarily associated with "progressive improvement," although men such as Priestley and Godwin would have seen the two terms as nearly synonymous. By the time Edgeworth was writing her sections of Practical Education, fear had developed that violent change would destroy the basis of society without replacing it with any other coherent system. The Terror in France had made many liberal reformers in England question the idea that traditional institutions could be destroyed without destroying any basis for civil order. I will argue that Edgeworth's rhetoric seeks to distance itself from any type of revolutionary fervor. Yet, encoded in her educational ideas themselves is a theory of society that emphasizes some of the same values which were espoused by Priestley and other more outspoken reformers. While apparently rejecting violent change and stressing the "practicality" of working for gradual change of existing systems, Edgeworth incorporates implicit criticism of those systems. In its examination of the domestic issue of education, Practical Education comments on issues of class and gender with an ambivalence which would only grow deeper as

Edgeworth's career progressed.

Edgeworth's disillusionment with revolutionary politics did not lead her, as it did some others, to a renewed respect or support for the status quo. Instead, I will argue that it led her to a utilitarian philosophy of accommodation; the individual, unable to effect positive change through revolutionary means, should learn to live within the current system, while parents and teachers should use the education of individuals to gradually reform society. Edgeworth echoes Priestley in her belief that necessary social reform will be accomplished through education. But rhetorically she seeks to satisfy a readership grown skeptical of the claims of social reformers of any type.

Edgeworth's rhetorical strategy for satisfying this wary readership has two major components. The first, as I have noted, is to distance herself from any revolutionary tendencies, while carefully avoiding any specific reference to the contemporary sources of this revolutionary theory. Instead, while citing Priestley, Rousseau, Macaulay and Godwin as authoritative sources on education, Edgeworth issues historically nonspecific disclaimers of revolutionary intent. An example is this statement in the section in which she criticizes universities. "Far be that insanity from our minds which would, like Orlando, tear up the academic groves; the madness of innovation is as destructive as the bigotry of ancient establishments" (515). In this quote, the threat of

chaotic, revolutionary change is associated with the distant past, and with the forces of reaction ("the bigotry of ancient establishments"), thus placing it at a safe distance from the reasoned and gradual progressive change advocated by Edgeworth and, she implies, by the authorities she cites.

In addition to placing revolutionary change in the category of chaos and irrationality, a move that would legitimize Edgeworth in the newly conservative political atmosphere, Edgeworth's rhetorical strategy has a second component, that of associating Practical Education with the discourse of "natural philosophy," what we would today call the natural and physical sciences. Londa Scheibinger, a pioneer in the study of women in the history of science, has pointed out that from the beginning of the eighteenth century, science was seen as the great hope for developing "value neutral" ways of looking at not only the natural world, but politics and society as well (265). While this view of science ignored the ways in which the "scientific method" could be used to support a variety of race and gender biased theories, the use of "objective " observation to discover useful information about the world gained continuing prestige, particularly as growing industrialization showed the financial rewards to be gained from incorporating recent scientific discoveries into material production. Social reformers found the scientific viewpoint to be a particularly useful way of looking at social problems, as I have discussed in chapter one.

Edgeworth, as a woman, may have faced some prejudice in attempting to adopt the voice of scientific authority. Yet, she did so successfully, largely through her skillful representation of her subject matter, education, as both a fit object of scientific investigation and as a domestic issue particularly suited to the capabilities of a woman writer. Having created an authoritative space for herself, Edgeworth, as I will discuss later, proceeded to use this forum to comment on class and gender issues of great public and political import.

In creating this voice of "domestic" science for herself, Edgeworth was aided by her father's preface, which clearly outlines the principles he sees as inherent in his daughter's work. He begins by stating that "To make any progress in the art of education, it must be patiently reduced to an experimental science" (v). At the end of the preface, after attributing the major part of the text to Maria, and discussing the necessity for the numerous pieces of anecdotal evidence in the book, R.L. presents what he sees as Maria's source of her authority on education. In speaking of education he states, "She was encouraged and enabled to write upon this important subject, by having for many years before her eyes the conduct of a judicious mother in the education of a large family" (x). Thus, it is Maria's domestic experiences that give her the necessary opportunities for "scientific"

observation, opportunities one may assume would be less plentiful for a man.

I do not mean to suggest, by citing R. L.'s preface, that Edgeworth required this male parentage to legitimize her work. To do so would be to reject the evidence of the many other women (Macaulay, Elizabeth Hamilton, Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Priscilla Wakefield, to name a few) who wrote on the subject of education without such sanction. Instead, I view R.L.'s comments as the astute critical observations of Edgeworth's editor and close friend. I think they give us valuable evidence about the way the Edgeworths viewed themselves and their project, evidence which is supported by Edgeworth's own writing. Edgeworth's "scientific" method of education is, she repeatedly insists, "practical" because it is based on real observations of real children. In the chapter on "Toys," for example, Edgeworth describes the way in which many children break apart expensive toys because this is the only amusing thing one can do with them. From a practical point of view, there is no sense in buying toys that do not for long fulfill their primary purpose, entertainment. But Edgeworth uses this simple domestic observation to enter into the scientific and political bases of her project. From an educational standpoint, fancy toys are useless both because they do not teach children to use their senses and develop their thinking skills, and also because toys such as "gilded

coaches" teach inappropriate social values. When the child is taught to be careful of fragile and boring toys,

...in general, he is taught to set a value upon them totally independent of all ideas of utility, or of any regard to his own real feelings. Either he is conjured to take particular care of them, because they cost a great deal of money; or else he is taught to admire them as miniatures of some of the fine things on which fine people pride themselves; if no other bad consequence ensue, this single circumstance of his being guided in his choice by the opinions of others is dangerous. Instead of attending to his own sensations, and learning from his own experience, he acquires the habit of estimating his pleasures by the taste and judgement of those who happen to be near him. (3)

Here, Edgeworth sets utility or usefulness in contrast with the values of "fine people," a reference to the suggestion by Priestley and others that the middle class has greater utility than the upper, and therefore has a superior value system.

Edgeworth further suggests that direct experience, and not the voice of authority, ought to decide the child's preferences. One of the values she believes the child should be taught is to review the evidence (in this case, the utility of the toy) and form a judgment based on this evidence, rather than rely on the traditional value assigned to an object. Thus, scientific objectivism is used in a domestic situation (the choice of toys) to prove the superiority of a value system based on utility rather than traditional values of rank and wealth. By using detail in her anecdote such as a supposed dialogue between parent and child, and explicit description of the colors and designs of the toys, Edgeworth

creates authority for herself as one who has observed real children playing with real toys and has estimated the utility of those toys to the children. As she notes elsewhere, only through these specific observations can accurate principles of education be discerned. "Whatever is connected with pain or pleasure commands our attention; but to make this general observation useful in education, we must examine what degrees of stimulus are necessary for different pupils, and in different circumstances" (85). She assumes the powerful stance of a scientific observer, whose "value neutral" point of view allows her to determine the "real" utility of objects and behaviors. This attitude occurs throughout Practical Education and culminates in the Appendix which contains supposed transcriptions of dialogues with children to illustrate various parts of the book's educational theory. The Appendix is the capstone of Edgeworth's creation of an authoritative scientific voice that originates in the domestic, but whose observations have clear implications for the political realm.

In discerning how Edgeworth creates this sort of dual meaning in her document that unites the public and the private in the issue of children's education, one finds power, particularly as it determines issues of class and gender, to be the comprehensive principle in Edgeworth's thought. Power, as Edgeworth discusses the term, incorporates both the ability to accurately observe and judge situations and the ability to affect situations through one's actions. Unlike earlier

writers from Rousseau to Macaulay, who tend to ignore the issues of power and class that have their roots in a child's infancy, Edgeworth discusses power relationships specifically as they affect every aspect of a middle class or upper class child's life from infancy to marriage. In doing so, she continually reiterates her desire to be "practical," that is, to emphasize those changes in the social environment that can be made at the level of the individual and the individual family. She generally avoids overt consideration of large scale reform, despite the fact that the educational principles she discusses would clearly have broad social significance. Edgeworth is always careful to avoid open discussion of the larger social ramifications of her educational theory.

Edgeworth begins, as do Rousseau, Macaulay and many others, with the infant's first social relationships, those it has with its mother and its nurse. Far from Rousseau's view of the nurse as a sort of transparent medium for the parents' orders, or Macaulay's view of the nurse as a completely incomprehensible individual subsumed under the category of the "lower classes," Edgeworth's view of the nurse encompasses the specific power factors that cause the nurse to relate to the child in specific ways. These factors include the nurse's personal desire for the child's love and affection, and also the nurse's economic relationship with the child's parents. In the chapter "Toys," Edgeworth opens the discussion of this relationship by noting the way in which the desires of the

mother and the nurse can come into conflict if the mother insists that the nurse not "spoil" the child with flattery and undeserved rewards. The nurse uses these means, Edgeworth argues, not because she deliberately wishes to harm the child, but because it is in her own best interest to "spoil" the child. "A nurse's wish is to have as little trouble as possible with the child committed to her charge, and at the same time to flatter the mother, from whom she expects her reward "(7). Flattering and indulging the child both keep it quiet and convince its mother that the nurse loves the child, thus fulfilling the nurse's desire to have little trouble and to please her employer. The solution, according to Edgeworth, is to recognize this complicated relationship and to work within it, rather than, as Rousseau states, to apply ever greater coercive power to the nurse. Edgeworth suggests that the mother should educate the nurse to understand that a spoiled child will be more trouble to her in the long run, thus not fulfilling her first desire. Second, the mother should show by her own example as well as her words that she is sincere in wanting the child to be appropriately disciplined, and that failure by the nurse to do so will displease the mother (8). Thus, Edgeworth demonstrates that practical domestic management requires recognition of power relationships involving the mother's control of economic resources and her greater social authority. One can then develop the ability to use those relationships to the

advantage of those on both sides of the equation, that is, to use the mother's economic and social authority to create a proper environment for the child while also satisfying some of the nurse's needs.

As the child grows it begins to formulate an understanding of its own relationships beyond the simple fulfillment of physical needs. In the chapter "On Servants," Edgeworth argues that as children become aware of authority and status in social relationships, they should not be allowed to associate with servants, not only because they will develop "vulgar habits" but also because the servant's own education is so limited that he/she does not have the appropriate understanding for educating children. "In education it is not enough to obey the laws, it is necessary to understand them; to understand the spirit, as well as the letter of the law"(123). Because servants do not have the intellectual training necessary to understand the theoretical bases of various educational practices, they cannot or will not apply those practices consistently or rationally. Edgeworth again uses the example of the child and the nurse to illustrate her opinion, but this time the child is older, and the bad lessons the nurse imparts are therefore even more consequential. The nurse gives the boy a treat, sugar, and implies that he should not tell his mother about it. Edgeworth notes that not only does the boy thus learn to be dishonest but he realizes that his mother will be angry with the nurse if she knows about the

treat. "His gratitude is engaged to his nurse for running the risk to indulge him; his mother, by the force of contrast, appears a severe person, who for no reason that he can comprehend, would deprive him of the innocent pleasure of eating sugar "(119). Not yet able to understand that his mother's concern for his health is in his own best interest, "His honour and affection towards his nurse are immediately set in opposition to his duty to his mother"(120). This occurs because the needs of the nurse to satisfy her employer and to gain the affection of her charge are in opposition, leading her to falsehood. However, because of the child's more advanced social awareness, the solution is no longer so simple. Furthermore, in their attempts to cultivate the favor of children, servants will often use flattery which not only incites jealousy among the children of the same family, but servants often flatter children with reference to the greatness of their family, leading to jealousy and animosity between the children of different upper and middle class families. Finally, children who grow up in "familiarity" with servants do not learn the appropriate ways of relating to social inferiors. They do not gain habitual respect by their manner and thus must eventually use "violent means" to reassert their authority over their servants when they are grown (125). The upper class child's eventual appropriate use of authority requires that the child develop early habits of behaving in a polite but authoritative manner toward members

of the lower class. Edgeworth thus argues that close association between servants and children leads to a breakdown of social boundaries between classes and a diminution of solidarity within the upper classes. Edgeworth argues from the upper class position that such breakdown is undoubtedly negative. Like Priestley, she sees class as one of the necessary organizational components of society. This is clear in her statement about the causes of ignorance in servants and the probable results of an improvement in their education. After noting that servants generally teach children "habits of cunning, falsehood, [and] envy," Edgeworth goes on to note that these habits are not inborn in servants. "What has been said of the understanding and dispositions of servants relates only to servants as they are now educated. Their vices and their ignorance arise from the same causes, the want of education. They are not a separate cast in society doomed to ignorance, or degraded by inherent vice; they are capable, they are desirous of education. Let them be well educated, and the difference in their conduct and understanding will repay society for the trouble of the undertaking" (124) Better education will lead to a better regulated lower class; Edgeworth does not consider the possibility that rational education could lead to "irrational" behavior such as a demand by the lower classes for workplace regulation or greater civil rights. Like many British reformers, Edgeworth viewed the British class system as rational and useful, and therefore

likely to be strengthened rather than weakened by education of the lower classes. Despite her low opinion of the lower classes' present education, however, Edgeworth is adamant that the "lower class" vices of dishonesty and wastefulness are not, as Macaulay implies, "incomprehensible," but arise from specific environmental causes. If those causes are altered, if the lower classes are taught to recognize the "rationality" of middle class values, they will naturally adopt them, becoming easily "comprehensible" to the middle class employers.

In fact, Edgeworth is explicit about the causes of most dishonesty and other undesirable behavior. The injudicious or "irrational" use of power by those in control is the root cause of most undesirable behavior in both children and adults. Edgeworth draws clear parallels between the parent, who holds physical power over the child, and the employer or ruler who holds economic or social power over the adult. In both cases, it is the responsibility of the person in power to wield it in such a way as to satisfy the needs of both the weak and the powerful. She states this case most strongly in the chapter "On Truth," in which she explores the causes of dishonesty. Edgeworth assumes that dishonesty is the result of poor education, but she notes that method is of equal if not greater importance than content in education. She argues strenuously that the use of fear does not produce true obedience or facilitate true learning; instead it leads to further problems while causing the student to mask his or her

true feelings. "Oppression and terror necessarily produce meanness and deceit in all climates, and in all ages; and wherever fear is the governing motive in education, we must expect to find in children a propensity to dissimulation, if not confirmed habits of falsehood" (212). The reference to "all climates" and "all ages" makes it clear that Edgeworth wishes her statement to be given wide application. Those who hold power are responsible for the "education" that they instill through their use of that power, whether they are parents or rulers. She specifically notes the dishonesty of the Irish peasants and of West Indian slaves noting that it is their oppression which leads them to falsehood in their own defence. The kind of falsehood which Macaulay believed made members of the lower classes incomprehensible is the result, according to Edgeworth, of "oppression" or the illegitimate exercise of authority. Severe oppression, in fact, makes it impossible for the oppressed to practice honesty or any other social virtue, as she notes that "Those who are excluded from hope are necessarily excluded from virtue..." (248).

The slave or oppressed peasant sees no likely reward for cooperating with the unjust system that oppresses him. Therefore, like a child who is punished repeatedly and with undue severity, he will use any means available to avoid punishment. The justice of those with power determines the virtue of the entire system. As Edgeworth notes in the chapter "On Rewards and Punishments," "When once, by

reasoning, children acquire even a vague idea that those who educate them are unjust, it is in vain either to punish or reward them; if they submit, or if they rebel, their education is equally spoiled..."(233). If one rebels against unjust authority, one learns to violate the letter of the law; if one submits, one learns cunning and cowardice.

Edgeworth continues the metaphoric connection between education and politics at another point when she notes that parents and teachers who are not consistent and just in their decisions may "set the example of caprice, or teach our pupils the arts of courtiers, who watch the humour of tyrants" (162). Further, she notes that children "murmur and rebel, if they dare, whenever they feel the hand of power press upon them capriciously" (163). In creating this metaphor of the parent as ruler, Edgeworth relies on the time-worn idea of the sovereign as the father of his people, but she skillfully incorporates the revolutionary principle that the ruled will rebel only if they are oppressed or treated with injustice.⁵ Further, she uses her detailed observations of domestic situations, her knowledge of children's behavior, to give authority to her political analysis.

Power is an intrinsic part of social relationships. All relationships described by Edgeworth involve the ability of one party or individual to control the behavior of another through either the threat of punishment or the promise of reward. Legitimate authority consists of the judicious use of

power by those with the ability to ensure the greatest common good. This is Edgeworth's underlying principle. It underlies her implicit support of the class system. A properly educated ruling class ensures the greatest good for all members of society through rational economic and political organization. She disagrees vehemently with Rousseau's suggestion in Emile that the child should be kept ignorant of these power relationships by careful and secretive arrangement of elaborate incidents, such as that in which Emile angers the gardener by planting beans in the melon plot. Edgeworth maintains that this sort of dishonesty leads to "endless absurdities and difficulties" (178). Instead, the child, like the citizen or the servant, should come to believe that those in power are acting in his interest in its exercise. By arranging their house and habits such that much of a child's good behavior is passive or comes by habit, parents can avoid the constant overt exercise of authority that eventually erodes its own basis (175).

Edgeworth again draws a parallel between good parenting and another legitimate use of power, that exercised by a good housekeeper over her servants. She presents the anecdote of a woman who taught her servants to keep order in the house by making order more convenient to them: "Order was made more convenient to them than disorder, and with their utmost ingenuity to save themselves trouble, they could not invent places for every thing more appropriate than those which had

been assigned by their mistress's legislative oeconomy" (176).

The implication here is that desire for order, an important middle class "rational" value, can be taught to servants if their employer provides a truly rational example. The good manager, whether he or she is a parent, teacher or employer, uses power to create rational habits that not only serve his or her own needs but those of the child or servant who would otherwise resent the exercise of authority. Following the utilitarian philosophy prevalent in reformist circles at the end of the century, Edgeworth sees power as a given, the variable being whether that power is controlled by a rational manager who uses power for legitimate purposes, or is controlled by a selfish "tyrant" who uses power for short-sighted personal gain. In Edgeworth's theoretical world, the child, the employee, the citizen would all acquiesce in the exercise of a rational authority when they could clearly see it was exercised for their own benefit. Like Macaulay, Edgeworth sees upper class education as a means of preparing members of the ruling class for the role as directors of power.

Edgeworth writes as a member of the upper class not desiring revolutionary change, and she writes as an adult who assumes that adult responsibility includes the use of power to protect and educate children. But she also writes as a woman in a time when women's status as fully rational beings -the intellectual and moral equals of men- was not universally

accepted. Edgeworth is an uncompromising advocate of education for women. In fact, in speaking of preadolescent children, Edgeworth does not differentiate between boys and girls in terms of education. Both provide examples of the various types of personalities and the various types of rational and irrational behavior one may observe in children. Further, in using the examples of the rational housekeeper and the rational mother, Edgeworth shows women in roles of authority, something most women writers do not do in their discussions of power.⁶ But, just as Edgeworth is clearly cognizant of the element of power in parent-child relationships and in master-servant relationships, she is explicit about the role that certain types of power play in determining women's lives. The difference in her treatment of gender is that Edgeworth makes no effort, as she did in the case of children and the lower classes, to provide rational or logical justification for the inferior position of women in society. Like Macaulay and Wollstonecraft, she argues that many of women's defects come from education, but Edgeworth, in keeping with her stated avoidance of visionary schemes, is more concerned with how to cultivate in women and girls those qualities which will allow them, while fully aware of their inferior status, to live reasonably happy and productive lives. Underneath her cheerful reiteration of belief in the power of reason and rationality to improve society, Edgeworth reveals a deep pessimism about the state of women and a lack

of hope that the power dynamics which determine their lives can be significantly altered. While she shares Macaulay and Wollstonecraft's disgust at the focus in women's education on sexual attractiveness, clearly delineating the resulting misery of some women's lives, Edgeworth never hints, as she does in discussing servants and children, that education will reform the power relationships between men and women. Instead, women's education is aimed at individual coping strategies designed to benefit individual women.

Edgeworth covers some familiar ground in her discussion of education for women. But, her careful examination of the power relationships determining women's roles adds depth to the common complaints about that state of learning in women. Edgeworth criticizes both women's lack of accurate knowledge about literature and science and their overemphasis on those areas supposed to increase sexual attractiveness or femininity, that is sensibility and fine accomplishments. Concerning "accomplishments" such as music and dancing, Edgeworth agrees with earlier writers in seeing the overemphasis on these components of education as the result of the mistaken priority given to attracting male attention. In fact, Edgeworth notes, such emphasis may even defeat its own purpose.

If the system of female manners, conspire to shew in the fair sex a degrading anxiety to attract worthless admiration, wealthy or titled homage, is it surprising that every young man, who has any pretensions to birth, fortune, or fashion, should consider himself as the arbiter of their fate, and

the despotic judge of their merit? Women, who understand their real interests, perceive the causes of the contempt, tacitly or openly expressed, is endured {sic} (534).

The concern with developing useless accomplishments, most of which will be abandoned after marriage, contributes to the marriage market mentality so degrading to women. Edgeworth also points out that a man who selects his wife based on ornamental accomplishments may be wealthy, but that does not necessarily mean he will make a good husband. A mother concerned with her daughter's happiness in marriage would rather see her attract a husband suited to her personality. Furthermore, if a young woman enjoys accomplishments such as music or drawing too much, she may be unhappy if her eventual spouse does not appreciate or encourage these same accomplishments. "Women cannot foresee what may be the tastes of the individuals with whom they are to pass their lives. Their own tastes should not therefore be early decided..." (528). This is a fairly standard argument that women should not form decided opinions until after marriage so that their opinions will be in agreement with those of their husbands.

While women are often given too much training in fine accomplishments, Edgeworth echoes writers from Wollstonecraft to Hannah More in pointing out the failure of the system to educate women in thinking skills and useful knowledge. A general note throughout Practical Education is that a good

education must first and foremost teach critical thinking skills and habits of attention. "Praise children for patience, for perseverance, for industry; encourage them to reason and to invent upon all subjects, and you may direct their attention afterwards as you think proper " (540). In this crucial area women are not given the opportunity to develop good thinking skills because society often views "reason, knowledge, and science, as unsuitable or dangerous to women," which leads to the corollary that "superficial knowledge is more desirable in women than accurate knowledge" (551). Without developing a good understanding of the theoretical and rational bases of the various sciences, women become "at once arrogant and ignorant; full of pretensions, incapable of application, and unfit to hear themselves convinced." Edgeworth argues that women should be given an accurate understanding of the basic principles of science as a groundwork for understanding learned conversation and also to teach them habits of accuracy in thinking and speaking. The suggestion contained within this argument is that women who are "unfit to hear themselves convinced" will not be able to fill the role of cooperative and rational helpmate to men.

While Edgeworth merely touches on the issue of authority and women's social roles in the section just discussed, other statements in Practical Education make it clear that part of educating a woman in a "practical" or rational way is to prepare her to fulfill the expected role in a way that will

bring her the most satisfaction. In being "practical," Edgeworth focuses on the individual's happiness or unhappiness, remaining somewhat vague about the ultimate social goals of women's education. Most of the differences that Edgeworth recommends between the education of girls and that of boys refer to the necessity that the two sexes fulfill different social roles. Edgeworth is straightforward in her acknowledgement of the fact that women are judged by different standards than men. In arguing that these differences ought to be taken into account in education she answers "writers who advise that no difference should be made in the education of the two sexes" with the firm statement "that their happiness is of more consequence than their speculative rights, and we wish to educate women so that they may be happy in the situations in which they are most likely to be placed" (168). This clearly separates Edgeworth from earlier writers such as Wollstonecraft who saw the reform of domestic power relationships as a societal rather than individual program. Edgeworth delineates several specific areas in which a woman's education must differ from a man's in order for the woman to live happily and comfortably in society as it really is. The first area of a girl's education that needs special attention is that of temper. In the chapter entitled "On Temper" Edgeworth explains why a woman's temper needs special attention. In doing so she shows a keen awareness of the ways in which lack of power and authority determine a

woman's role in society. From their earliest years, "girls should be more inured to restraint than boys, because they are likely to meet with more restraint in society " (168). Through this early restraint, girls will become accustomed to their roles, and it is Edgeworth's firm belief that happiness in one's position comes through the habit of submitting to necessary restraints and discomforts. As she says at another point in speaking of boys and girls, "Unless we could ever ensure the bed of roses to our pupils, we should do very imprudently to make it early necessary to their repose..." (172). If a woman fails to learn superior control of temper at an early age, she will suffer as an adult because she does not recognize or cannot adapt to the unequal power structure of society. This is Edgeworth's major point, as she illustrates in this contrast between the effects of loss of temper in men and women. "A man in a furious passion is terrible to his enemies, but a woman in a passion is disgusting to her friends; she loses the respect due to her sex, and she has not masculine strength and courage to enforce any other species of respect " (167). When a woman loses her temper, she sacrifices that allowance for her weak position which men normally make. As a result, she is exposed to the direct effects of the power imbalance in which shows of "strength and courage" are reserved for men. If a woman understands and accepts that the respect accorded to men is partly due to physical strength and power of action that are

unavailable to her, she can use her reasoning powers more effectively. Edgeworth attempts to show that women can assert themselves, as long as they are aware of the parameters of accepted feminine behavior. "We by no means wish that women should yield their better judgment to their fathers or husbands; but, without using any of that debasing cunning which Rousseau recommends, they may support the cause of reason with all the graces of female gentleness " (167).

Practical Education states in various ways that women's education needs to teach women a sort of social self defense for a world in which they will have little power. In writing of the need to develop women's critical thinking skills, Edgeworth makes this vague but cautionary statement, "her knowledge must be various and her powers of reasoning unawed by authority; yet she must habitually feel that nice sense of propriety, which is at once the guard and the charm of every feminine virtue " (550). The coded meaning here seems to be that a woman whose reasoning is not to some extent controlled by limits determined by her gender runs the risk of losing her "feminine virtue," a phrase well known to denote chastity and sexual self control.

In the chapter "On Prudence and Economy," Edgeworth elaborates on the particular dangers faced by women in society, and the special sorts of behavior required to avoid those dangers. In general, prudence, according to Edgeworth, requires that a person have "the power to judge, and the habit

of acting in consequence of his conviction "(690). But while boys may learn from errors of judgment, the errors which girls may make are irreversible. Therefore, Edgeworth devotes a considerable amount of time to describing the ways in which girls must be taught the special value of prudence. "In the education of girls we must teach them much more caution than is necessary to boys; their prudence must be more the result of reasoning than of experiment; they must trust to the experience of others, they cannot always have recourse to what ought to be, they must adapt themselves to what is" (699).

Here is the crux of Edgeworth's argument. For women, individual happiness is dependent on learning to successfully negotiate a social system in which they have little power to enforce their own views. While this may be theoretically illogical, an individual woman who attempts to ignore the circumstances of real life will bring unhappiness to herself with no gain to society. As Edgeworth notes, for women there is often no second chance after an error has been made. "They cannot rectify the material mistakes in their conduct "(699). Therefore, in educating women, one should "avoid every circumstance which can tend to make girls venturesome, which can encourage them to trust in their good fortune, instead of relying on their own prudence" (700). Far from seeing this system as "natural" or essentially right, Edgeworth had criticized this very tendency of society to fatally condemn women for a single mistake in an earlier section (194). But

unlike Rousseau, who believed he could educate the natural man and then introduce him into society, Edgeworth recognizes the necessity of living in society from birth. Men and women cannot escape social necessity through education, but they can learn to adapt to it in ways that preserve their morality and their happiness.

This concern with what "is" permeates all of Edgeworth's works. As an intellectual woman, she followed the example of many other women writers of the eighteenth century in using children's education as a topic through which she could explore a variety of political and social issues. Edgeworth writes from the perspective of the individual parent concerned with ensuring the greatest happiness to an individual child. From this viewpoint, she could explore class and gender inequalities without seeming to advocate revolutionary change. The fact that learning to live within the current rules of society makes the best of a situation does not necessarily mean the situation is itself good. In fact, I have attempted to show that Edgeworth saw social relationships as a sort of minefield, with power issues always just beneath the surface.⁷ In Practical Education, she gives rules for negotiating the minefield, disavowing any immediate interest in what lies beyond. Given the precarious status of intellectual women and given the generally unsettled state of society in Ireland and Great Britain at this time, this attitude is certainly understandable. Nevertheless, Edgeworth shows great

sensitivity to issues of power and authority, particularly as these issues impinge on individual morality. In creating a metaphoric link between education and politics, Edgeworth gave herself a space in which to examine and criticize society while staying within the prescribed area of domestic evidence in which she could be expected to have expertise. This type of "evidence" is particularly suited, as Edgeworth seems to recognize, to the art of fiction. In the following chapters, I will examine how Edgeworth uses fiction and the topics of social and intellectual education to explore the same underlying issues of power and authority that she raises in Practical Education.

Chapter 3

BELINDA OR THE MORAL OBSERVER

Belinda, Edgeworth's first full length novel in the female "bildungsroman" tradition, has been much maligned by critics. As Kathryn Kirkpatrick notes in her preface to a modern edition of Belinda, some early critics felt that the protagonist, Belinda, was not a sufficiently sympathetic character (Kirkpatrick xxi). Marilyn Butler sums up the objections of many modern readers in stating that the novel is weakened by "a moralistic running commentary, and ...subordination of character and incident to the manufacture of a perfectly just conclusion" (Butler 314). In this chapter I will argue that Belinda provides an excellent example of the way in which Edgeworth uses fiction to present her views on education and the interrelated issues of power and authority in the domestic setting. Belinda is an interesting novel with a complicated relationship to similar novels of female development due to Edgeworth's innovative consideration of the ways in which judgment and observation can empower women as well as men. By understanding some of Edgeworth's unique didactic aims, one is able to read Belinda with greater appreciation of Edgeworth's ability to combine subtle philosophical considerations with an interesting story. In Belinda Edgeworth makes a case for women's moral and intellectual authority through the role of the objective

observer, the same "scientific" stance she had adopted in Practical Education. Furthermore, Belinda specifically rejects gender-based dichotomies of intellectual and moral responsibility, illustrating the need for both men and women to be able to make rational moral judgments based on intellect and sound moral reasoning.

In the "Advertisement" for Belinda, Edgeworth offers specific praise for the novels of Elizabeth Inchbald and Frances Burney, stating that if all novels were like theirs, she would "adopt the name of novel with delight" for her own work. However, she states that "so much folly, error, and vice are disseminated" in books termed "novels" that she prefers to call Belinda a "moral tale." Belinda has definite similarities to Inchbald's A Simple Story and Burney's three novels, Evelina, Cecilia, and Camilla. All of these novels center on the experience of a young woman who, through the action of the novel, is more or less successfully integrated into upper class British society. As Jane Spencer has noted, many novels of the late eighteenth century follow a similar plan, involving a heroine who, unlike Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa, makes a variety of mistakes in conduct or judgment, serious enough to engage the reader's interest, but never of the type to bring the heroine's basic virtue into question (Spencer 141). Often, the heroine is guided into her proper place by a lover-mentor, who provides paternal advice through the action of the novel and is transformed into a mentor-

husband at the end. As Spencer notes, one of the underlying messages of this plot is the importance of young women "learning to repudiate faults seen as specially feminine, and accepting male authority instead of challenging it" (143). Evelina's experience in Burney's novel is a good example. The heroine must learn through threatening encounters that only with the protection and advice of Lord Orville can she safely negotiate the many dangers of the social world. Burney's presentation of the dangers and confusions of the young woman's situation suggest underlying dissatisfaction with the conventional marriage plot. In fact, the ending to Cecilia leaves the reader almost stunned with the stifling and unfulfilling nature of the "marriage ending." In Camilla, Edgar's obsessive spying and judging make his eventual marriage to the heroine seem more a testament to her lack of viable options than a satisfactory solution to her problems. But Burney does not provide options for her heroine. Despite its many drawbacks, marriage is presented as the only alternative likely to at least bring the heroine a measure of social and financial security. In Belinda Edgeworth presents a story that appears to be similar to Burney's, in which a young woman must become educated in various social conventions before eventually finding resolution if not fulfillment in marriage.

Despite definite similarities in plot line, however, Belinda differs significantly from Burney's works and from

those of other contemporaries, such as Charlotte Smith, who presented the ideal romantic relationship as tutorial, with the hero educating the heroine.¹ As Kowaleski-Wallace has noted, Belinda has met with scattered but persistent criticism because of the "insipidity" of the title character. "Unlike Fanny Burney's comparable heroines," Kowaleski-Wallace states, "she experiences little self-doubt and rarely any convincing inner conflict" (109). While one may debate the comparative appeal of fictional characters to modern readers, I would argue that Edgeworth's significant differences from Burney are not the result of Edgeworth having less artistic sense or ability than Burney, but are caused by Edgeworth's insistent experimental attempts to mold the novel into a vehicle for her unique social vision. Belinda is different from Evelina because Edgeworth is creating a heroine for different narrative and ideological purposes. To insist that Belinda "fails" as a heroine because she is not Evelina or Camilla, or even Miss Milner, is to miss the point of Edgeworth's narrative.

In Belinda, Edgeworth uses her main plot as well as an array of subplots to question the conventional wisdom of the mentoring relationship as the model for the marital or courtship relationship, raising doubts about the ability of any one individual to appropriately make moral and intellectual judgments for another. Edgeworth also explores the ways in which rational thought and action create power and

ability for both men and women. While relying on the conventional romantic plot of love and marriage for her heroine, Edgeworth insistently modifies and defamiliarizes the conventions of that plot, causing the reader to reexamine the assumptions about gender and class that underlie the traditional "happy ending." While Burney in Cecilia and Camilla gives the reader the traditional wedding ending, leaving many bitter conflicts unresolved, Edgeworth attempts to rework and reconsider the marriage plot in a way that creates a traditional appearance with a more satisfactory moral basis. Thus, Edgeworth raises many of the same questions about the traditional marriage plot that are explored by Burney, but Edgeworth attempts to answer these questions in terms of the Enlightenment belief in social perfectibility, while Burney seems to take a pessimistic and doubting view of social progress.

Belinda appears in the opening sentences of the novel to be a typical heroine in need of education, "handsome, graceful, sprightly, and highly accomplished." Nevertheless, Edgeworth provides some indication of the novel's direction in the comment that Belinda's scheming Aunt Stanhope does not find her "such a docile pupil" in the art of coquetry as she would like. No very specific reason is ever given for Belinda's unusually rational approach to life except that "she had been educated chiefly in the country; she had early been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures; she was fond of

reading, and disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity" (7). Edgeworth uses Belinda in the novel, not as the trial and error learner common to Burney and Austen, but as an acute, mature observer who brings her considerable rational abilities to bear on the problems that others create for themselves through their lack of this same quality. In fact, despite complaints, even among feminist critics, of Belinda's coldness, Edgeworth's heroine represents a mature woman with considerable power to affect her own circumstances and those of others. Unlike Arabella in Lennox's The Female Quixote, who is ultimately forced to abandon her fantasy of power and authority, Belinda's control of circumstances is based on her superior reasoning powers; thus, in Edgeworth's novel the heroine's confidence in her own judgment is reinforced rather than undermined.

Furthermore, as Kristina Straub has noted, the spectator is an important icon of power and cultural authority in the eighteenth century (6). Hearing and judging the stories of the various less rational characters puts Belinda in the position of observer traditionally associated with the male mentor. In fact, when reciting her life story to Belinda, Lady Delacour refers to herself as "princess Scheherazade," thus emphasising the power implicit in Belinda's position as spectator or auditor of another's story. In investing Belinda with the power of the spectator, Edgeworth involves her heroine in subtle difficulties related to judgment and

choice. Belinda assumes the responsibility of audience in deciding which stories merit attention and belief. Thus, Belinda's difficulties may seem more exterior, less heart-rending than those of less informed heroines, but they are equally important to her social survival and success. When Belinda is invested with the power and responsibility of an objective observer she can no longer rely on conventional authority figures such as her aunt to exercise judgment on her behalf. Belinda must judge and act for herself.

Even before the story opens, Edgeworth employs an epigraph from Lyttleton's "Monody on his Wife" which reads in part "A prudence undeceiving, undeceived, that nor too little, nor too much believed." One is thus prepared for Belinda's task of judging what to believe and determining how to exercise prudence, particularly if one recalls Edgeworth's definition of prudence in Practical Education:

Prudence is a virtue compounded of judgement and resolution: we do not here speak of that narrow species of prudence which is more properly called worldly wisdom; but we mean that enlarged, comprehensive wisdom, which, after taking a calm view of the object's happiness, steadily prefers the greatest portion of felicity. (689)

While contemporary women novelists (for example, Charlotte Smith in Emmeline and Celestina) use the older female mentor to reinforce and stabilize the heroine's value system, Edgeworth presents older women who are equally as liable as younger women to errors in judgment, and more likely to be invested in a sexist value system in which women become

obsessed with their value as items of male exchange. Within the novel's first two pages, Belinda encounters two potential female mentors, each representing a world view that Belinda must evaluate. Her Aunt Stanhope represents the conventional view that young women's highest goals should be to marry "men of fortunes far superior to their own" (7). While Belinda appears not to have completely absorbed Aunt Stanhope's lessons, the narrator cautions the reader that Belinda's task of rational evaluation has barely begun. "Her character, however, was yet to be developed by circumstances" (7). Furthermore, her Aunt Stanhope's first letter in the novel indicates the difficulties that confront the rational observer; everyone the observer meets will be intent upon creating a particular response, thus potentially deceiving her. Aunt Stanhope indicates to Belinda that she should use dress and behavior to gain a husband while concealing important facts about herself. "I know of no law, which compels a young lady, to tell what her age or her fortune may be" (9). In addition, she indicates that even the most simple appearances may be deceiving. "I have covered my old carpet with a handsome green baize, and every stranger, who comes to see me, I observe, takes it for granted, that I have a rich carpet under it" (9). Belinda will have to determine what lies beneath the "green baize" of the various characters in the novel in order to exercise the prudence indicated in the

epigraph. Aunt Stanhope's candid letter suggests what a difficult task this will be.

The second prospective mentor Belinda encounters is considerably more attractive than Aunt Stanhope, making the exercise of Belinda's powers of observation even more crucial to the exercise of her judgment. Aunt Stanhope has gotten Belinda placed for the winter with Lady Delacour, a woman whose "company was courted by all the gay, the witty, and the gallant." Belinda, whom the narrator admits had "never been roused to much reflection," is at first awed by Lady Delacour's fashionable reputation. Furthermore, Lady Delacour's wit and intelligence make her "the most fascinating person she [Belinda] had ever beheld" (10). After the reference to Burney in the advertisement, one is immediately struck by the superficial resemblance between the relationship of Belinda and Lady Delacour and that of Camilla and Mrs. Arlbery. The word "fascinating" should likewise alert us that Belinda's admiration of Lady Delacour is not entirely based on reason and judgment, but more likely upon Lady Delacour's appeal to Belinda's fancy or imagination, an unstable basis for judgment, as Edgeworth and other educational theorists have indicated. Like Camilla, Belinda seems to be in some danger of being charmed into situations and behaviors that might be dangerous to her. Wit and gaiety are not solid reasons for choosing a mentor, or even a companion. Furthermore, Lady Delacour, while considerably more tactful

than Aunt Stanhope, likewise appears to espouse a theatrical view of social relations as a sort of performance, incorporating the need to hide anything unpleasant about oneself behind an acceptable mask. As the leader of fashion she presents herself as the "mistress of the revels" (11).

Of course, the continuation of the novel reveals Lady Delacour to be, indeed, hiding a number of things under the facade of wit and humor. Her husband is drunken and sullen, and Lady Delacour herself seems to be dying of breast cancer. She maintains a gay and careless attitude in public to hide the fact that her private life is hollow and hopeless. In Camilla, a similar female role model leads the heroine deeper and deeper into debt, alienating her from her chosen suitor and her family. Mrs. Arlbery likes Camilla, but one is led to wonder to what extent the older woman may take pleasure in seeing someone who is at least potentially a rival embarrassed. As one woman acquaintance describes Mrs. Arlbery, "she was a woman far more agreeable to the men, than to her own sex" (Camilla 194). Edgeworth suggests as a possibility in Belinda's relationship to Lady Delacour the pattern of an older fashionable woman leading astray a younger woman who potentially threatens to divert the attention of admirers. What is especially interesting in Edgeworth's construction of the relationship is the way in which this narrative expectation is thwarted. The disruptive potential of the sexual rivalry between the younger woman and her older

mentor hinted at by Burney is addressed directly in Belinda. But even more interesting is the way in which Edgeworth takes aspects of the mentor-student relationship and, through alterations of the structure of authority, transforms the relationship into an equal friendship in which both Belinda and Lady Delacour have something to gain and something to contribute.

As I have noted, Belinda's main didactic role in the novel is to illustrate the power and authority created by an education that stresses intelligent observation and prudence. In the case of her relationship with Lady Delacour, these powers of observation must combine with ready sympathy and steady nerves to enable Belinda to both diagnose and treat Lady Delacour's moral illness. Contrary to the views of some critics, however, I do not think that Belinda enters the novel fully equipped and prepared to exercise perfect prudence. Belinda must overcome her own doubts and weaknesses as well as Lady Delacour's if the women's relationship is to develop into the friendly confidence that will allow each of them to benefit from the other.

The first major obstacle to the women's friendship is their shared attraction to Clarence Hervey. Lady Delacour carries on a long-standing flirtation with Hervey, although she and Lord Delacour still live together. Despite the apparently non-physical nature of Hervey's relationship to Lady D, Belinda suspects that it may be this "entanglement"

that causes his ambivalent behavior toward herself, despite his obvious admiration of Belinda's beauty and intelligence. As the narrator notes, the idea that Hervey could be lost to her due to his relationship with Lady Delacour, "excited, in the most edifying manner, her indignation against coquetry in general, and against her ladyship's in particular; she became wonderfully clear sighted to all the improprieties of her ladyship's conduct" (15). The narrator speaks mockingly of Belinda's "newly acquired moral sense" suggesting that sexual jealousy, not moral outrage, is the cause of Belinda's doubting whether she should remain with Lady Delacour or return to her Aunt Stanhope. Aunt Stanhope replies to Belinda's concerned letter about this point by reassuring her niece that Lady Delacour's age and marital status ensure that her relationship with Hervey must be temporary, much quieting "Belinda's fears of Lady Delacour, as a dangerous rival" (16).

When once this fundamental fear is removed, Belinda writes a remorseful letter to Aunt Stanhope, stating that she has been too harsh on Lady Delacour and claiming "an error of judgment, and not of my heart" (17). When Lady Delacour intercepts this letter, the record of Belinda's candid but ultimately sympathetic observations creates an emotional intimacy that leads Lady Delacour to eventually reveal the secret of her cancer and her past conduct to Belinda.

Edgeworth emphasizes women's desire for male attention and the jealousy that desire arouses by later creating a

further obstacle to the confidence of Belinda and Lady Delacour. Although Lady Delacour has entrusted Belinda with the secrets of her unhappiness, she finds it difficult to accept Belinda's sympathy without suspecting the Hobbesian accompaniment of pleasure in one's own better fortune. That is, she suspects that Belinda intends to benefit from her friend's distress. The specific form taken by her suspicion is that of sexual jealousy. When Belinda urges Lady Delacour to confide in her husband concerning her breast cancer, Lady Delacour becomes nearly convinced that Belinda is trying "on purpose to disgust him with me" (181). Lady Delacour's powers of observation and judgment have been warped by her own continuous masquerade and performance. Unlike Belinda, she is unable to perceive concrete reality, and continually seeks to peer through layers of artifice, even when none exist. In considering Belinda's conduct, Lady Delacour thus interprets even Belinda's apparent sincerity as a sign of deliberate deception. "[Belinda] may have all her aunt's art, and the still greater art to conceal it under the mask of openness and simplicity," Lady Delacour tells herself. While this misunderstanding too is eventually resolved, and Lady Delacour and Belinda re-establish their former confidence, the two similar instances of jealousy between these women friends suggest that one of the great obstacles to women's friendship is that their need for male attention puts them in continuous rivalry. As Wollstonecraft and other feminist writers had

noted, this need for male attention leads women into the habits of artifice and affectation that eventually destroy their capacity for sincerity and intimacy.

Requiring the heroine to reject a proffered place in the fashionable social world was, by Belinda's time, a well-established convention of the form. But Belinda, in rejecting the specific version of "la monde" introduced by Lady Delacour, rejects more than a lifestyle or a pattern for occupying one's time. She is also rejecting a self-concept which requires that a woman's self-esteem hinge on her ability to attract male attention through theatrical performance. Belinda's eventual ability to defuse the tension of sexual jealousy between herself and Lady Delacour is dependent upon her ability to develop a self-concept not determined by the male characters who continually attempt to define all women as objects.

The section of the novel in which Belinda and Lady Delacour attend a masquerade is essential in understanding how Edgeworth views the development of Belinda's self-concept through her practical education in the organization of power and authority in her social group.² If Belinda is to develop clear powers of observation, then her understanding of her own vantage point is crucial. Through the experience of the masquerade, Belinda suffers the embarrassment and loss of ability to act that Elizabeth Craft-Fairchild describes in Burney's Cecilia. "The masquerade seems a painful submission

of the woman to male scopophilia" (4). Through this experience, however, Belinda is educated in a way that ultimately gives her greater personal power of action and more choices in exercising her judgment. By recognizing that the male-female interaction practiced in Lady Delacour's social group is, like the masquerade itself, based on surface appearances, Belinda learns to reject that group's definition of her. The self-concept that Aunt Stanhope and Lady Delacour offer Belinda is the sexualized one described and rejected by Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay, and also Edgeworth in Practical Education. Each of these writers comments on the fact that if a woman is taught to value herself only on her ability to attract male attention, she does not develop a sense of herself as an active agent. Wollstonecraft's description is eloquent.

It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meannesses, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than to reason, and that all the power they obtain must be obtained by their charms and weakness. (153)

At the masquerade, Belinda is educated in the true value that men place upon women's physical attractiveness, and this education, although painful, empowers her to seek a more solid basis for self-esteem. Lady Delacour and Belinda are to represent "tragedy" and "comedy" respectively, due to the oddly vehement insistence of Lady Delacour's maid, Marriott. Although Marriott's behavior is strangely out of keeping with her class and social position, Belinda does not take the time

to observe this closely or to speculate about its significance because "the idea of what Clarence Hervey would think of her appearance was uppermost in her mind" (21). Her only reaction when Lady Delacour capriciously insists that they switch costumes at a friend's house enroute to the masquerade is to be "rather vexed to be obliged to give up her becoming character" (22). But the results of the costume switch prove to be significant as, believing her to be Lady Delacour, Clarence Hervey and his friends anatomize Belinda's character before her masked face. One of the young men describes explicitly how young women like Belinda are converted into objects of exchange because their desire to attract male attention is assumed to have an economic or social status motive:

As for this Belinda Portman 'twas a good hit to send her to lady Delacour's; but I take it, she hangs upon hands; for last winter, when I was at Bath, she was hawked about every where, and the aunt was puffing her with might and main. You heard of nothing, wherever you went, but of Belinda Portman, and Belinda Portman's accomplishments. Belinda Portman, and her accomplishments, I'll swear, were as well advertised, as Packwood's razor straps. (25)

The woman's display is equated with commercial display, designed to attract male attention not for the purpose of either male or female entertainment but in order to further the economic motives of the woman's family.³ While Belinda views her masquerade costume as a means of raising her own self-worth by earning her a positive evaluation from Hervey, the equation of woman and consumer product makes clear that

the further the woman "invests" herself emotionally in her physical ability to attract male attention, the more completely she will cooperate in her own objectification. Clarence Hervey completes the conversation by replying to his friend that he is not likely to be influenced by such advertising. "--do 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). Edgeworth here demonstrates the objections to women's education in "accomplishments" which she had discussed in Practical Education. As she notes there, women's eager desire to please is interpreted as a sign not only of deliberate deception, but also as a tacit acceptance of the right of men to judge women's worth. Nevertheless, while Belinda is understandably mortified by Hervey's judgment, and this scene is certainly an important point in her social education, Edgeworth will show that Hervey himself errs when he assumes the "power to judge" without sufficient opportunity for observation. While Belinda must gradually come to understand the basis on which Lady Delacour's world rests so that she can reject it, Hervey, likewise, must learn from experience that his own assumptions about women's worth and nature are shallow and incorrect.

Stunned by the judgment of herself she has inadvertently overheard, Belinda begs Lady Delacour to take her home. Lady Delacour interprets the blushes and faintness of Belinda, as

well as Clarence Hervey's silence, as signs of mutual sexual attraction. She chides Hervey for being too embarrassed to offer Belinda any effectual assistance. "Did you never see a woman blush before? --or did you never say or do any thing to make a woman blush before?" (27). While Hervey is the cause of Belinda's blush, it is not in the presumably mutually pleasurable way Lady Delacour assumes. Here is yet another difficulty of judging from appearances in a social situation in which every appearance is assumed to be a deception. Belinda, aware that her strong emotional reaction to the overheard conversation may be interpreted as embarrassment at having her true intentions "found out," tries to hide this reaction from Hervey behind her mask. However, Lady Delacour insists on removing the mask, arguing, "This is not the first time Clarence Hervey has ever seen your face without a mask, is it? It's the first time indeed he, or any body else, ever saw it of such a color, I believe" (27). Indeed, it is exposure to Hervey that Belinda fears in removing her mask, but she is most afraid that what is revealed (her blush) will be misinterpreted. Through the overheard conversation, Belinda has discovered that to be an object of another's gaze is to relinquish power, to give over the authority of naming the self to the spectator. When Belinda and Lady Delacour are finally alone together in the carriage, Belinda tries to explain the cause of her embarrassment. At first supposing that Belinda is crying over some inattention of Clarence

Hervey's, Lady Delacour offers to initiate her in the complicated skills of social disguise and deception necessary to attract male attention. "...you have nothing to fear from me, and everything to hope from yourself; if you will only dry up your tears, keep on your mask, and take my advice; you'll find it as good as your aunt Stanhope's" (28). Belinda, however, has learned the price of displaying oneself as an object is to be regarded as such, and it is not a price she is willing to pay. Concerning Aunt Stanhope she states, "never, never more will I take such advice-- never more will I expose myself to be insulted as a female adventurer" (28). Emphasizing the importance of the spectator as interpreter she laments, "Little did I know in what light I appeared" (28).

Lady Delacour readily acknowledges, and, in fact, re-emphasizes the deceptive qualities of the social world and lack of sincere intimacy that this constant state of masquerade produces. She notes that among the "multitude of obedient humble servants, dear creatures, and very sincere and most affectionate friends" with whom she corresponds and exchanges cards there are none who would "care the hundredth part of a straw, if I were this minute thrown into the Red, or the Black sea!" (29). But Lady Delacour insists that by understanding and accepting the insincerity and deception of social relations, one can gain self-esteem through successful deception of others. "I am the comic muse, and mean to keep it up--keep it up to the last--on purpose to provoke those who

pity me" (29). Lady Delacour, unlike Aunt Stanhope, acknowledges the need for emotional as well as financial gratification. But she is apparently convinced that real intimacy creates unacceptable vulnerability. Instead, she advises Belinda to "elbow your way through the crowd," gaining self-esteem and emotional satisfaction from the ability to play one's part well. Lady Delacour seeks power and authority through physical display. However, in addition to the fact that many writers were beginning to criticize women's wielding of power through physical attractiveness as an illegitimate and immoral means to power (see for example the many criticisms of French court women) Belinda discovers that the spectator or rational observer is far more powerful, more able to control people and circumstances, than is the object of observation.

Lady Delacour and Belinda proceed to a second masquerade, at which Belinda cannot enjoy herself because of the "pain" she still feels concerning "that conversation." While the first masquerade proved an important learning experience for Belinda, the second masquerade provides a similar lesson for Lady Delacour, who must at last come to acknowledge the emotional hollowness of her own masquerade. Lady Delacour's enlightenment is revealed to the reader and to Belinda when the two women once again return to the carriage together. When Belinda compliments Lady Delacour on her "amazing flow of spirits," Lady Delacour "let fall her mask," and admits to

Belinda that she is dying, and worst of all, dying without any close emotional attachment to soothe her. Lady Delacour, betrayed by Harriet Freke, the one woman with whom she believed she had a sincere relationship, realizes the masquerade she has maintained has been for the benefit of its spectators, not for herself. She states, "If I had served myself, with half the zeal that I have served the world, I should not now be thus forsaken!" (30).

When Lady Delacour recognizes the hollowness of her social standing, she is led to reflect on her past actions and narrate the story of her dissipated life to Belinda. Like the wise older woman mentor, the fallen woman who recites her "adventures" is a literary convention so trite as to be successfully used by Lennox in The Female Quixote to ridicule the novelistic form. But Edgeworth uses Lady Delacour's narrative of transgression not to educate Belinda to avoid the follies of the older woman (as does the narrator in Wollstonecraft's Maria). Instead, Lady Delacour's narrative provides the turning point in her relationship with Belinda. The mentor-mentee relationship is reversed, with the older woman providing the text which Belinda as observer\interpreter will "read" to diagnose and begin to treat Lady Delacour's educational shortcomings. Edgeworth refers frequently in her educational writings to the importance of reflection on one's life narrative. In Letters for Literary Ladies, the correspondents Caroline and Julia debate the value of this

practice, with the rational Caroline urging her friend to, "Retrace, then, dear Julia, in your mind the course of your thoughts for some time past..." (56). Julia refuses to accept this advice, arguing in her first letter, "In vain, dear Caroline, you urge me to think; I profess only to feel" (37). Because Julia refuses to become an objective observer of her own actions, analyzing their causes and consequences, ultimately her rational friend Caroline is unable to mentor her and she dies disgraced and outcast. With Lady Delacour's frank and self-critical narrative confession to Belinda, she makes possible a sincere mentoring relationship in which Belinda's greater prudence and more rational habits of thought can guide Lady Delacour's reform. One can benefit from being observed, but only when the chosen observer is rational and virtuous.

The basis of the mentoring relationship in self-exposure, modeled here by Belinda and Lady Delacour, reflects in some respects the rhetorical basis of the emerging social and physical sciences. Given the Edgeworth family's unusually strong interest in and acquaintance with scientific developments, and particularly Maria and R.L.'s concern with putting the study of education into a scientific framework, it is not surprising that Maria would use the recurring scientific motifs of observation and inductive reasoning in her portrait of social relationships. As Isaac Kramnick has noted, philosophers in England and France of the time believed

that observation and experimentation could lead to social and political as well as mechanical improvement and innovation. "Human beings and social institutions were, like the human body, material contrivances whose operations were knowable and manageable" (Kramnick 95). To "know" a thing was to be able to control it, and for the new natural philosophers the essential process of "knowing" was observation. Thus, for Belinda to be able to successfully guide Lady Delacour's personal reformation, Lady Delacour must "expose" herself completely to Belinda. This she does, nearly literally, in showing Belinda the wound which Lady Delacour believes to be breast cancer. One of the themes of the novel as a whole is the importance of prudent self-exposure, as we will see illustrated in each of the interlocking subplots of education. Lady Delacour has previously exposed her story and her wound imprudently, to the irrational Harriet Freke and to Marriott, her maid, whose social position and consequent lack of rational education make her an inappropriate confidante. Finally, later parts of the novel will reveal that Lady Delacour also secretly revealed her wound to a "quack" doctor, who prescribes excessive use of opium and other "irrational" remedies that actually worsen Lady Delacour's condition.

While the case of Belinda and Lady Delacour illustrates the importance of prudent exposure and the role of the rational scientific observer as mentor, Belinda incorporates another educational theme which qualifies this seeming

unbounded confidence in the ability and worth of the mentor. I have already shown that Belinda must reject the mentorship of both Aunt Stanhope and Lady Delacour early in the novel. Throughout the novel, moreover, situations are portrayed in which a seemingly trustworthy and benign mentor is revealed to be mistaken, powerless, or in some other way fundamentally flawed. While many of these mentors are shown to be essentially "good" characters, Edgeworth demonstrates the necessity for each individual to develop the ability to judge independently. No mentor, no matter how well-intentioned, or even rational he or she may be, is able to perfectly evaluate another person's situation. Thus, Edgeworth suggests that a hierarchical power structure in which the judgment of certain individuals is presumed to safely determine the fate of others often leads to discontent for the mentee and guilt and self-blame for the mentor. In Practical Education, Edgeworth notes that true education ultimately is only possible when the student reaches a point of maturity necessary to begin educating himself or herself. One can never really excel if one always remains passively reliant on the judgment of others. True education must be self-education; "Few people have sufficient courage to recommence their own education, and for this reason few people get beyond a certain point of mediocrity" (Practical Education 537). Women become the special subject of Edgeworth's consideration of the fallibilities of the mentoring system because they are so

often subject to the judgment of authority figures and because they seem least prepared through education to judge for themselves.

The novel's most striking example of this need for each individual to develop the capacity to exercise independent judgment is contained in the narrative of Virginia St. Pierre. This subplot not only illustrates important points concerning women's education but also involves the development of Clarence Hervey's ability to perceive the limits of his own powers of observation and the legitimate exercise of his own authority. Unlike the lover-mentors of Burney's fiction, Clarence Hervey requires education himself in order to understand the ways in which accepted societal definitions of male-female relationships may be oversimplified or even false, leading to unhealthy personal interactions between men and women. Healthy relationships, Hervey learns, not only incorporate acknowledged differentiation of roles for men and women, but must also include recognition of individual abilities and tastes which are not necessarily gender-determined.

In Edgeworth's preliminary sketch for Belinda, Clarence Hervey's education and reformation are considerably more dramatic than they appear in the finished novel. In the sketch he is reformed from a drunken indebted rake into an incorruptible member of parliament. In the finished novel, Edgeworth is careful to exempt Hervey from any faults which

may show basic weakness of character, giving him instead faults that may be attributed to an incomplete education. Thus, his "reformation" becomes a process of maturation, not a change in basic character. In fact, Clarence Hervey's education resembles in many ways the education of a heroine. While basically sound in moral character, Hervey must learn "prudence," the ability to judge others fairly and to act according to one's own conviction and good judgment. Hervey's situation differs from that of a heroine in that, as a man, his judgments of others carry more authority. He has more power to affect others' circumstances on the basis of his judgments. When Hervey is first introduced, however, he has the same faults as both Belinda and Lady Delacour, although these faults are expressed in different ways. The narrator says of Hervey, "Clarence Hervey might have been more than a pleasant young man, if he had not been smitten with the desire of being thought superiour in every thing, and of being the most admired person in all companies" (14). Like Lady Delacour, and to a lesser extent Belinda, Clarence's self-concept is dependent on the impression he makes on others. He does not have the self-awareness necessary to exercise his own judgment. Influenced by the opinions of his friends, Hervey views every young woman, including Belinda, as merchandise to be evaluated, always assuming deception and artifice to be at the base of every woman's actions. Of Belinda, "he suspected her of artifice in every word, look and motion; and even when

he felt himself most charmed by her powers of pleasing, he was most inclined to despise her for what he thought such premature proficiency in scientific coquetry" (15). While enjoying the spectacle which he assumes Belinda is putting on for his benefit, Hervey reserves the right to judge. He is like one of the young men Edgeworth discusses in Practical Education, who decides that he is for young women "the arbiter of their fate, and the despotic judge of their merit" (Practical Education 534).

A large part of Clarence's Hervey's re-education occurs through his relationship not with Belinda but with a young woman who is known both as Rachel and as Virginia St. Pierre. Hervey has chosen this young woman as his future wife, planning to educate her for that role according to Rousseauvian principals. In searching for a subject for his educational experiment, Hervey himself realizes the difficulty of finding "an understanding wholly uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction"(362). In fact, an acquaintance with Edgeworth's educational theories would suggest that such an individual, whose early education had been completely neglected, would not likely be capable of the mental exertion and development Hervey requires. Nevertheless, when Hervey accidentally comes upon an isolated cottage in which "Rachel" is living with her grandmother he is struck by her look of "artless sensibility" (363). No doubt, the fact that he admires Rachel's "finely shaped hands and

arms" adds something to Hervey's impression that he has at last found his potential Sophie. Apparently unaware of the degree to which sexual attraction has determined interest in the girl, Hervey sees her as the perfect object of his plan to educate a wife.

While technically acting in a completely honorable fashion, in his desire to possess and control Rachel, Clarence seems little different from the traditional seducer such as Mr. B or Lovelace, whose first step is to isolate his intended victim from any circumstances or persons who might tend to affirm for her an identity separate from his. His control of her identity is emphasized by his renaming of his "pupil." "[T]he name of Rachel he could not endure, and he thought it so unsuited to her, that he could scarcely believe it belonged to her" (369). He changes her name to Virginia, after a character in St. Pierre's novel, Paul and Virginia. Although Clarence fully intends to marry Rachel, the way in which he attempts to erase her associations with her grandmother and their cottage, and the control implied in his assumption of financial responsibility for her life and education, echo a much more sinister "educational" process such as that attempted by Lovelace in removing Clarissa to the brothel and putting her under the control of women whom he pays. This aspect of the relationship is merely hinted at, yet it seems important that other characters, such as Clarence's rakish friends Baddely and Rochfort, and Lady Delacour's maid,

Marriot, interpret the relationship in exactly this way from their own observations.

In addition to his questionable legitimacy as mentor to "Virginia" on social grounds, Clarence employs mistaken pedagogical concepts. He believes, after Rousseau, that women's intellectual capacity is a result of their emotional nature. He has great hopes for Virginia as a pupil because he has seen so many signs of her "sensibility." He argues, "Sensibility...is the parent of great talents, and great virtues"(367). Again we may refer to Practical Education to be reminded that Edgeworth believed sensibility must be regulated, and that excessive sensibility was not conducive to great moral virtue (Practical Education 269). Virginia's ability to sympathize and feel are charming, but without the regulating power of rational intellect, sensibility alone will never lead to a sound moral base. Hervey assumes a gender-based dichotomy of intellect, namely, that Virginia can rely on his judgment as her guide and mentor. Further, he assumes that the role of observer and mentor is an appropriate starting point for the development of a romantic relationship. Yet the lack of sincere communication between himself and Virginia demonstrates that the powerful and authoritative stance of the mentor is not an appropriate foundation for romantic love.

Clarence's most crucial mistake in believing he can educate a wife for himself is in assuming that a relationship

based on mutual sexual attraction and romantic love can grow from the tutorial-paternal framework he has established with Virginia. It is in exploding the myth of the tutor-lover, a concept insidious in its undermining of women's intellectual and personal equality, that I believe Edgeworth makes her most vehement statement regarding domestic authority. In Evelina, Burney hints at the emotional confusion and entanglement that can result from the conflation of the lover and the paternal figure. Evelina's famous last sentence about coming to "the arms of the best of men" (Evelina 406) in reference to her guardian is a good example of the way in which the tutor-lover leaves an uncomfortable space open for the incestuous father-daughter pairing. If the best lover is the one who can most effectually offer superior advice and protection, then the father becomes a good candidate. Edgeworth, however, in the Virginia episode, suggests that the lover-mentor is unsatisfactory because sexual love and marriage must be based on mutual intellectual and moral respect, a situation unattainable when one party is always in the role of pupil.

Even though Clarence Hervey is a young man with a scrupulous sense of honor and great humanity, the role of tutor and father figure brings him into dangerous proximity with a young woman whom he ultimately views as a sexual object. By placing himself in the role of tutor, Hervey removes the social boundaries that would normally have prevented a tempting intimacy between two young people of the

opposite sex. Thus, the tutor-lover has an unfair advantage over the young woman who is the object of his affections; it is right that she should reveal all her plans and hopes to him, but not that he should reciprocate.⁴ Thus, the power relationship between the mentor and student is incompatible with the equality that should exist between lovers.

In addition to finding it difficult to separate the roles of lover and tutor, Clarence begins to wonder if intellectual superiority over one's lover can really lead to domestic satisfaction. "[I]n talking to Virginia, his understanding was passive; he perceived that a large proportion of his intellectual powers and of his knowledge was absolutely useless to him in her company, and this did not raise her either in his love or esteem" (378). After meeting Belinda, Clarence begins to perceive that a woman need not be only a source of sympathy or admiration, that intellectual stimulation can be part of the male-female relationship. In comparing Belinda and Virginia, "the one he found was his equal, the other his inferiour; the one he saw could be a companion, a friend to him for life; the other would merely be his pupil, or his plaything" (379). Unlike Austen, and other conservative writers, who saw the ideal male-female relationship as modeled on the father/mentor-daughter/pupil division, Edgeworth argues that stable attraction must be based on intellectual equality. In equating the wife-pupil with a "plaything," Edgeworth also hints at the parallel

between the mentor-lover, who wants only beauty and sensibility in his wife, and the man who keeps a prostitute for her same ability to please the physical senses. As Clarence notes in considering the necessity of developing Virginia's intellect, "it was not a mistress, but a wife, he wanted in Virginia" (374).

While Clarence Hervey gradually comes to realize the mistaken premises of his relationship with Virginia, it is Virginia herself, through her acute sensitivity to emotional nuances, who finally rejects the equation of tutor-father with lover-husband. Her sensitivity to feeling makes her keenly aware of the economic and social power that Clarence holds in their relationship. While Clarence is careful never to suggest that she is obligated to him, Virginia not only realizes that she should feel "gratitude" for his care of her, but connects this gratitude with sexual attraction. Virginia's dream suggests that she has underlying guilt and fear concerning Clarence Hervey as a lover because he has always related to her as a mentor and father figure.

Virginia, the least reflective and most "feminine" of all the book's characters, explains the book's most consistently radical concept, that the lover-mentor is an emotional and intellectual fallacy. One cannot "fall in love" with someone who has acted in the role of the father, although one can certainly feel love and gratitude for that person. Hervey's mistake is not merely in choosing an inappropriate subject for

his educational scheme, but in attempting to form another human being to suit his own purposes rather than those of the pupil. Further, Virginia's lack of any systematic process of thought or expression denies her the ability to verbalize her desires. If she could have expressed her feelings to Hervey or Mrs. Ormond more readily, both she and Clarence would have been spared much anxiety. As Lady Delacour once says to Belinda, "...if you would only open your eyes, which heroines make it a principle never to do-- or else there would be an end of the novel..." (83). Virginia is a much better heroine than Belinda, and it is her lack of rational training that makes it impossible for her eyes to be effectually opened for so long. Clarence, with his great rational command of language, translates Virginia's feelings into words. "I might have foreseen what must happen, that Virginia would consider me as her tutor, her father, not as her lover, or her husband; that, with the most affectionate of hearts, she could for me feel nothing but gratitude" (472). And so with the narrative of Virginia St. Pierre, Edgeworth insistently refutes one of the eighteenth century's most respected paradigms of the marital relationship, one that would gather even greater cultural credence in the century to follow, that a husband is also a surrogate father. Edgeworth insists that the two roles cannot be simultaneously assumed by the same person. A man who wishes for true romantic attachment from his wife must not

seek to be either her tutor or her father, but must meet her as an intellectual and emotional equal.

Edgeworth emphasizes the importance of this type of equality by providing Belinda, like Hervey, with a "natural" suitor, that is, one who is intellectually undisciplined while physically attractive and emotionally interesting. At about the time when Belinda becomes convinced that Clarence Hervey has a kept mistress she goes on an extended visit to the Percival's, a rational family who live a retired country life. At the Percival's Belinda meets Mr. Vincent. The narrator is unusually explicit about Mr. Vincent's physical attractiveness. "[H]e was tall, and remarkably handsome; he had large dark eyes, an aquiline nose, fine hair, and a sun-burnt complexion, which gave him a manly appearance" (217). But like Virginia, Vincent's physical attractiveness seemingly blinds even the most acute observers to his most serious faults, his lack of rational development. In introducing Mr. Vincent and describing his temper the narrator notes that his aristocratic sense of honor and dignity was useful "in some degree, to supply the place of the power and habit of reasoning, in which he was totally deficient" (218). Obviously, part of the purpose of including Mr. Vincent's narrative in the novel is to prove that this "degree" is not satisfactory. Like Virginia, Vincent supplies the place of reason and rational observation with feeling and a general moral sense derived from "good breeding." His fault is more

dangerous than hers because unlike a woman, a man's ability to exercise prudence may greatly affect not only his own welfare but that of others who are dependent on him. Furthermore, like Virginia's inability to appreciate literature or science, Vincent's inability to reason clearly makes him unable to fully appreciate the virtues of a rational and well-educated spouse. This is illustrated when Vincent praises the Creole women. "Their indolence is but a slight, and, in my judgment, an amiable, defect; it keeps them out of mischief, and it attaches them to domestic life" (233). Intellectually indolent himself, Vincent is happy to admire a similar defect in women. In fact, at one point Vincent thinks to himself that "if Belinda had more faults she would be more amiable" (426) feeling that she is perhaps too rational ever to feel the "passion of love" which he requires of her. Edgeworth seems to be reiterating an argument from Letters for Literary Ladies, that one of the reasons for men's dislike of intellectual endeavor in women is that it requires similar exertion on their part. Vincent is unwilling to put forth the intellectual effort necessary to gain the complete admiration of a woman of cultivated mind.

Vincent's inability to reason clearly, and his determination "to trust to the sublime instinct of a good heart" (423), rather than a rigorously examined moral system, lead him to gradually become absorbed with gambling. As Edgeworth has noted in Practical Education, prudence combines

both "judgment and resolution." Prudence requires that one observe all the factors involved in a situation and judge what course of action will lead to the "greatest portion of felicity" in the long run (Practical Education 689). But Mr. Vincent "disdained prudence, as the factitious virtue of inferiour minds; he thought that the feelings of a man of honour were to be his guide"(423). Vincent's sensibility, that is his sensitivity to emotional stimuli, makes him especially prone to gambling addiction. In Practical Education, Edgeworth describes the situation of a person with excessive sensibility. "They have accustomed themselves to such violent stimulus, that they cannot endure the languor to which they are subject in the intervals of delirium" (653).

As the narrator in Belinda notes, to Vincent, "not to feel was not to live; and soon the suspense, the anxiety, the hopes, the fears, the perpetual vicissitudes of a gamester's life, appeared to him almost as delightful as those of a lover's" (424). Two points are being made here. First, Vincent's "sensibility," or susceptibility to emotional excitement leads him to a behavior which is immoral and inconsiderate. As Edgeworth has noted elsewhere, sensibility is not a sure moral guide (Practical Education 269). Second, the type of love that Vincent feels for Belinda, compounded mainly of physical attraction and embellished by romantic imagination, is not true esteem for her intellect, but is a sort of addictive excitement which can be created by a number

of other objects, including the excitement of gambling. Vincent's attraction to Belinda thus parallels Hervey's attraction to Virginia.

Vincent's emotional "sensibility" and neglect of reason lead him into a moral morass. He feels it impossible to confess his addiction to gambling to Percival as his fortune grows increasingly depressed; "the acuteness of his feelings was to his own mind an excuse for dissimulation; so fallacious is moral instinct, unenlightened or uncontrolled by reason or religion" (428). Vincent's lack of a rational moral system not only makes him susceptible to error, but also isolates him from Mr. Percival, the one person who might have been able to guide him out of his moral and financial entanglements.

In a way, Edgeworth has "set up" the reader in creating such a heroic character for Belinda's rejected suitor. Vincent is handsome, brave and passionate, everything Virginia's romances could paint for a hero. The reader may be tempted to feel irritation at Belinda for her ability to dismiss him so rationally. But as Edgeworth states and demonstrates repeatedly in this novel, prudence is judging wisely what will bring the "greatest portion of felicity" (Practical Education 689). In considering her own feelings about Vincent, Belinda's mention of "the happiness of her life" invites the reader to consider that the temporary pleasure of a relationship with a physically attractive and passionate lover may in this instance be bought at the price of a lifetime of

want and anxiety. Belinda has observed at first hand the domestic disruption occasioned by Lord Delacour's addiction to alcohol. An addiction to gambling, begun not as Lord Delacour's addiction to escape misery, but merely to provide emotional stimulation, seems likely to bring misery and poverty to any woman dependent on Vincent. As Lady Delacour says of Vincent, "Fine lovers these make for stage effect!-- but the worst husbands in the world" (451). Edgeworth demonstrates that, contrary to many contemporary stereotypes, men are also subject to dangerous levels of sensibility. Vincent's addiction to extreme emotional stimuli is even less excusable than Virginia's, because his potential economic, domestic and legal control of Belinda make his addiction extremely dangerous for her as well as for himself.

Belinda's reaction to Vincent's confession is in keeping with what I have argued is her role as a rational observer. She does not begin the novel with infallible judgment, nor is her behavior free from error. But through the use of her powers of observation and rational judgment, Belinda is able to avoid costly errors, such as marriage to Vincent. Edgeworth has been careful to demonstrate, as well, that Belinda's reliance on her own ability to observe and judge, that is to act as a good natural philosopher, is particularly important because of the impossibility of any mentor being able to judge for his or her pupil. I have already shown that Belinda avoids the deceptive advice of both Aunt Stanhope and

Lady Delacour. Her involvement with Vincent shows that even the most apparently rational mentors can be mistaken. Mr. and Mrs. Percival, the rational parents of a happy family, have been very solicitous of marrying Belinda to Vincent, believing the match to be ideal for both parties. As Lady Delacour comments to Belinda, for women, prudence requires not only the courage to judge, but the special courage to stick to one's own judgments, even if they are contrary to the advice of others. Lady Delacour refers to this as "civil courage" "such as enabled the princess Parizade, in the Arabian Tales, to go straight up the hill to her object, though the magical multitude of advising and abusive voices continually called to her to turn back" (452). To seek one's own "greatest felicity" requires that one become one's own mentor and authority, using systematic and rational observation to determine what is best for oneself.

In this section I have sought to show that Belinda, despite its outward similarities to many contemporary novels of female development, is unusual, probably unique, in two ways. First, Edgeworth attributes the power of spectatorship to women through the role of the objective observer. Women as well as men are called upon to make moral judgments and to exercise prudence. They can only do so if they have the intellectual development which allows them to observe carefully and accurately and to draw logical conclusions from their observations. Reliance on mentors leads to a sort of

permanent childhood or adolescence and is ultimately unsatisfactory for, as the narrative of Virginia demonstrates, every mentor has his or her own self interest which may conflict with that of the pupil. This is particularly true in the case of the so-called lover-mentor. Finally, Edgeworth demonstrates that both males and females are susceptible to excessive sensibility and to self-deception, both of which make accurate observation and prudence impossible. In using the concepts of Practical Education to rewrite the female "bildungsroman," Edgeworth makes strong claims for women's ability to assume and benefit from the authority of rationality.

Chapter 4

DIDACTIC FICTION AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF REFORM

In Belinda, Edgeworth demonstrates that women can use the status of rational and prudent observer to create power and moral authority for themselves. In this section I would like to examine two of Edgeworth's shorter works which explore the extent and limits of women's rationality. In Letters for Literary Ladies and Leonora one can see the ways in which, through the medium of social intercourse and letter writing in particular, Edgeworth examines the limits and dangers of the observer's role, and the ways in which texts can be subversive and dangerous as well as powerful and effective. I will argue that in working her way from Letters for Literary Ladies (1795), where she demonstrates faith in both the power of rational reflection and didactic fiction, to Leonora (1806), Edgeworth deepens and problematizes her views both of the powers of rational observation and of didactic fiction.

Edgeworth's letters, educational writings and prefaces all indicate that she had definite didactic aims in writing fiction. Edgeworth states in Practical Education that in avoiding "fanciful" fiction that appears to aim mainly at developing the imagination, and instead writing fiction about "real" life, one could develop the reader's reasoning powers at the same time that one entertained. "The history of realities written in an entertaining manner appears not only

better suited to the purposes of education, but also more agreeable to young people than improbable fictions" (Practical Education 338). Yet Edgeworth's own concern with the careful selection of reading material for young people suggests that she, like many contemporary theorists and critics, was well aware of the seductive power of fiction. As she notes, "Few books can safely be given to children without the previous use of the pen, the pencil, and the scissors" (Practical Education 350). The power of fiction to improve or enlighten the young reader is paradoxically the same power that threatens to deceive or contaminate the reader by arousing the imagination. In Edgeworth's didactic epistolary works, the author/"editor" exhibits letters for the reader's examination that either demonstrate Edgeworth's principles of prudent observation and truthful "realistic" interpretation of events, or, in the case of dangerous and deceptive characters such as Olivia, demonstrate the power of the text to create a "false" interpretation of reality.¹ The role of the reader, who observes and interprets texts, is thus fraught with danger. While Edgeworth asserts and attempts to demonstrate the positive power of the rational observer to interpret reality and thus gain moral authority, the epistolary form creates evidence of the extremely deceptive power of fiction. In the works I will examine, this deceptive power of fiction threatens to undermine the rational observer's ability to accurately perceive reality. While Edgeworth in each case

manufactures a plausible ending in which the text's disruptive power, and hence the disruptive power of the "irrational" author, is controlled and eventually counteracted, an unsettling sense of the unreliability of language, of the text's power to deceive, remains at the end of each narrative. While in Letters for Literary Ladies, Edgeworth seems to suggest that the greatest problem is the possible failure of the rational observer to use the text to present a convincing rational argument, Leonora presents the possibility that a text's effectiveness is its greatest threat to order and rationality. If texts themselves are inherently untrustworthy, what is implied for the rationality of didactic fiction? Can a force as volatile as fiction be successfully harnessed for didactic purposes?

Letters for Literary Ladies (1795) was Edgeworth's first published work. It consists of two separate sets of correspondence, one between two gentlemen concerning the appropriateness of literary education for women, and the second between two women, containing the story of how one of the women is led astray by her reading of romantic and metaphysical literature, eventually dying disgraced and abandoned by all but her rational friend, Caroline. The titles and subject matter of the letters clearly evince their didactic purpose. I will argue that Letters for Literary Ladies also has a political component. Like Practical Education which follows it, the work uses the overtly private

and domestic issue of education to engage the public debate over individual rights and responsibilities and the need for a more "rational" social order.

In Romantic Correspondence, Mary Favret has raised the issue of the letter's political import in the late eighteenth century. Favret points out that during and after the French Revolution, there was a proliferation in England of "corresponding societies," many of which addressed their letters either to foreign governments or to the British people directly as the holders of British sovereignty (Favret 29). To address either of these audiences was a political act in itself, since in either case the "corresponding society" circumvented accepted channels of communication and representation (Favret 30). The societies' members viewed the letter as "an open, democratic form, predicated on a belief in negotiation between disparate and multitudinous voices" (33). Their conservative opponents, on the other hand, viewed the letter as "the tool of conspiracy, the epitome of deceit" (33). In either case, Favret demonstrates that the letter form had become a politicized genre by the end of the eighteenth century. Nicola Watson supports Favret's view of the importance of political implications in epistolary fiction in her study Revolution and the Form of the British Novel. Watson notes that following Rousseau's construction of Julie, the exemplar of the sentimental epistolary heroine, all writers using the epistolary form had to consider the ways in

which the use of the epistolary form in general, and its specific relation to sentimental ideals affected the political implications of their work. Finally, Anne Shteir has documented the importance of the epistolarity in the development of modern scientific dialogue. According to Shteir, the epistolary form was a venerable means of transmitting important scientific discoveries and information. She cites its use by Galileo and Boyle, for example (Shteir 81). Thus, in addition to its political implications, the epistolary form carried the stamp of scientific authority that Edgeworth sought. The work of Favret and Watson is particularly useful in demonstrating that Edgeworth could not have been ignorant of the political implications of her use of the epistolary form. Indeed, I will argue that using the epistolary form at this point was a deliberate move on Edgeworth's part, an attempt to declare her political affiliations and her right as a woman writer on education to enter actively into the terms of political debate. I would like to begin my examination of Letters for Literary Ladies by considering how Edgeworth made use of the political rhetoric surrounding the French Revolution to characterize her fictional correspondents, thus revealing the deeper political implications of the issue of women's education.

One of the most influential pieces of correspondence generated from the debate surrounding the French Revolution was Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France.

In this letter to "a very young gentleman at Paris" Burke presents the classic conservative case against the revolution. Areas of Burke's argument that have particular relevance for the examination of Letters for Literary Ladies are Burke's considerations of the proper epistolary form, his discussion of the idea of prejudice, and his use of gender in political discussion.

Burke states that he is presenting his argument in epistolary form quite accidentally, because "having thrown down his first thoughts in the form of a letter...he found it difficult to change the form of address" (introduction). Having thus disavowed political intention in his choice of form, Burke implies a contrast between his spontaneous use of the epistolary form, his private message that is innocent enough for public circulation, and the work of the corresponding societies. These groups make illegitimate use of the letter form in two ways. First, their letters are addressed to "the actual government of a foreign nation" (18). As a private individual, Burke argues that a good citizen of a particular state should feel himself "bound up in a considerable degree, by its public will" (18). That is, the individual should be subordinated to the general will of the populace in all communications with other governments. This brings Burke to his strongest reason for discrediting the societies. He argues that their writings are illegitimate because the members of the societies do not sign their names

individually, allowing one to determine "how many they are; who they are; and of what value their opinions may be, from their personal abilities, from their knowledge, from their experience, or their lead and authority in this state" (19). The societies' correspondence is not to be credited because unlike personal or official letters, published correspondence is not authorized either by the government or by the personal relationship between the correspondents. The epistolary form is dangerous when it escapes the boundaries of either government authority or personal relationship that define its appropriate interpretation and use. Burke legitimates his own use of the epistolary form through a reference both to his personal relationship to the original audience (he is an older man advising a younger) and through reference to his trustworthy public character. The corresponding societies are revolutionary themselves not only because they write in support of revolution in France, but also because in their address they ignore established forms of legitimate epistolarity, speaking as a public body outside the government, controlled neither by personal relationship nor by the established rules of state. Burke thus recognizes the revolutionary character of the form even as he attempts to co-opt the strategy of epistolarity for his own argument. Burke's Reflections bring epistolarity to the fore of the revolutionary debate.

Prejudice is the second issue raised by Burke that has particular resonance for Letters for Literary Ladies. In his view of prejudice, Burke shows himself to be in opposition to the "rational" or empirical philosophers of the time. As Isaac Kramnick has noted, political radicals such as Joseph Priestley clearly associated prejudice with "error and superstition" (Kramnick 82) that would be eliminated with the new influence of empirical observation. To Priestley and other radicals all political institutions and ideas which could not be defended on a purely empirical basis were supported only because the people had been prejudiced in favor of those opinions and institutions. Therefore, prejudice was not only inimical to progress, but was an impediment to human achievement of the greatest possible happiness. For Burke, however, prejudice in favor of traditional political and economic structures was based not on "error and superstition" but on the collected wisdom of past generations who had tested and refined the system, and whose judgment, added to that of contemporary man, was bound to be more secure than empirical evidence alone. In writing of the English people and their belief in traditional structures Burke states, "[W]e cherish them because they are prejudices, and the longer they have lasted, the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them" (100). In Burke's defense of prejudice, there is an explicit lack of trust in individual judgment. "We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private

stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small..." (100). Thus, Burke's Reflections creates a specific link between anti-revolutionary sentiment and the idea of prejudice. The revolutionary cause is wrong partly because it refuses the wisdom of prejudice.

Finally, in Reflections, Burke uses gender stereotypes to create a set of metaphors for revolution and anti-revolution that encompass not only political ideas but also seem, like his discussion of prejudice, to encompass the rhetoric of empirical science as well. In his discussion of prejudice, Burke characterizes the revolutionaries as arrogant in their belief in the wisdom of their own observations. "They have no respect for the wisdom of others; but they pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own" (101). In fact, the revolutionaries and their supporters such as Priestley, did, as discussed in chapter one, rely on the metaphors of revelation and openness that were legitimized by the new rhetoric of empirical science. Burke uses a critique of these metaphors in his attack on revolutionary politics. Rereading the revolutionaries' claims of openness and transparency in gendered terms, Burke is able to elide political and scientific revelation and openness with loss of female modesty, equating the breakdown of traditional structures of political power with the erosion of traditional codes of feminine conduct and propriety. Burke refers to the entire revolutionary enterprise in terms of female dress and

exposure.

The following is his contrast of the present situation with the past veneration for authority.

All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as ridiculous, absurd and antiquated fashion. (90)

Burke's reference to the exposure of "naked, shivering nature " is implicitly gendered, particularly as women were traditionally associated both with unadorned nature and with elaborate "wardrobe." Furthermore, Burke views the revolutionaries and their sympathizers as analogous to the "natural philosophers," exposing the underpinnings of life which had previously been modestly veiled, an analogy that men like Priestley also cultivated (Kramnick 80). By associating revolutionaries with natural philosophers and the traditional state with the female body, Burke draws on his readers' assumed sense of the importance of feminine propriety in his critique of political revolution.² Burke heightens this sense of political revolution as sexual exposure or violation through his particular attention to Marie Antoinette as potential sexual victim of the revolutionaries. When Burke describes how members of the Parisian mob "rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persercuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked," (84) there is no

mistaking that the threat to the queen is sexual. The connection is explicitly constructed between traditional political structures and traditional gender relations. Burke fears that when one no longer respects the traditional power balance, " a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order" (90).

By the time Edgeworth wrote and published Letters for Literary Ladies, then, not only was the epistolary form itself highly politicized, but Burke's Reflections and other pieces, including Paine's Rights of Man, had created a specialized language for political epistolarity which represented revolutionary and conservative rhetoric in terms of certain gender stereotypes. While reaction to the Terror modified and eventually transformed liberal rhetoric both in terms of political and domestic issues, Edgeworth in Letters makes bold use of Burke's categories from Reflections to reread the relation of gender roles to revolutionary politics in terms supportive both of reformist political ideas and nontraditional views of women. In the book's first exchange of letters, Edgeworth creates two correspondents who represent not only contrasting views of women's education, but who also see the world in opposing terms. The first correspondent maintains a basically Burkean argument in which prejudice and respect for tradition represent reason and the individual's rational capacity is limited and untrustworthy. The second

correspondent not only asserts the importance of women's education, but supports a view of individuals as capable of great moral and intellectual development that may be aided by, but is not dependent upon, prejudice. By creating a Burkean correspondent who argues against literary education for women, Edgeworth aligns women's education with reformist politics and with an empirical view of human nature. Yet, the appeal of the rhetoric of prejudice employed by the first correspondent demonstrates the difficulties of presenting didactic material in epistolary form. By giving the first correspondent's arguments a voice, Edgeworth's piece demonstrates and possibly increases the effectiveness of these arguments as pieces of rhetoric, despite their ostensible logical weaknesses.

The first correspondent's arguments are based on several interrelated premises. He argues that "neither experience nor analogy" suggest that women are capable of the same mental cultivation as men (1). While using the lack of women's achievement in arts and science as evidence of their lack of ability, the first correspondent spends a considerable portion of the letter using Burkean metaphors of veiling and exposure to establish the essential incompatibility between modest femininity and mental accomplishment. First, he argues that the status of observer necessary for scientific or rational study is inappropriate for women. Women are denied access to the realm of intellectual discourse, according to the correspondent's circular reasoning, because whenever women are

admitted to a discourse, it ceases to be deeply intellectual. "Whenever women appear, even when we seem to admit them as our equals in understanding, every thing assumes a different form; our politeness, delicacy, habits toward the sex, forbid us to argue or to converse with them as we do with one another..." (3). He hints that the reason for this change in the discourse is that women will be somehow tainted by direct contact with masculine ideas. This equation of the physical and the intellectual identity is confirmed by the metaphoric reference to the intellectual observer as one who looks at subjects without the modesty of indirection or veiling. "[W]e (men) see things as they are; but women must always see things through a veil, or cease to be women" (3). While the language here is deliberately vague, it seems that the writer is equating intellectual curiosity and observation with sexual curiosity or observation, thus arguing that the two are equally inappropriate for women. By indulging in the "male" discourse of science or the arts, a woman abandons her sexual identity and therefore, her sexual modesty. The social transgression of entering the male intellectual community is clearly equated with the breaking of other social rules that define appropriate "womanly" behavior.³ One is insistently reminded here of this argument's similarity to Burke's in Reflections, where Burke argues that political revolutionaries wish to tear off "the decent drapery of life" thus exposing

not only the political hierarchy, but the traditional sex roles, to immodest scrutiny.

The parallel between Burke's political arguments and the first correspondent's opinions on women's education develops as the writer contrasts the influences of reason and prejudice, arguing that women should be taught to rely on the latter as a reliable guide to behavior and thought. The writer's strategy is to raise doubts about the general effectiveness of reason as a moral guide "The moral character seems, even amongst men of superior strength of mind, to have no certain dependence upon the reasoning faculty" (5). Having established the inability of reason to govern men, the writer implies that women, because of the greater restrictions on "proper" female behavior, are in even greater danger if they rely on reason rather than prejudice to guide their behavior. The writer again introduces a metaphor of covering and exposure to describe the proper role of women in society. In discussing the utility of prejudice he argues, "You would look with horror at one who should go to sap the foundations of the building; beware then how you venture to tear away the ivy which clings to the walls, and braces the loose stones together" (5). The foundations of society must be hidden in order to be secure. Again, women must be protected from the dangerous role of direct observer, this time by the "ivy" of prejudice. Without this mediation between society's rules and the woman's rational gaze, the whole structure may

collapse. General social collapse is then the fear attendant upon women's education. In paraphrasing proponents of women's education, the writer introduces more elements of revolutionary discourse.

Morality should, we are told, be founded upon demonstration, not upon sentiment; and we should not require human beings to submit to any laws or customs, without convincing their understandings of the universal utility of these political conventions.(5) This is a good general summary of the arguments of such revolutionary theorists as Thomas Paine, who felt that all political tradition was irrational unless it was based on some concrete utility for the majority. Edgeworth's correspondent, however, argues according to the conservative line of reasoning, that when one is called upon to act the passions are not likely to be controlled by reason. Instead, one must rely on habits and prejudices that have been learned from childhood. On a political scale, the people could not be expected to rely on reason to determine their actions. Instead, they must have an instilled habit of obedience to authority to rely upon in moments of crisis. Edgeworth's correspondent both applies this argument specifically to women and enlarges its application to society as a whole. He argues in favor of traditional moral education, "If the result of the thought, experience, and sufferings of one race of beings is, (when inculcated upon the belief of the next), to be stigmatized as

prejudice, there is an end to all the benefits of history and of education" (6). Women, the correspondent argues, should be satisfied if, by following traditional moral teaching, they "be conducted quietly to their good" rather than engaging in philosophical debate about "pompous metaphysical names" (6). Like many conservatives of the time, Edgeworth's correspondent reveals a deep distrust of the power of human reason. Moral chaos continuously threatens to overwhelm the society or the individual that questions the traditional order of society. In response to this line of reasoning, Edgeworth's second correspondent defends education for women and political liberalism by attempting to demonstrate that both of these lead to a more stable hierarchy that is durable by virtue of its more equitable foundation. Furthermore, the second correspondent insists upon the power of rational observation and literal description to lead to sound judgments. Relying on the same equation of political liberalism with women's education presented by the first correspondent, the second correspondent attempts to show that both lead to stability rather than chaos.

The second correspondent, like the first, connects science to exposure and unveiling, but while the first correspondent emphasized the disintegration of proper respect for traditional hierarchy, the second correspondent emphasizes the way in which obscure terms allow those in power to maintain control of knowledge, suggesting that power based on

limiting the knowledge of the governed is illegitimate. He develops this theme through an Enlightenment comparison of modern empiricism with ancient philosophy, noting that the former is accessible and open, while the latter is exclusionary. "[O]ur books of science were full of unintelligible jargon, and mystery veiled pompous ignorance from public contempt; but now writers must offer their discoveries to the public in distinct terms, which every body may understand; technical language no longer supplies the place of knowledge..." (20). This statement clearly refers not only to natural science, but to politics as well, an area in which writers such as Thomas Paine had contended that it was only the confusing rhetoric of the ruling class that caused the lower classes not to be able to understand and articulate their own best interests. Thus, the second correspondent, like the first, draws a parallel between women's education and liberal politics.

Furthermore, with direct reference to women's education, the second correspondent notes that the physical sciences are particularly well-suited as studies for women because they lack metaphoric content. Of chemistry specifically he writes, "whilst the ingenuity of the most inventive mind may in this science be exercised, there is no danger of inflaming the imagination, because the mind is intent upon realities, the knowledge that is acquired is exact, and the pleasure of the pursuit is a sufficient reward for the labour" (21).

Empirical science is thus closely connected to virtue, as the straightforward study of observable reality cannot lead to the kind of "fanciful" imagination that inevitably leads to moral chaos. Knowledge is equated with virtue. In fact, the second correspondent argues that women who are taught to reason will realize that conventional behavior is to their own advantage, and thus be less, not more, susceptible to moral failing. While agreeing with the first correspondent that appropriate behavior must be inculcated as habit when children are too young to reason, the second correspondent draws a clear distinction between children and adult women. "By degrees as her understanding, that is to say as her knowledge and power of reasoning increase, I can explain the advantages of these habits, and confirm their power by the voice of reason" (22). In fact, he argues that ignorance is a greater threat to the social order. "[T]hose who depend entirely upon the force of custom and prejudice expose themselves to infinite danger. If once their pupils begin to reflect upon their own hoodwinked education, they will probably suspect that they have been deceived in all that they have been taught and they will burst their bonds with indignation" (23). Thus, the rebellious behavior of women (and perhaps by inference, the lower classes) is the fault, not of their gaining knowledge, but of lack of education to develop their "understandings." The second correspondent argues that social order will be better maintained when its rational basis is

understood by all participants. The unchallenged assumption, of course, is that the underlying basis of society is rational, and that critical examination will prove the prudence of maintaining the current system. In this assumption the second correspondent is clearly differentiated from more radical reformers such as Thomas Paine or even Joseph Priestley, who would argue that the existing social system is not rational, and that rational observation will lead anyone to see the fallacies on which it is established. The second correspondent develops an argument that could allow reform-minded English citizens such as the Edgeworths to separate themselves from the violence of the French Revolution while maintaining essentially radical positions on topics such as women's education.

The second correspondent builds on this shared assumption of the rational basis of traditional social order to challenge the first correspondent's claims about education. "You seem, my dear sir, to be afraid that truth should not keep so firm a hold upon the mind as prejudice" (23). He hints that only if the current system cannot be supported by reason should conservatives fear education for women. As he states later, "It is a contradiction to say, that giving the power to discern what is good is giving a disposition to prefer what is bad" (24). Thus, the assumed rationality of the current system becomes the safeguard against any anti-establishment effects of women's education. The second correspondent

constructs a logical system in which to argue against education is to deny the rationality of the traditional social system.

In fact, the second correspondent hints that the first correspondent's argument is based, at least in part, on fear of women's intellectual abilities and a desire to maintain the unfair mental and social advantages currently promoted by women's lack of education. He refutes the previous writer's evidence for women's mental inferiority in their lack of achievement. As he points out, laboring under distinct educational disadvantages, women have never been able to practice their mental powers to any significant degree. He introduces a specifically political metaphor in noting the unfairness of judging women's ability by their production under such disadvantages, comparing women to slaves in Biblical narrative. "With the insulting injustice of an Egyptian task-master, you demand the work, and deny the necessary materials" (26). Further, he hints that this injustice may be based on the first correspondent's fear of women's ability. "But if it be your opinion that women are naturally inferior to us in capacity, why do you feel so much apprehension of their becoming eminent, or of their obtaining power in consequence of the cultivation of their understandings?" (28). Thus, if one objects to women's education, one is implicitly admitting that men can only maintain their superiority over women through oppression. If

women's secondary social status is indeed natural, as the second correspondent seems somewhat willing to concede, developing women's ability to judge and reason will make them more, not less amenable to the current arrangement as they realize its logical necessity.

Finally, the second correspondent argues for the education of women in terms that again suggest parallels between women and the rebellious lower classes. Neither can be controlled indefinitely either by force or by unthinking habits of obedience. The following comment in reference women's education seems fully relevant to the revolution-minded masses as well.

Girls who have been disciplined under the strict high hand of authority, are apt to fancy that to escape from habitual restraint, to exercise their own will, no matter how, is to be free and to be happy. -- Hence innumerable errors in their conduct; hence their mistaken notions of liberty, and that inordinate ambition to acquire power, which ignorant, ill-educated women show in every petty struggle. (30)

In light of the ubiquitous revolutionary rhetoric of the time, this passage clearly links the domestic and the political through the motif of the abuse of power. The young woman whose father assumes illegitimate authority causes his daughter's rebellion and precipitates her own lust for power. In a similar way, liberals argued that unreasonable government restraint of the people led to the rise of revolutionary leaders and "mob" behavior.

The second correspondent argues that with the expanding

availability of print material, it is no longer possible to control the circulation of information itself even if this were desirable. One must instead educate women to be "good" readers, so that they can appropriately evaluate the growing number of texts available to them. "[T]he art of printing has totally changed their situation; their eyes are opened,--the classic page is unrolled, they will read;--all we can do is to induce them to take a full view of their interests and of ours" (34). Thus, the second correspondent, while supporting the traditional social hierarchy in many respects, argues that education and reform are necessary if that hierarchy is to continue to function in changing circumstances. He does not advocate an entire overhaul of the bases of social and political power. In fact, he implicitly supports the economic and political authority of the male upper class. He argues, however, that this authority must increase its legitimacy by gaining, through education, the support of those it controls, namely, women and the lower classes. Thus, Edgeworth uses the epistolary mode to negotiate common ground between the conservative and reformist positions on women's education. In doing so, she continues the project of Practical Education, that of discussing education not only as a domestic issue, but as a topic with important parallels to current political debate.

If in the first part of Letters for Literary Ladies, Edgeworth uses the epistolary form to affiliate herself with

reformist politics while simultaneously defining what she sees as the legitimate limits of reform within the social order, the second part of the work represents both a demonstration of and a potential challenge to this project. The "Letters of Julia and Caroline" tell the story of Julia, a woman whose imagination is overstimulated while her ability to reason is undeveloped, and Caroline, her "rational" friend who tries unsuccessfully to save Julia from her own mistakes. Caroline's letters consist of reasonable logical arguments that attempt to educate Julia in how to recognize and act in her own best interests. The problem is that Julia is already a grown woman when the section of the correspondence Edgeworth presents begins. Therefore, Julia has already developed habits of following her imagination unguided by her reason. All Caroline's attempts to instill enlightened self-interest in her friend apparently fall on deaf ears. I say "apparently" because only one of Julia's letters is presented to Edgeworth's reader. The rest of what we know about Julia's arguments and her actions is transmitted through Caroline's letters in the form of quotes and descriptions. As Nicola Watson has noted, the form of the piece allows Julia's language to be "suppressed by being literally erased" by her friend's editorship of the letters (74). Julia speaks through Caroline, her "rational" editor. The story of Julia's mistaken choice of a marriage partner (she chooses wealth over intellectual substance), her seduction and betrayal and her

lonely death are not allowed their full emotional effect due to Caroline's continuous attempts at epistolary intervention. Because Caroline presents Julia with numerous opportunities to change, along with rational explanations of the necessity for change, Julia's determination to follow her imagination, her "enthusiasm" as she calls it, seems inexcusable and does not elicit much reader sympathy.

Edgeworth's careful suppression of Julia's voice, however, suggests that she is aware both of the power of the editor and of the limits of that power. As both rational observer and editor, Caroline can choose what parts of Julia's discourse will be subject to interpretation, and she can also present a coherent interpretation of that discourse that emphasizes lack of rational thought as the cause of Julia's unhappiness. As she demonstrates, she can also end the correspondence when the topics of Julia's letters move too far away from conventional morality. In her last letter to Julia, Caroline makes use of her control over the correspondence by stating that she must now "bid an eternal adieu" to Julia, whose "infamy I cannot share"(58). Furthermore, the action that she reports not only emphasizes her power as a fictional character over the fictional Julia's epistolary voice, but also Edgeworth's concrete control over our access as readers to the elements of this correspondence. Caroline writes, "I burned your last letter the moment I had read it. Your past confidence I never will betray; but I must renounce all future

intercourse with you"(58). As readers, we are never allowed to completely share this confidence.

Caroline's final letter is an admission that her powers as rational observer, advisor and editor cannot control Julia's actions, despite her effectiveness in refuting Julia's illogical rhetoric. It is bitterly ironic, from the standpoint of Edgeworth's view of the power of education to increase women's contentment and happiness, that, reminiscent of Marianne in Austen's Sense and Sensibility, Julia will only allow Caroline to control her actions when she is nearly, as Caroline says, "insensible," that is, dying. Julia's excessive sensibility has indeed been the cause of her imprudent behavior, and yet the attraction of her rhetoric of sensibility can only be successfully controlled when it is silenced, either by Caroline's editorship or by Julia's own death. Caroline's power and limitations as an editor are emphasized by the last letter in the collection, in which Caroline writes to Julia's husband describing his wife's final hours and death. While there is no suggestion that Caroline "fictionalizes" her account in order to excuse Julia, it is clear that she writes in an attempt to place Julia's behavior in the best possible light, showing the power of the interpretive observer.

Despite the disruptive potential of Julia's rhetoric, however, and the questions raised by the limits of Caroline's editorial authority, Letters for Literary Ladies ultimately

affirms Edgeworth's belief in the effects of education and the power of didactic writing. While Caroline is never successful in converting Julia to a rational philosophy, Julia consigns her young daughter to Caroline's care, implying that while unable to reform her own philosophy, she wishes her daughter to be trained in rational thought. Further, Caroline's own letters have a sentimental or sensible appeal that is likely to make her rhetoric more attractive than if presented as a sermon or conduct book piece. The fact that Caroline admits to sympathizing with many of Julia's longings and fears gives the epistolary form greater possibilities for affecting young female readers trained to read novels of sensibility. When speaking of the "desire to please" as one of the primary motives for women's action, Caroline admits that the desire to win praise and admiration is as much a motive for her as it is for Julia (44). But, indicating the direction that Edgeworth's philosophy would take in Belinda, Caroline indicates that in order to contribute to one's self-esteem, what she calls "self-complacency," admiration must be based on appropriate criteria. Only the approval of a discerning judge, one who appreciates intellect and moral solidity will satisfy Caroline's discerning "vanity." She explains to Julia, "You say that you are proud; I am prouder.--You will be content with indiscriminate admiration -- nothing will content me but what is select" (45). Caroline attempts to turn Julia's own desire for praise to the service of traditional

ideas of women's virtue. "I would have a woman early in life know that she is capable of filling the heart of a man of sense and merit; that she is worthy to be his companion and friend" (45).

What is radical here is that the self-complacency Caroline describes is based solely on a woman's own sense that she is worthy of admiration, not on her success or failure in actually procuring that admiration. Caroline's rational discourse leads inevitably to a new sense of women's worth and equality, while Julia's philosophy of "sensibility" leaves the woman's sense of self dependent on male approval. Thus, the heroine of sensibility, Edgeworth argues, is actually more constrained, less free, than the rational woman who can judge her own worth independent of others' opinions. Julia's self-worth is based on her physical attractiveness to others. As she states in her single whole letter, "a woman's part in life is to please, and Providence has assigned to her success, all the pride and pleasure of her being" (40). Caroline's argument attempts to prove that a truly self-complacent woman can develop a sense of self-worth apart from the approval of male spectators. She becomes her own spectator, judging and approving of her inner self.

As in the letters between two gentlemen, the letter's subversive potential is apparently modified and made acceptable by Edgeworth's giving the literal and figurative last word to a rational character who supports a fairly

conventional set of moral values while espousing a more radical view of education. The implicit political content of the letter form comes out even in the personal correspondence of Caroline and Julia. Julia's major mistake is choosing to marry the aristocratic Lord V. rather than Caroline's brother. In advising Julia to choose her brother over the aristocrat, Caroline had invoked a set of class expectations that identify the middle classes with domesticity while suggesting that this value is unattainable by the aristocracy. In describing the life of an aristocratic woman Caroline lists mainly deficits: "... the restraints upon your time, upon the choice of your friends and your company, which high life imposes; the ennui subsequent to dissipation" (49). Thus while supporting some conventional moral values for women such as chastity and domesticity, Edgeworth uses the epistolary form to connect these values with the middle class, an anti-aristocratic stance common to many of the radical political correspondents of the time, including Mary Wollstonecraft.

Caroline assumes a stance of rationality as opposed to sensibility that demonstrates the ways in which the second male correspondent's views on women's education lead to more not less domestic stability. The woman who is educated to be a rational observer is better able and more motivated to preserve domestic order because she is able to see how much that order works to her general happiness.

While certain tantalizing questions about the effectiveness of epistolarity in didactic fiction are raised in Letters for Literary Ladies, particularly by Edgeworth's silencing of Julia, Leonora, published eleven years later in 1806, does not push aside the troubling aspects of didactic fiction so quickly nor so firmly. In Leonora, the rational observer is still a key figure. In fact, as is common in the epistolary form, much of the novella's interest derives from our examination and comparison of the accuracy of various characters' observations and judgments. Whether a particular character's predictions are supported by the outcome of the plot seems to determine that character's skill as a rational observer. But, unlike Letters for Literary Ladies, in which accuracy and logic in observation ensured safety and eventual success for a character, Leonora raises the issues of the limits of rational discourse and the observer's authority more directly. Leonora suggests that while rationality and observational ability are important to a woman, they may not give her the ability to control either the actions of others or her own circumstances. Despite their poor powers of observation, two characters, Olivia and Mr. L. control most of the action in the novella. They hold power over the actions and circumstances of other characters through different but symbiotic sources of power, language and gender. The "good" woman in Leonora, that is, Leonora herself, is, like Caroline, committed to traditional gender roles as well as to

rationality. But unlike Caroline, whose commitment to traditional middle class social values and also to logical thinking bring her personal fulfillment, Leonora's determination to behave as a modest and rational woman leads her to misery and despair. Although the "other" woman, Olivia, eventually self-destructs due to her own undisciplined and unprincipled behavior, this seems an ending based on luck rather than the logical or natural consequence of Caroline's rational philosophy. The near success of Olivia, and Mr. L's inability to resist either her physical attractiveness or her rhetoric of sensibility together present a bleak assessment of the lot of the "rational" and moral woman described by the second correspondent in Letters for Literary Ladies.

I am not suggesting that Edgeworth is in any way less committed to education for women or to the importance of rationality to morality. Instead, I think Leonora illustrates Edgeworth's growing realization that the sexual hierarchy can present insurmountable difficulties to women, even when those women are well-educated and rational. These difficulties center around the privileged access of men to direct language. While women may be able to think and reason as well as men, in Leonora one sees women's access to language is limited not only by education, but by social norms that proscribe direct and effective speech for women. While Edgeworth continues to build a case against the "incomprehensible" language of sensibility used by Olivia, in Leonora she tackles the

quandary of the rational woman who has no socially acceptable means of expressing herself. Finally, I would suggest that this inability to express ideas directly reflects a problem for Edgeworth as a writer as well. While the women characters in Leonora find outlets for expression in letter writing, Edgeworth seems in this somewhat unsatisfactory novella to be trapped by didactic fiction's form. It is difficult to write realistic and yet interesting fiction that relies wholly on rational principles for plot development. While Edgeworth rejected the "gothic solution" to this problem employed to some extent by many women writers of this period, she does seem to be increasingly aware of the difficulties of genre.

Language is always a focal point for Edgeworth. In Practical Education, she discusses the importance of careful language use in education. As she noted, "a man who attempts to teach will find it necessary to select his terms with care, to define them with accuracy, and to abide by them with steadiness" (Practical Education 77). In Letters for Literary Ladies, both Caroline and the second correspondent note that weak arguments are often bolstered by the inaccurate use of language. As Caroline states to Julia,

an inaccurate use of words produces such a strange confusion of all reasoning, that in the heat of debate, the combatants, unable to distinguish their friends from their foes, fall promiscuously on both. The skilful disputant knows well how to take advantage of this confusion, and sometimes endeavours to create it (Letters 42)

While the educator, whose goal is to increase his student's knowledge and understanding, learns to avoid inaccurate or inconsistent language, the debater, whose goal is to promote his or her own opinion, may deliberately employ different definitions of the same word. Caroline uses the example of "art" from Julia's letter, but "prejudice," "sensibility," or any other late eighteenth-century buzz words present similar possibilities. Edgeworth makes it clear in both Practical Education and Letters that the inaccurate use of language is dangerous, but for contradictory reasons. Inaccurate language is either dangerous because it is ineffective, or because it is deceptively effective. Both of these possibilities seem to exist. The role of the rational observer then takes on particular importance when related to language, as one must determine whether others are using language to accurately portray a real situation.

The main task of the characters in Leonora is to accurately judge and react to Olivia's intentions and motives. But Olivia's inaccurate and self-serving use of a variety of rhetorical modes makes her incomprehensible for all but brief periods of the book. In fact, she often seems to be unaware of the extent to which her imprecise language leads her into a moral morass. Significantly, Olivia employs rhetorical figures borrowed from a variety of contradictory sources. In her first appearance, Olivia expresses herself in the language of a stereotypical romantic heroine whose delicate

sensibilities are unable to endure the restraints of custom. Using selective paraphrases of Wollstonecraft, Olivia explains that she is one of those with "the misfortune to feel with delicacy" and that leaving her husband was her only recourse when she realized she and her husband "were not born for each other." To live with him after this would be "legal prostitution." Likewise, her strong feelings lead her to fall in love with another man, the attachment which has led to her social ostracism in England.

While Leonora is touched by what she sees as Olivia's repentance and "good heart," her mother's reading of the letters leads into a discussion of the dangers of linking sensibility with social action. While her comments could be taken as criticisms of reformist politics, Leonora's mother begins by identifying the source of the trouble as "the elegant profligacy of French gallantry" that was introduced in England "before the destruction of the French monarchy" (10). This leads into her attack upon "some sentimental writers and pretended philosophers of our own and foreign countries" who attempt to "confound all our ideas of morality" (10). These writers "pretend that the general good of society is their sole immutable rule of morality, and in practice they make the variable feelings of each individual the judges of the general good" (11). This argument harkens back to Burke's similar fears of general utility as a basis for morality. Leonora's mother, unlike Burke, is confident of the stability of the

social hierarchy. While her description of the writers and philosophers is reminiscent of the first correspondent in Letters for Literary Ladies, she is only marginally concerned about the effect these writers' theories may have upon society as a whole. Her greatest concern is that "weak and enthusiastic women" who adopt and promote these opinions will reverse the gains in the social and intellectual status of all women. She particularly targets these women's use of language and their perversion of the privileges of education. "[T]hey can read,--and they can write--and they can talk,-- and they can effect a revolution in public opinion! " (12) (This is a clear reference to Wollstonecraft's Vindication.) But this revolution will not, according to Leonora's mother, have the effects that these women anticipate. "Where must all this end? Where the abuse of reason inevitably ends--in the ultimate law of force" (12).

There is no mistaking the parallel being drawn here between women who adopt the rhetoric of political perfectibility to permit and excuse their moral failings and the revolutionaries in France, whose determination to form a new basis for society appeared to have destroyed the stability of all social relationships. The duchess does not believe, however, that English society will collapse. Instead, those in power will reassert control to effectively deny women all access to authoritative language by denying women opportunities for education and intellectual cultivation.

If men find that the virtue of women diminishes in proportion as intellectual cultivation increases, they will connect, fatally for the freedom and happiness of our sex, the ideas of female ignorance and female innocence; they will decide that one is the effect of the other. They will not pause to distinguish between the use and the abuse of reason; they will not stand by to see further experiments tried at their expense, but they will prohibit knowledge altogether as a pernicious commodity, and will exert the superior power which nature and society place in their hands, to enforce their decrees. Opinion obtained freedom for women; by opinion they may be again enslaved. (12)

I have quoted this passage at length because it is a powerful statement of the fears that may have developed in intellectual women like Edgeworth since the publication of Letters for Literary Ladies.

While I will argue that Leonora's mother is ultimately mistaken in her advice to Leonora concerning Olivia and Mr. L., her argument here is compelling. It expresses the fear that access to the authoritative rhetorics of science and politics is ultimately controlled by no more legitimate authority than superior force. Further, if the purpose of legitimate authority is not to protect theoretical rights but to guarantee real physical and social stability, then perhaps women's access to these rhetorics through education is dangerous. The duchess's reasoning raises menacing questions concerning Edgeworth's entire educational project. Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and other writers of the French Revolutionary period had linked women's education and women's writing with both sensibility and revolution. This amalagamation was proving both embarrassing and potentially

dangerous for intellectual women like Edgeworth by the start of the nineteenth century. Olivia's linkage of the rhetorics of social revolution, sensibility and science threatens the status of intellectual women because, in her misuse of the powerful language education has provided her, she realizes the fears of the first correspondent. That is, that women, incapable of using authoritative language appropriately, will misuse it in ways that will destroy their virtue and damage the social hierarchy. The duchess succinctly and openly states the generally hidden fear of intellectual women, namely, that men actually retain the social and physical power to confiscate authoritative rhetorics from women through their domestic control of women's education, and that women who exploit their sexuality to control men provide an excuse for doing so.

Olivia's adoption of some of the language of science and rationality to explain what she terms her "metaphysics" is another way in which she seems a caricature of the "reasoning" woman, whose mental capabilities are so completely focused on creating sexual interest that she is incapable of real observation or judgment. She describes her seduction of Mr. L-- in terms that suggest an objective experiment. She writes to her friend Madame De P-- that her only purpose in attracting Mr. L's attention is to determine whether Leonora is jealous. She states this motive in terms that suggest an objective hypothesis. "My object was, to ascertain the

existence or non-existence of Leonora's jealousy." (71) Her methods are also apparently "scientific." As she says, "I must observe more accurately" (70). And yet it is clear that Olivia has a considerable emotional investment in attracting and holding the attention of men. It is the means by which she acquires and maintains her self-esteem. By the time Leonora faints at the fete, convincing Olivia that she is jealous, Olivia is already deeply involved in gaining the complete attention of Mr. L--. She continues to suggest to Madame De P-- that her behavior is only a sort of psychological testing, even as it becomes increasingly clear that Mr. L-- is incapable of controlling his attraction to her. She argues, "I know not what to think-- his manner is so variable towards me-- I must be convinced of what his sentiments are before I can decide what my conduct ought to be." Olivia uses the rhetoric of rational observation to excuse behavior that violates even the most liberal moral codes. She uses the cover of friendship to seduce her friend's husband.

Several characters in the book accurately observe Olivia's rhetorical devices and deceptions. However, unlike Belinda in which accurate observation was sufficient protection for "good" characters, in Leonora the usefulness of one's observations depends upon one's willingness and ability to act effectively upon those observations. One definition of power in this novel might be, "the ability to express one's

judgment forcefully and persuasively." By this definition, few of the characters seem to possess the power to contain either Olivia's rhetoric or Mr. L's sexual passion. In addition to Leonora herself, whom I will discuss last, two other women characters observe and comment upon Olivia's behavior. The duchess (Leonora's mother) and Mrs. C. (Helen) both express critical opinions of Olivia, but both are ineffective.

I have already discussed the duchess's earliest assessment of Olivia. Her prediction that Olivia will disrupt her daughter's life and betray her friendship proves accurate. But her advice to her daughter on how to handle the situation effectively denies her daughter the use of authoritative moral language. True to her theory in the first letter that men's power is the only legitimate authority, and that women's only security comes from their understanding and acquiescence in this, the duchess counsels Leonora to keep her suspicions to herself even when Olivia's seduction of Mr. L-- is obvious to all observers. She argues that Mr. L-- is a "penetrating and discriminative judge of character" and therefore, he cannot love Olivia; he merely finds her amusing. She advises Leonora, "A wife, who has sense enough to abstain from all reproaches, direct or indirect, by word or look, may reclaim her husband's affections; the bird escapes from his cage, but returns to his nest" (94). In short, Leonora must pretend ignorance of her husband's betrayal and welcome the return of

his affections when he has tired of Olivia. According to the duchess, this will not only eventually restore Leonora's domestic happiness, but will also prove her moral superiority to Olivia. She further counsels Leonora to restrain her anger at Olivia, even "in the moment of detection." Leonora's doubts concerning her mother's counsel are clear. However, she suppresses her own sense of indignation, following her mother's counsel to give no evidence of her suspicions or jealousy. In doing so, she convinces her husband that she does not really love him and allowed Olivia to use Leonora's indifference as an excuse for her own behavior. By refusing to express her feelings, rejecting the power of legitimately authoritative language, Leonora allows others to behave as if those feelings did not exist. I hesitate to ascribe to Edgeworth a twentieth-century belief in the value of "honest and open communication" between spouses. And yet, it is clear that the advice of the elderly conservative duchess nearly results in the disintegration of Leonora's marriage. To exaggerate one's feelings, as Olivia does, is clearly wrong. But not to exercise one's ability to express genuine feelings and opinions seems equally disastrous.

The inability of the observer to express his or her "rational" opinion in an effective way is a recurring motif in Leonora. The duchess, for example, does not visit Leonora to comfort her because she fears that she will express herself too openly. Even the most acute observer, Mrs. C. (Helen)

finds her attempts to influence events through observation and judgment are continually thwarted. Helen finds herself entrapped by Leonora's strategy; if Leonora refuses to speak on her own behalf, no woman friend may speak for her. Helen believes that the falsity of Olivia's emotions will be as evident to Mr. L-- as it is to everyone else. At several points she comments to Miss B. on the transparency of Olivia's pretended sensibility through metaphors of physical observation. She states, "Those who do not really feel always pitch their expressions too high or too low, as deaf people bellow or speak in a whisper" (47). But Helen quickly discovers that the ability to accurately observe others is important but not sufficient for influencing one's social circumstances. One must have not only observational abilities, but also the right to use legitimately authoritative rhetoric, if one is to influence the outcome of a situation. Leonora is, in fact, an acute observer with sound rational judgment, but, in refusing to utilize the rhetoric either of emotional appeal or sexual attractiveness that are available to women, she becomes powerless, a "mere" observer who cannot influence her own circumstances or speak persuasively on her own behalf.

As the story proceeds, Helen discovers that while Leonora is gradually able to see through Olivia's pretensions, Mr. L-- is flattered by Olivia's attention and overwhelmed by her rhetoric of sensibility. Helen observes Leonora's gradual physical deterioration and is shocked that Mr. L-- either does

not observe it or attributes it to pregnancy rather than her grief over his growing attachment to Olivia. In attempting to gain Leonora's confidence concerning her situation, Helen finds that Leonora, whose physical state makes her mental misery obvious, refuses to verbally acknowledge her unhappiness, even to her best friend. "Neither by provocation, persuasion, laughing, teasing, question, cross or round...wondering, or blundering, could I gain my point. Every look--guarded -- every syllable measured" (134). This description, while highlighting both Helen and Leonora's mastery of language, also points to the insoluble difficulty of Leonora's situation. If she betrays any unhappiness over her situation, she becomes the "jealous wife" thus forfeiting any conventional claim to pity or sympathy from her husband or her rival. But to fulfill the virtuous role of the trusting wife, Leonora refuse to act decisively or to speak on her own behalf. While observation and rationality render her acutely conscious both of Olivia's arts and of their effect, her social situation defines her powerlessness. There is no role for the rational but virtuous woman that incorporates free exercise of her judgment. There is an echo here of the first correspondent's warning in Letters. "The captive who has numbered the links of his chains, and has even discovered how those chains are constructed, is not therefore nearer the recovery of his liberty" (13).

Eleven years after the publication of Letters, Edgeworth reached the point at which she could no longer ignore this difficulty. While rationality for Edgeworth represented transparency and understanding, the gender hierarchy that limited women's access to authoritative rhetorics of rationality for describing their observations had become a much more important factor in Edgeworth's work. Nicola Watson has noted that in Leonora Olivia's rhetorical entrapment of Mr. L-- can only be unmasked and dismantled through the intervention of a "private secretary to the Foreign Office" who sends an intercepted packet of Olivia's letters to Mr.L--. The contents of Olivia's letters to her French correspondent reveal her calculated seduction of Mr. L-- , her continuing interest in her French lover, and her jealous dislike of Leonora. These effectively free Mr. L-- from his vow to take Olivia with him on an embassy to Russia and restore Mr. L-- to Leonora. As Watson points out, the need for appeal to an outside authority to settle the complicated question of truth and duplicity in this novel suggests that one must view "the epistolary as always potentially treasonous" (81). I would go further, and argue that the need for, as Watson terms it, "an epistolary circuit...between two men" to resolve the difficulty emphasizes the inability of women to access the language of legitimate authority. Olivia's use of the rhetoric of sensibility is branded as "illegitimate" and "dishonest" power by the narrator, as contrasted with Leonora's virtuous

silence. But no woman in the novel, not even the duchess, who attempts to intervene by forwarding to Mr. L-- letters that Leonora had written to her mother, succeeds in using rational language to affect either circumstances or events.

As readers, we are made to share the frustration of the "rational" women characters with the inaccessability of rationally authoritative language. While Edgeworth had always firmly rejected the language of sensibility and the irrational mode of the gothic, both possible reactions to women's lack of access to the language of power and authority, in Leonora one senses a new frustration with the didactic form. Edgeworth seems to develop a sense of the limitations of rationality for women in a social system in which men continue to hold social, political and economic power. While she manages to engineer a happy ending for Leonora, the novel ends with a sense of strain. If men and women inhabit different social spheres, then descriptions of shared experience become increasingly tenuous and unreliable. Edgeworth further examines this sense of mutual incomprehensibility between the sexes in Helen, but never fully resolves it.

Olivia is finally an author of complex fictions. She arouses sympathy, attraction and other emotions in her "audience" through expression of emotions that are, for her, a mixture of real feeling and role-playing. The fact that Edgeworth clearly discredits this kind of fiction without developing an alternative form of powerful verbal expression

for women suggests a problem, not only for this particular novel, but for the whole project of didactic fiction. If "false" texts are the most effective, what guarantees to either writer or reader that the arousal of emotion will have a properly edifying effect on the reader? From the straightforward formulation of "good" and "bad" female characters who are justly rewarded or punished for their behavior in the letters of Julia and Caroline, Edgeworth develops an increasingly confusing and ambivalent view of the relationship of fiction to authority and that of language to gender. When Edgeworth again writes a novel in the mode of "domestic didactic fiction" (Helen in 1834), she remains committed to rationality and observation as the correct moral and intellectual stance. But she also becomes increasingly disturbed by the implications of gender and power for the use of language, particularly language written by women.

Chapter 5

HELEN: THE DIFFICULTIES OF CREATING AN AUTHORITATIVE VOICE

After the publication of Leonora in 1804, Maria Edgeworth did not publish another novel in the woman-centered domestic didactic mode until the appearance of Helen in 1834. In the intervening years, Edgeworth continued writing, publishing many tales for young adults and her longest novel, Patronage. She also lived through the death of her father and the family crisis of having to discharge and replace her well-meaning but alcoholic brother, Lovell, as manager of the family estate. While always surrounded by members of her large and close-knit family, by 1834 Maria had experienced far greater social and economic independence and responsibility than most women of her time. In Helen, Edgeworth returned to some of her most compelling themes, the nature and interconnections of political and domestic power, the strengths and limits of rationality, and the relationship of these issues to gender. In her last novel, Edgeworth explores these issues with greater depth than ever before, revealing a view of women's experience that is both darker and more rich than anything in her previous works. If one defines subversive, not as the simple reversal or inversion of structures, but as an attempt, however tentative, to move beyond existing social and intellectual structures to develop new possibilities, then Helen is certainly one of the most subversive novels of its

genre.¹

Although not an epistolary novel, Helen is preoccupied with letters and writing. Unlike Leonora, in which the letters of various characters serve not only to reveal personality and motivation, but also to describe the action of the plot, in Helen, which employs a third person narrator, writing and reading letters is the greatest part of the plot. All of the various dangers of social disgrace that threaten Helen, Cecilia, and Lady Davenant are created by written correspondence. Furthermore, unlike Leonora, in which reading Olivia's letters enlightens and reforms Mr. L--, the reading of correspondence in Helen usually serves to confuse and mislead the characters into ever deeper and more serious misunderstandings. As Favret has noted in examining Jane Austen's Lady Susan and Sense and Sensibility, while earlier epistolary novels, such as Pamela, emphasized the power of the letter-writing woman, later novels tend to expose her vulnerability to the "harsh judgment of 'The World'" (Favret 146). Thus, it is not only the somewhat foolish and deceptive Cecilia who is entrapped by her letters, but the high-minded and moralistic Lady Davenant also finds that her status as a letter writer makes her vulnerable.

Gender and power are clearly connected. Despite Lady Davenant's wisdom and morality, authority and power in the novel are clearly vested in male characters, most particularly in General Clarendon. Helen's inability to affect the outcome

of nearly any situation in the novel, despite her honesty and rationality, further serves to emphasize the role of gender in the power equation. To a greater extent than in any of her earlier novels, Helen demonstrates the importance of Edgeworth's view that women's "happiness is of greater importance than their speculative rights" (Practical Education 168). While advocating rational education for women, in Helen Edgeworth firmly indicates that even the most intellectually talented women must be guided by a concern for their social and moral reputations. Women can effectively exercise their rational abilities when individual women succeed in creating new kinds of personal relationships in which men and women have confidence in each others' rational ability.

In order to create a rational heroine who can fulfill this role, Edgeworth creates a heroine who is rational and virtuous but who still faces difficult moral decisions by causing Helen's moral dilemmas to arise from her friendship for another woman who has somewhat serious moral failings. Cecilia's behavior and moral dilemmas are a more obvious focus of the books' plot than Helen's less serious errors. Like Lady Delacour in Belinda, Cecilia is a likable character who mistakenly invests too much of her self-esteem in her ability to fulfill "feminine" roles that may not reflect her real feelings or ideas. Even more than her predecessor, Cecilia seems a victim of her own lack of healthy self-esteem rather than of flawed morals. Her sense of self is thoroughly

invested in a male-female dichotomy of virtue. Her need for others' approval and affection leads her to make ambiguous statements in an attempt to maintain the virtuous feminine image she has created.

Cecilia is led into her first small deception of the General, claiming that she has "never thought" of another man, through fear of losing his esteem and love. As her mother has noted to Helen in describing the couple's courtship, Cecilia's attraction to the General seems from the beginning to be based on the fact that he insists on retaining power rather than symbolically relinquishing it in the style of the typical romantic hero. "[I]t was new to Cecilia to see a man of his appearance who had not on his first arrival shown himself ambitious to be made known to her" (29). As Lady Davenant describes to Helen their growing acquaintance with Clarendon, she continues to emphasize his ability to control and dominate. "Gleams came out, of a character born to subjugate, to captivate, to attach for life" (31). Finally, Lady Davenant explains to Helen that Clarendon's affection for Cecilia is really based on how well she is able to fit the image he constructs of her. "[T]he idol he adores must keep herself at the height to which he has raised her, or cease to receive his adoration. She must be no common vulgar idol for every passing worshipper" (33). Clarendon's relationship with Cecilia thus encapsulates the dilemma of the "angel in the house" so poignantly discussed by nineteenth-century writers.

The man's "worship" of the woman gives him the power to define her.²

Clarendon constructs an image of Cecilia to which she must conform in order to retain his affection. At the same time that this image constrains her behavior, it also pleases her to be thought of so highly. Therefore, some of Cecilia's own self-esteem becomes invested in meeting Clarendon's expectations. Lady Davenant, who sees this attachment as a guarantee of Cecilia's integrity and good behavior, is quite blunt in describing to Helen the power equation between Cecilia and Clarendon. "[He is] inferior to my daughter altogether in abilities, in what is call genius, but far superior in that ruling power, strength of mind. Strength of mind is an attaching as well as a ruling power: all human creatures, women especially, become attached to those who have power over their minds" (34). It is Clarendon's power over Cecilia that leads her into deception. Afraid of losing his affection and through it her new-found self-esteem, Cecilia deceives him about the extent of her previous attachment.

Cecilia strives continuously to gain and retain the affection of her mother and her husband. Her positive self-image is largely dependent on their approval. Yet, because of their severity and the threats of both her mother and her husband to withdraw their affection if Cecilia does not meet their exacting standards, she also fears them. She feels she cannot reveal any weaknesses that might give them ammunition

against her. Again, reference to Practical Education reveals that Edgeworth had long been concerned about the way that parents and educators use their power over pupils either to encourage self-confidence and intimacy or to foster fear and dishonesty. "Oppression and terror necessarily produce meanness and deceit in all climates, and in all ages; and wherever fear is the governing motive in education, we must expect to find in children a propensity to dissimulation, if not confirmed habits of falsehood" (212). While Cecilia is no longer a child, it is clear that fear is the governing motive in her relationships with both her mother and her husband. Because she feels she cannot in reality meet their incredibly high standards, she is driven to hypocrisy and deceit in order to appear to be what they desire. Again one may refer to Practical Education in which, in the chapter titled "Truth," Edgeworth makes reference to the need to inspire rather than terrify or subdue children. "Those who are excluded from hope are necessarily excluded from virtue..." (248). Fear is neither a rational nor an effective means of educating an individual. It does not promote the exercise of rationality in the pupil, and therefore creates an unhealthy dependence on the approval of others.

Furthermore, Helen also demonstrates the fallibility of "authority" figures who rely on their own powers of observation to ensure rational behavior in others. The failure of authority figures to correctly observe and

interpret the behavior of those they wish to control is a recurring motif. It is particularly interesting in the case of Lady Davenant, who for most of the novel serves as the moral guide and touchstone for other characters. Helen particularly often seems to believe that if she could have Lady Davenant's specific advice in every situation, she would never make an error. But Lady Davenant herself is fallible. Not only in her misjudgment of Cecilia, but in her rational dependence on her own judgment, Lady Davenant is shown to be vulnerable to the same sorts of misinterpretation and editorial violation that nearly destroy Helen and Cecilia.

Lady Davenant, as she tells her story to Helen, describes her "vice" as the desire for power. She describes what she terms the "virtuous ambition" that motivated her to push Lord Davenant into politics. She compares his political activities explicitly to courtly behavior designed to impress a watching woman. "He entered the lists, and in the political tournament tilted successfully" (86). Thus, as long as her ambition is of the traditional female kind, ambition for the reflected glory of her male "champion," Lady Davenant sees it as legitimate and even virtuous, as it motivates Lord Davenant to act for the public good. Only when her ambition becomes centered on obtaining direct attention does she say to Helen, "I am come to the point where ambition ceased to be a virtue" (87). Lady Davenant explains that she was inspired by De Stael's Sur la Revolution Francaise to try to prove that

English women could fill the sort of role in political and social debate De Stael ascribes to pre-revolutionary French court women. "I set about, as soon as I was able, to assemble an audience around me, to exhibit myself in the character of a female politician, and I believe I had a notion at the same time of being the English Corinne"(88).

While Lady Davenant describes her vice in this situation as being mainly "affectation," the reader can clearly see that Lady Davenant is most concerned here about her own desire for an audience and for attention. She compares herself to De Stael's character Corrine, the female artist who dies of grief because her beloved, a staid Englishman, cannot accept such a public figure as his wife. This comparison clearly indicates that it is not the sincerity of Lady Davenant's behavior that is being questioned. Rather, she believes that she erred in seeking the attention and authority that belong exclusively to men. She is seeking, through her domestic audience at the salon, to recreate the sort of public authority legitimately exercised by her political husband. The French salon culture Lady Davenant is emulating lacks properly defined gender roles. Thus, Edgeworth relies on the standard English liberal view of the French "ancien regime" as corrupt and corrupting to make her point about appropriate types of female self-esteem. As Belinda learned at the masquerade, women who base their self-esteem on outward display and the competition for

male affection make themselves objects to be valued only on their physical appearance.

Yet Lady Davenant, for all her apparent wisdom and experience, is not infallible. While after the end of her salon experience she believes that women are "protected" within their domestic sphere, and may safely exercise political influence as long as it is sanctioned by appropriate domestic relationships, her reputation and her husband's are nearly ruined in the episode of Carlos and the letters. This episode brings home with great force both the interrelationship of the political and the domestic and the way in which the current makeup of this interrelationship excludes women from the legitimate exercise of power. In this incident, Lady Davenant knows that the politically sensitive letter which was apparently copied and circulated without her permission was probably stolen from her writing desk for that purpose. She suspects a certain politician, although she cannot understand how he could have gotten access to her locked writing desk. Helen, however, believes that Lady Davenant's Portuguese page, Carlos, is probably involved in the crime. Lady Davenant here shows the way in which the domestic and the political become intertwined. She will not suspect Carlos of stealing the letter because of her domestic relationship with him. Lady Davenant has become a surrogate mother to Carlos; "she had brought him to England, had saved him from his mother, a profligate camp-follower" (46). And

despite the fact that Lady Davenant knows that Carlos has a biological mother living, she insists on referring to Carlos as "a young defenceless orphan," or "the orphan boy" thus emphasizing her self-appointed role as parent, and Carlos' apparently unwed mother's inability to legitimize him or provide an appropriate domestic setting for him. Because of her parental relationship to Carlos, Lady Davenant is unable to examine and judge his behavior as Helen does. When the half-burned letters and other physical evidence are finally discovered that prove Carlos to be the thief, and that also prove he has been copying and selling politically sensitive correspondence from Lady Davenant's writing desk for some time, Lady Davenant's reaction emphasizes her domestic relationship to the boy. "It is his writing--I see it, yet can scarcely believe it! I, who taught him to write myself--guided that little hand to make the first letters that he ever formed!" Lady Davenant's experience with Carlos illustrates one of the many ways that the political and the domestic intertwine. When domestic feelings become the basis for political policy, it seems, the space for deception and corruption is greatly enlarged.

Cecilia and Lady Davenant have similar experiences in the sense that both have correspondence taken from them and publicly displayed. While Lady Davenant firmly believes that a woman who keeps her use of language within the proper domestic sphere is safe and need not be concerned about power

relationships, Cecilia exhibits greater anxiety over the controls that gender places upon women's language. During a discussion of French politics, Lady Davenant and General Clarendon agree that women have a specialized domestic influence over politics, and that they should not attempt the sorts of political argument common to men. Clarendon speaks of women in political discourse "with an emphasis on influence, contradistinguishing it from power" (35). Lady Davenant, likewise argues that women's only power is derived from the "privilege" of their gender. "'So long as ladies keep in their own proper character,' said Lady Davenant, 'all is well; but if once they cease to act as women, that instant they lose their privilege--their charm; they forfeit their exercising power; they can no longer command the demon of party nor themselves...'" (36). While Lady Davenant sees women's position as advantageous to both men and themselves, however, Cecilia sees women's subordinate position as less "privileged" than silenced. In speaking of the Parisian women Cecilia excuses their behavior on the basis of women's inability to gain a legitimate domestic audience. "Lady Cecilia said that, from what she had seen at Paris, she was persuaded that if the ladies did bawl too loud, it was because the gentlemen did not listen to them" (35). Rather than sharing the general view that the Parisian women's loud behavior is caused by their political ambitions, Cecilia suggests that a domestic arrangement in which women are denied

the power of authoritative language creates turmoil in which women must cease any opportunity to speak, even if this means speaking too loudly or on inappropriate subjects. At another point, Cecilia explains to Helen that women's wit and verbal ability are legitimate as long as they serve to help men make a good impression. "'It is always permitted...to woman to use her intellects so far as to comprehend what man says; her knowledge of whatever sort, never comes amiss when it serves only to illustrate what is said by one of the lords of creation" (124).

Neither Cecilia nor Lady Davenant ever seem to notice the parallel circumstances in which their writing places them. Yet both are quite aware of the dangers of language for women. Lady Davenant believes she can control her written and spoken language if her use of it is always within the proper domestic sphere. Her experience with Carlos shows, to the reader at least, that this is not true. Cecilia, on the other hand, who never really attempts to enter the political sphere overtly, is quite aware that even within the domestic sphere, women's language is controlled and limited. Also, Cecilia sees the limitations on women's language as silencing women's voices and denying the opportunity to seek power, whether political or domestic. Men control both domestic and political authority, and this unequal power relationship denies women the full exercise of their rational abilities.

Cecilia, aware that her relationship with Clarendon is based not on rational understanding between them but on his worship of the image of femininity she represents, is led into subtle manipulations and half-truths in order to please him. Helen, by contrast, gradually realizes the need to assert her own rational judgment and avoid the dangers of excessive reliance on "female" virtues of silence, passivity and self-denial. From the opening of the novel, when Helen denies herself her small inheritance in order to cover her late uncle's debts, to its final chapters when she refuses to speak in defense of her own reputation and denies herself marriage to Beauclerc in order to "save" Cecilia, Helen attempts to define virtue through traditionally "feminine" characteristics. Such "feminine" virtues lead Helen into deceptive behavior and ultimately harm not only herself, but Cecilia, the person she is trying to protect. Through Helen's experiences, Edgeworth questions the usefulness of gendered definitions of virtue and the male control of authoritative language that maintains that dichotomy. Only through her relationship with Beauclerc, in which Helen claims the power to freely disclose or withhold information in accordance with her own rational judgment, does Edgeworth present a truly subversive and empowering alternative for women.

Helen and Beauclerc represent an alternative model of the "couple," partly through Helen's growing dependence on her own rational abilities, and partly through Beauclerc's observant

and rational attitude toward women. In his ability to see women as rational beings equal to himself, Beauclerc is contrasted with Clarendon, whose views of women are traditional and superficial. Beauclerc's superior powers of observation, and their relationship to gender issues, are brought into sharp focus through the contrast between Beauclerc's and Clarendon's reactions to the love letters of "Henry and Emma."

Beauclerc first learns of the letters when he sees one which has inadvertently been left in a drawer. While the behavior of Cecilia, Helen and the general seem to suggest that Helen should feel embarrassment, Beauclerc correctly identifies the letter's author immediately. "[I]n that single glance the writing seemed to him to be Lady Cecilia's..."(108). Clarendon insists that Helen must tell Beauclerc "the truth" about the letters, which is, of course, the lie that Cecilia has told him. Helen, refusing to tell a verbal lie although she has cooperated in a passive deception, decides that in order to avoid betraying Cecilia, her only honorable course is not to explain anything to Beauclerc. She makes his trust in her judgment and honor a test of his love. She only tells him that "I am innocent of anything wrong but the concealment" (120). She further explains that marital happiness, for her, can only grow from a relationship of complete mutual trust. "[I]f your confidence in me is not sufficient to endure this trial, we can never be happy

together" (121). Beauclerc accepts this explanation because it further convinces him that the letters were actually written by Cecilia. "That writing was Lady Cecilia's! I thought so at the first moment..." (123). However, Beauclerc is helped in his trust of Helen by his pride in having a different, more complete view of women than Clarendon.

The general, with his strict, narrow, conventional notions, has not an idea of the kind of woman I like, or of what Helen really is. He sees in Helen only the discreet proper-behaved young lady, adapted, so nicely to her place in society.... Give me a being able to stand alone, to think and feel, decide and act, for herself (122).

Beauclerc describes the rational and prudent observer role that Edgeworth had long advocated for women. The principle set forth here, that women, like men, must be trusted based not only on their past behavior, but also on their rational ability and character, is borne out by the novel's plot. Helen, despite many misinterpretations and unfair accusations, proves herself capable of rational judgment as well as emotional sacrifice, and in the process she discovers that sacrifice is good only when based on prudent and rational analysis. Furthermore, Beauclerc's ability to trust Helen is buttressed by his own powers of rational observation. He can easily distinguish between Helen and Cecilia's handwriting, and therefore is not, like the general, deceived by superficial appearances. Beauclerc's faith in Helen, based both on principle and rational observation, is certainly one of the book's most subversive

elements. In a relationship between equals, trust in one's partner's rational ability and character replaces the reliance on traditional gender dichotomies of "masculine" and "feminine" virtues displayed in the relationship of Clarendon and Cecilia. While Clarendon is expected to supply Cecilia's want of rationality, and she to supply his lack of emotional sensitivity, Beauclerc and Helen are complete and autonomous individuals.

In her discussion of Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace criticizes Edgeworth for her failure to deconstruct the patriarchal dichotomy that figures "feminine" as irrational. Kowaleski-Wallace rightly argues that in order to describe substantial social change, one needs to consider not only how to free women from their historical categorization as "irrational," but also to "investigate the conditions under which such categories are constructed in the first place; who does the constructing and why? What holds such constructions in place?" (107). I would argue that this investigation is a major component of Edgeworth's work, and that in Helen she finally succeeds in constructing a new vision of male-female relationships outside the dichotomies that she had examined from so many different angles. Rather than "feminizing" her hero as Elizabeth Inchbald attempts to do in A Simple Story, Edgeworth "humanizes" both Helen and Beauclerc, illustrating that the greatest obstacle to virtuous behavior and rational relationships between men and women is

the gendered dichotomy of "feminine" and "masculine" virtues that interferes with rational thought.³

The final fate of the overdetermined love letters provides the culminating example of the way in which private and public, domestic and political are intertwined in power relationships that deny women direct rational power and involve them in deceptive, desperate and irrational behavior. Both Cecilia and Clarendon become aware of the existence of the manuscript and about-to-be-published copies of the letters. In order to destroy the advance copy that has been loaned to her cousin Katrine, Cecilia must endure a seemingly endless conversation with Lady Castlefort, in which the sentimental lady recites all her romantic woes and marital unhappiness. Finally, Cecilia is able to trick her into leaving the room which buys her enough time to destroy certain pages of the book. "That instant Lady Cecilia drew the book out... and quick, quick, tore out page after page--every page of those letters that concerned herself or Helen, and into the fire thrust them, and as they blazed held them down bravely--had the boldness to wait till all was black..."(173). Throughout this procedure, Cecilia is terrified that one of her cousins will return and see her in this unauthorized "editorial" act.

Quite a contrast is provided by Clarendon's destruction of the copies of the book at the bookseller's shop. In contrast to Cecilia's frustration and desperation, Clarendon's

financial and social status make the destruction of the books a simple matter for him. He need only "settle with Stone" (the bookseller) and "stop the publication." At Clarendon's request, and with his promise of good payment, the bookseller removes and burns all copies of the chapter containing the letters. Clarendon's only physical involvement in the transaction is to receive the bill and "after one glance at the amount, he took up a pen, wrote, and signed his name to a cheque on his banker" (176). Thus, Cecilia's deceptive behavior is shown in this case to be not a fault of her character, but a natural outgrowth of her social situation, in which her only power of action and expression is through domestic means that require deception and indirection. Economically and socially, Cecilia is incapable of the sort of direct action that allows Clarendon to openly destroy all the chapters in a few minutes.

Throughout Helen, Edgeworth explores the complicated power relationships that not only silence women in the public sphere, but render men and women unintelligible to each other by granting men absolute authority in the domestic sphere as well. Edgeworth does not represent men and women as inhabiting separate "spheres" in which each has legitimate authority. Instead, she shows that all power relationships, from that of the mother and child to that of the husband and wife, are predicated on power and authority. In the case of adult men and women, if women are not granted the power to

exercise their rationality, if, like Cecilia, they are kept perpetually childlike in their lack of serious responsibility, then gender relationships become unhealthy. Cecilia and Clarendon do not communicate sincerely. Instead they fulfill roles for each other in the socially accepted ways. Not until Cecilia's fear of Clarendon leads her into serious deception do either of them begin to question the gender-based stereotypes upon which their relationship has been built. Edgeworth continues to present rational and observant women like Helen as her ideal, but in this novel, as in Leonora, it is evident that unequal domestic power relationships that deny women the ability to express or act upon their rational analyses make real social and personal progress for women impossible. In contrast to her earlier works, however, Edgeworth holds out definite hope, in the relationship of Helen and Beauclerc, that rational adult relationships between men and women are possible, although arriving at these will require courage and insight on the part of both sexes.

In the final analysis, Maria Edgeworth lived and wrote at the "margins" of the Enlightenment in more than one sense. I have argued that early in her career, Edgeworth adopted and learned to exploit the Enlightenment rhetorics of scientific rationality and social reform, capitalizing on her gender-determined domestic experience to create the "science of education." Although she had close social and intellectual contact with many of the great thinkers of the English

Enlightenment, her gender gave her a different perspective on the issues of power and individual autonomy that her contemporaries thought so crucial. By the end of her career, Edgeworth had outlived the social and political exuberance of her father's Enlightenment milieu. Helen is a nineteenth-century novel. When viewed in this way, Edgeworth's insistence on autonomous rational thought for women, and her argument, inherent in Helen, that the typical domestic relationship, based on a dichotomy of male and female virtues, is fundamentally flawed, can be seen as a courageous attempt to refute the growing belief in British society in the "separate spheres" of male and female experience. In an argument that can be traced back far beyond the Enlightenment itself, Edgeworth links the domestic and the public. The power relationships within the family, Helen suggests, are the model and the mirror for public relationships. But rather than a comfortable picture of the middle class family, Edgeworth shows us a family in which a gender-based dichotomy of virtue and values is at the root of confusion, deception and incomprehensibility. Thus, Edgeworth brings the Enlightenment concerns with rational analysis and systematic reform to bear on the "Victorian" family. At the chronological margins of the Enlightenment, Edgeworth uses its values to interrogate Victorian England's growing complacency about domestic relationships.⁴

With her firm reliance on her own ability to observe accurately and act with prudence, Maria Edgeworth speaks directly to the continuing exclusion of women from the rational order. Are not liberals and reformers today conceding the fight for women's political and economic equality in the face of a newly invigorated domestic model, today termed "family values"? If read with attention to gender issues, Edgeworth's work can be seen as a dissection of the political and social implications of such values. Power, Edgeworth suggests, is the motive force of domestic relationships. The family, as the site both for the formation of gender relationships and the education of children is the primary social unit. As such, the way that domestic power is distributed is indeed a political issue, and one with broad significance for the rest of society.

NOTES

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹Harden, however, does endeavour to examine Edgeworth's "art," providing detailed readings of Edgeworth's major works of fiction for adults. Harden's work shares the weakness of many studies of Edgeworth in failing to address the political and intellectual context of Edgeworth's fictional concepts.

²Kate Millet's Sexual Politics is one of the original examples that gave inspiration to the feminist critical project. Whatever its oft-cited errors in logic, this work still stands as an example of clarity of purpose and critical courage. Millett clearly demonstrates that fiction is by its nature didactic, presenting as reality certain norms and values.

³See Isaac Kramnick's Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism for an interesting discussion of this thesis.

⁴The role of R.L. Edgeworth in Maria Edgeworth's writing career, including his possible editorial "interference" and control of her ideas, has been discussed by virtually every biographer of Edgeworth. I agree with Marilyn Butler that R.L., while a major influence on Maria's life, served as a helpful editor rather than an overbearing and covertly hostile

critic (a view presented most recently by Kowaleski-Wallace). Therefore, my focus will be on Maria Edgeworth and her cultural surroundings as the origin of her ideas. I will not attempt to reconstruct her relationship with her father in psychological terms as I do not think enough evidence exists to support the negative effects of this relationship as represented by other critics.

⁵This concept can be found in Epstein, Poovey, Spender, Spencer and many other scholarly feminist discussions of the period. Epstein particularly chronicles the ambivalences and confusion suffered by Edgeworth's contemporary, Frances Burney, as a woman writer.

⁶For further discussion of this issue see Castle, Epstein, Schiebinger and Straub.

⁷I credit Jane Marcus with the invention and popularization of this apt metaphoric description of women's exclusion from literary studies.

MARIA EDGEWORTH AND THE RHETORIC OF PERFECTIBILITY

¹For an interesting exploration of ways in which the mother-infant bond may influence the child's views on gender (and reflect those of the larger society) see Nancy Chodorow's study The Reproduction of Mothering.

²Nicola Watson in Revolution and the Form of the British Novel discusses the underlying issue of sensibility in Rousseau as it relates to later British novelists.

³Madelyn Gutwirth presents a convincing argument for this and other imagery of breasts and maternity as elements representing the declining status of women in Revolutionary France.

PRACTICAL EDUCATION AND POWER RELATIONSHIPS

¹ Mitzi Myers discusses the failure of critics to engage with Edgeworth's overtly didactic works in her article.

² For examples of the exploration of the gender-specific implications in both revolutionary and reactionary imagery see Applebaum, Levy, and Gutwirth.

³For evidence of how the relative status of these issues has transformed our view of history, one need only consider the twentieth-century view of such figures as Priestley and Watt, whose political views are currently known and acknowledged by only literary and historical scholars, while their scientific achievements are widely recognized.

⁴On the question of whether to credit R.L. or Maria Edgeworth with the authorship of Practical Education, I rely on the primary evidence, R.L.'s attribution in the Preface to Practical Education in which he states,

When a book appears under the name of two authors, it is natural to inquire what share belongs to each of them. All that relates to the art of teaching to read in the chapter on Tasks, the chapters on Grammar and Classical Literature, Geography, Chronology, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Mechanics, were written by Mr. Edgeworth, and the rest of the book by Miss Edgeworth (ix-x).

This attributes most of those sections containing significant political or cultural observations to Maria Edgeworth. I can think of no reason why R.L.'s statement should not be believed as there is no contradictory primary evidence.

⁵Mary Astell employs the same metaphor in Some Reflections Upon Marriage (1700). There Astell claims that the contractual nature of the relationship between the sovereign and the subject ought to provide a model for the marital relationship.

⁶See, for example, Mary Astell and Edgeworth's contemporary, Mary Hays.

⁷I am indebted to Annette Kolodny's article "Dancing Through the Minefield" for this apt metaphor.

BELINDA OR THE MORAL OBSERVER

¹The Old Manor House by Charlotte Smith presents the most elegant example of this plot in Orlando's introduction of Monimia into the library.

²Although I find Elizabeth Craft-Fairchild's discussion of masquerade more useful for my purposes here, Terry Castle's study, Masquerade and Civilization provides the foundation for considering the importance of masquerade in eighteenth-century culture.

³See Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" for an interesting discussion of the theoretical implications of this process.

⁴As I noted earlier, a similar power differential is created but not resolved in Burney's novel Camilla. It is likewise an underlying conflict in Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story.

DIDACTIC FICTION AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF REFORM

¹In New Science, New World Denise Albanese presents an interesting theory of the way in which the emergence of modern science and "modernity" in general may have influenced both the form and the authority of literature.

²The effectiveness of this linkage of prejudice and appropriate female modesty is demonstrated by the writing of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. A member of Priestley's liberal dissenter circle, as well as Edgeworth's friend, and her only female contemporary to achieve equal breadth and depth in science and literature, she could think of no more compelling argument in favor of some types of prejudice. She explains, "Are not ideas of female honour and decorum imprest first as prejudices; and would any parent wish they should be so much canvassed until the most settled habits of propriety have rendered it safe to do it?" (437).

³This issue lies at the heart of Mary Poovey's work The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer.

HELEN: THE DIFFICULTIES IN CREATING AN AUTHORITATIVE VOICE

¹Elizabeth Craft-Fairchild and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace both discuss the need for deconstruction rather than reversal in subverting gender stereotypes (Craft-Fairchild, Masquerade and Gender, and Kowaleski-Wallace, Their Fathers' Daughters).

²This statement recalls Robert Browning's My Last Duchess. But the character of Marian in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, driven to prostitution partly through her inability to fulfill Romney's imaginary ideal, echoes Cecilia's dilemma.

³Elizabeth Craft-Fairchild explores the way in which Rushbrook is feminized in order to defuse the rivalry between the father and son over the daughter (Masquerade and Gender 119).

⁴In her study Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy, Dierdre David examines in detail the gender-dichotomy of nineteenth-century intellectual culture and its effects on intellectual women.

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