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Educating Women: Women Writers, the Domestic Novel and the Education Debate, 1790-1820

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EDUCATING WOMEN: WOMEN WRITERS, 
THE DOMESTIC NOVEL AND THE EDUCATION DEBATE, 1790-1820

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ vi

INTRODUCTION: MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, WOMEN’S FICTION, AND THE EDUCATION DEBATE, 1790-1820 ............................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE - EDUCATIONAL ROMANCE: EDUCATION, COURTSHIP AND FAMILY IN MARIA EDGECRTH’S BELINDA ........................................................................ 28

CHAPTER TWO - EDUCATING EDITHA: ADELINE MOWBRAY AND WOMEN’S EDUCATION .......................................................................................................................... 73

CHAPTER THREE - WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REFORM IN ELIZABETH HAMILTON’S THE COTTAGERS OF GLENBURNIE .................................................... 117

CHAPTER FOUR - RELIGION, EDUCATION AND FEMININITY IN MARY BRUNTON’S DISCIPLINE .................................................................................................................. 147

CHAPTER FIVE - WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND DOMESTIC AUTHORITY IN MANSFIELD PARK ................................................................................................................... 180

CONCLUSION: EDUCATION, NATIONALISM, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION ..........213

References .................................................................................................................................... 223

Biographical Sketch ..................................................................................................................... 229
ABSTRACT

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the debate over education is centered on women’s bodies and receives significant discussion in works by women. In this dissertation, I discuss five domestic novels written by women that make education their main topic and, despite political and personal differences, show a unified interest in asserting the importance of improved education for women and a desire to open up the roles available to women in education and educational reform. Each novel depicts the education of the female protagonist and shows her also as an educator of those around her. In doing so, all five of these women contributed to the educational discourse of the time, entering into the discussion on the different educational ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke while also revising Mary Wollstonecraft’s polemical theories on women’s education as expressed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. I argue that each of these novelists shows the importance of improved educations for women, while also opening a more public role for women in educational practices.

The five novels I discuss in this project are Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), Elizabeth Hamilton’s *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), Mary Brunton’s *Discipline* (1814) and Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). These five novels were written by women of various backgrounds and educations and were all published after Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* and after the backlash against her and other radical thinkers of the 1790s. I explore how these novels deal with issues discussed in *Vindication*, including female subjectivity, marriage and women’s role within the home and in society, focusing particularly on female education. These novels were written and published within a few years of
each other and were all well-received at the time of publication. All five of these novels have generally been considered conservative novels because they appear to uphold the status quo through appropriate marriages or the death of the character who has stepped out of the normative bounds of society, but a careful reading shows more reformist tendencies. Each of these novels has moments of progressive thought that seem to subvert the main moral thrust of the novel and force the reader to question the conservative categorization.

These novelists test and extend the domestic boundaries, clearing more space for women both inside and outside of the home. In most of the novels I discuss in the following chapters, the protagonist and main educator is a woman entering into society while being educated and educating others. She does not yet have a home of her own from which to perform her domestic educational role. However, each protagonist has a particular power in her situation as a single woman and her choices surrounding her marriage and future. Each of these characters is thus operating in a space between the domestic and public spheres; her role as moral guide and educator grows out of a domestic circle but enters into the larger social world. Each is engaged in educational activities outside of her own home, showing the influence women can have outside of the domestic sphere. These female characters also receive an important part of their own education by being part of the world and engaging in society at large. The movement of these women within society further politicizes women’s roles in educational practices; the portrayals of these protagonists show the need for better education for women and suggest that women can and should have more public roles both in and through education.
INTRODUCTION

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, WOMEN’S FICTION, AND THE EDUCATION DEBATE, 1790-1820

In 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the French Revolution appeared to be succeeding in its goal of establishing a democratic form of government not based on hereditary rights but on the rational consent of the governed. The English Jacobins had great hope for the success of the revolution and supported its liberal politics in favor of independence and equality for men, hoping to see a similar revolution spread to Britain. Wollstonecraft was a strong supporter of the French Revolution, but believed the revolutionary dialogue stops short of true equality by continuing to advocate subordinate roles for women. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft takes up the radical principles of the Jacobins which she had first supported in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and applies these same principles to women, demanding that this great revolution also include “a REVOLUTION in female manners” (281).

Wollstonecraft’s radical call in *Vindication* was publicly praised for a short time, but after the French Revolution degrades into the Terror and the history of Wollstonecraft’s personal life becomes public knowledge, her words turn into treason. The following chapters show how five influential female novelists pulled the debate about women’s education away from the vilified body of Mary Wollstonecraft and re-inscribed it onto the virtuous bodies of moderately progressive heroines. In this introduction, I discuss the influential arguments Wollstonecraft makes about women’s education in *Vindication* and her significance as a proto-feminist thinker. I then review current scholarship on Wollstonecraft, women’s writing, and education in the period
following the French Revolution, focusing particularly on the work of Alan Richardson, Nancy Armstrong, and Claudia Johnson. Each of these scholars discusses the role of conservative fiction after the radical 1790s, questioning the politics and tendencies of various women authors. My own argument enters into this debate, showing how five women novelists make education their main topic and, despite political and personal differences, show a unified interest in asserting the importance of improved education for women and a desire to expand the roles available to women in education and educational reform. Finally, I give a brief overview of my chapters, each of which focuses on a single exemplary novel that depicts the education of the female protagonist and shows her also as an educator of those around her. Each chapter also demonstrates how the novelist contributes to the educational discourse of the time and enters into the debates about the theories of Locke and Rousseau while also revising and reasserting Wollstonecraft’s polemical theories as expressed in *Vindication*.

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Wollstonecraft’s polemic begins with an appeal to Charles de Talleyrand-Perigord, a French Bishop and minister of Napoleon. Talleyrand had written in favor of free education in *Rapport sur l’instruction publique, fait au nom du Comité de constitution* (1791), but still suggested that the education offered to women should be limited and should direct them towards a subservient role within the home. Wollstonecraft supports his ideal of free education, but boldly asks him to interest himself not only in the rights of men, but also in the educational rights of women. In doing so, she claims the radical arguments of the revolutionaries for womankind and applies the principles of equality and liberty to both genders. Wollstonecraft wisely sees that this is an historic moment with great potential for political and social change and injects her
arguments for the rights of woman directly into the revolutionary discourse. In so doing, she makes sure that the revolutionary principles that are touted throughout France and England also include a discussion of women’s rights. Wollstonecraft enthusiastically supports equal rights for men, but wants to change the gendered language of revolution to include rights for humanity as a whole.

In calling for a revolution in female manners in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft offers a sharp criticism of the current system of education available to women. Throughout the eighteenth century, women’s education prepared them for a subordinate role in the private sphere as the public sphere was reserved for men. These separate spheres were supported by the belief that nature created men and women differently and thus sanctioned separate roles. Men were viewed as physically and mentally superior to women and naturally formed to fulfill public roles in religion, business, politics, and higher education as well as function as the leaders of their families and nations. Women, on the other hand, were viewed as helpmates for the male public role and were meant to remain in the private sphere to take care of children and the home in preparation for the husband’s return after his important public work. Women were viewed as naturally more emotional, irrational, and domestic and were thus only fitted for roles within the home. Education for girls in the landowning classes thus focused on feminine accomplishments that prepared them to get married and maintain a home. A girl’s education, usually performed at a boarding school or by a governess at home, consisted of lessons in music, dancing, painting, embroidery, needlework, and religion while emphasizing the important feminine virtues of modesty, docility, cleanliness, meekness, and simplicity. It rarely included academic subjects like history, writing, mathematics, or literature unless girls were unorthodoxly educated by their own fathers, their brothers’ tutors, or other male figures who
took an interest in their educations. As Marjorie Reeve has pointed out, “‘the real education of intellectual young women was fostered by the men in their social environment—bookish fathers . . . writers of various types or literary men who became patrons of talented girls’” (qtd. in Sotiropoulos 125).

In addition, reading was a highly contested topic during the eighteenth-century as society feared the power of the written word over what was perceived to be the simple and enthusiastic minds of young women. The rise of the novel during this period caused additional fear as it was considered a predominantly feminine form which had the power to improve or corrupt a whole nation of reading ladies. Not only were women the primary readers of novels, but the majority of novels were also written by women which meant the novel primarily focused on female experience. At the same time, there was a great increase in the publication of conduct books during the eighteenth century which aimed at teaching girls female virtues, proper behavior, and social etiquette. As Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos points out, “conduct-book training—‘society’s substitution of women’s behavior for a masculinizing education’ . . . —and the cultivation of feminine accomplishments remained the focus of schools for girls” (128). Girls were to avoid masculine academic subjects like philosophy and politics and encouraged to read conduct books for moral and religious improvement.

Wollstonecraft focuses her arguments in Vindication on women’s education, providing a biting analysis of the current system and demanding a system that offers equal educational opportunities for women. She criticizes Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, whose works greatly influenced her own ideas, arguing that their educational systems stopped short by claiming intellectual independence for men but not including equal improvements for women. Locke influentially argued that the child is a blank slate, free from original sin and capable of
developing his reason through education. According to Locke, a man should not be forced to submit to rule but must voluntarily submit to any authority outside of his own body through the use of this reason. Rousseau argued that society is a corrupting influence and felt that children should be educated away from society in as natural a state as possible with a tutor who would wisely arrange and superintend this education. In this way, a boy’s natural powers of reason and morality will develop without the corruption of society and then the rational man can enter into public life, prepared to agree to the social contract through the exercise of his reason. At the same time, the uncorrupted woman can take up her subordinate role in the domestic sphere.

Wollstonecraft directly refutes Rousseau, arguing for the equality of women as human creatures. She states women have the same rational capacities as men and have been victimized by “a false system of education” that needs to be completely dismantled (71). Wollstonecraft believes that women’s education teaches them to be “alluring mistresses” rather than “affectionate wives and rational mothers” and makes them into the sentimental, irrational creatures that they are regularly portrayed to be in conduct books, novels, and political thought (71). She forcefully states that if women are given the same educations as men, society will recognize that there is no sexual difference in the mind or the soul. As a result, men and women will be rational companions in egalitarian marriages and will create and educate better citizens.

Wollstonecraft proceeds to break down this “false system of education,” showing that the current system of education does not teach women to live virtuous lives, but instead teaches women their primary purpose is to always appear virtuous in society. Much of Wollstonecraft’s argument exposes the dichotomy between seeming and being; women’s educations generally neglect the substance of true religion, morality, and virtue, instead teaching women to maintain the appearance of these qualities. Wollstonecraft argues against sexual difference, stating “I here
throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty” (119) and further argues that “morality is very insidiously undermined, in the female world, by the attention being turned to the shew instead of the substance. . . . sometimes virtue and its shadow are set at variance” (214). This system of education thus makes women weak, selfish, and vain creatures who are incapable of understanding the virtues they appear to possess. She believes that virtues should not be separated by gender and instead demands that virtues should apply to all human creatures and should be developed by the use of each individual’s reason. She shows that the overwhelming focus in women’s education on sexual virtues enslaves women to public opinion and demands their own mental faculties be subsumed by the authority of male reason. She wants women free from the rule of men and wants all humans to rule themselves: “To become respectable, the exercise of their understanding is necessary, there is no other foundation for independence in character; I mean explicitly to say that they must only bow to the authority of reason, instead of being the modest slaves of opinion” (119, italics in original).

The focus on sexual virtues and the exclusion of rational thought development in women’s educational programs cause what Wollstonecraft sees as one of the great ironies of women’s position: society expects women, in their roles as wives and mothers, to be the socializers of men and the creators of future generations of patriots yet society does not allow women the educations that will prepare them to fulfill these demands. Women are responsible for the education of their infants, but their own educations infantilize them due to their exclusion from intellectual pursuits and their inability to exercise their own mental powers. They are not granted any form of intellectual or moral equality with men, yet they are expected to be the socializing force – the moral center – of the home. Women are to suppress their ideas, desires, and intellects, submitting them to the rule of masculine reason, yet they are expected also to
educate the next generation of political and social leaders without the use of their own reason. Wollstonecraft thus draws attention to the contradictory belief that women do not have the mental acuity or moral fortitude to fulfill the roles that society insists they are specially formed by nature to fill. If society desires, and nature demands, that women be the educators of their children and socializers of men, they cannot be educated only to be submissive slaves to male desire who have no moral or mental substance in and of themselves. If the nation depends on women’s domestic role, women must be properly educated to fulfill this role. They must be given educations that equal those of men so that they can be rational companions to their husbands and intelligent, reasoning educators of their children.

Wollstonecraft also points out that many women do not have the opportunity to enter into this domestic role, largely due to men’s desire for “alluring mistresses,” and demands that women be educated to support themselves in professions that are currently only available to men (71). She shows that the few professions available to women are degrading equivalents of servitude and argues that women have the capacities to take care of themselves through professions that command respect. She asserts that women’s educations must fit them for roles outside the home, so they can support themselves and still be active members of society and not be forced into servitude or even prostitution due to some disqualification from a sexually-based domestic role. Wollstonecraft states “[w]omen might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses” and bemoans the women who “waste life away, the prey of discontent, who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads” (229, 230). She calls for a complete reworking of women’s role in society through education.

* * *
Mary Wollstonecraft is not alone in her interest in education and her condemnation of the flaws in the current system of education. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, education becomes an increasingly important topic for conservative, liberal, and radical thinkers throughout Britain as they begin to consider the relationship between education and the formation of the individual, develop educational programs as tools for promoting social cohesion, and utilize education as a weapon to fight injustice and oppression. Radical thinkers viewed current educational systems as reinforcing patriarchal society while conservative theorists demanded that education uphold social divisions while instilling patriotic values and Christian virtues into the lower classes and the emerging generations. Authors and politicians debated the best way to educate children, women, and the lower classes, while reformers on both sides supported Sunday School and day-school movements for lower class children. Other proto-feminist authors, like Mary Astell and Catharine Macaulay, also argued that better educations would make women better mothers and better wives and some even argued that women should be provided with greater educational opportunities in order to support themselves outside of the home.

Alan Richardson discusses this cultural preoccupation with education during the Romantic-era in *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, pointing to the permeation of educational ideas in all forms of literature during the romantic period. Richardson claims “[a]n intense concern with education finds its way into Romantic-era writings of all kinds . . . often with the abruptness of a cultural obsession” (4). He argues that the Romantic period is the beginning of our modern view of education and helps form our modern beliefs in the importance of childhood as an era of innocence, the significance of early education in forming the adult, the maternal role in educating children, and the benefits of imagination and fantasy for children.
Richardson connects this intense focus on education to a cultural shift as society begins to reject the idea of inherited characteristics, turning to a Lockean belief in education being the crucial element in forming the individual. Richardson focuses the debate on education during this period on Locke and Rousseau, and discusses how many writers emulate, revise and criticize their education theories in almost every form of media available. Locke’s and Rousseau’s educational theories became popularized and were experimented upon throughout the nation and writers continually critiqued and reinforced the ideas of these and other educational philosophers. Richardson thus sees education as a central topic of political thought during the Romantic period.

Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* discusses how this growing “obsession” with education affects the emerging novel form. She reports how the novel emerges as a female-dominated genre and offers a Foucauldian reading of the novel as a pedagogic tool used to educate the desires. She argues that “the modern individual was first and foremost a woman” and claims that the novel’s emphasis on women authors and characters turned the idea of the social contract into a sexual exchange and helped create a domestic ideal that was opposed to the public sphere (Armstrong 8). The novel thus helped shore up the dangerous implications of educational freedom for women. The domestic ideal created a role for women as moral guide of the family and the novel highlights this role by focusing on women’s importance in the domestic sphere. This domestic ideal placed greater emphasis on the education of children, making the mother the primary educator of children and thus making better education for women a social necessity in order to properly prepare the next generation of society. The novel thus helps create a role for women which gives them authority at home as the moral and educational center of the family. This role, as Beth Kowalski-Wallace and Alan Richardson point out, is both empowering and
limiting for women as it offers increased authority and significance within the home, but also diminishes power outside of the home as a woman’s only political significance is within the domestic sphere. Richardson sees the woman’s role in educational practices as both empowering and controlling: “Romantic-era domestic ideology was as restrictive as it was enabling in relation to women writers, excluding women from political debate even while granting them a certain authority within the confines of pedagogical and didactic discourse” (Literature 168-169). But women writers took advantage of this contradiction by engaging in the debate in new and interesting ways. They accepted and supported this domestic ideal but continually expanded and questioned the ideal, opening up broader areas for women in education and society.

As the education debate continued after the publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, it became centered on the woman’s body, particularly the body of Mary Wollstonecraft. William Godwin’s Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798) shared intimate and shocking details of Wollstonecraft’s life at a time when radicalism was becoming kin to treason. The Reign of Terror in France thoroughly quashed hopes for a reconstituted society based on the democratic ideals of the Jacobins and brought about an intense reaction against radical thought throughout Britain. Wollstonecraft’s gender and her support of revolutionary ideals already made her works suspect, but Godwin’s frank acknowledgement of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, her suicide attempts, her pregnancies while yet unmarried, and their cohabitation before the birth of their daughter destroyed her reputation and fully marginalized her literary and political contributions. As a result, the important and well-reasoned arguments Wollstonecraft made in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman became bywords of a woman who wanted to justify her own sexual misconduct and destroy not only the English home but the nation as well.
After the radical 1790s and the death of Wollstonecraft and her reputation, women writers had to be particularly careful espousing reformist or feminist ideals in their writings. As Roxane Eberle points out, “[t]he publication and reception of Godwin’s Memoirs made clear the untenable position of an intellectual woman; her reputation was shown to be insecure in both radical and conservative camps” (126). Women novelists were in danger of losing reputations and being labelled anything from prostitute to traitor if affiliated with Wollstonecraft’s ideology and the now-demonized radicalism of the Jacobins. However, many women writers from varying political camps still entered into the debate polemicized by Wollstonecraft. Remarkably, even conservative writers offered arguments for improved education for women that coincide with Wollstonecraft’s Vindication.

The five novels I discuss in the following chapters were written by women of various backgrounds and educations and were all published in the wake of the backlash against Wollstonecraft and other radical thinkers of the 1790s. I demonstrate how these novels continue to deal with issues discussed in Vindication, including female subjectivity, marriage, and women’s role within the home and in society, focusing particularly on women’s education. All of these novels have generally been considered conservative novels because they appear to uphold the status quo through appropriate marriages or the death of the character who has stepped out of the normative bounds of society, but a careful reading reveals reformist dynamics. Each of these novels has moments of progressive thought that subvert the main moral thrust of the novel and call into question the pigeonhole of conservative fiction that delimits them.

In Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel, Claudia Johnson suggests that many women novelists at the turn of the century use innovative narrative forms and techniques to engage with Wollstonecraft’s theories while avoiding direct connection with her ideology and
public censure. Johnson focuses on the anti-Jacobin novel and shows how some authors typically considered conservative can be read as imbedding progressive agendas within their novels. In order to express reformist ideas regarding the education of women and children without being equated with Wollstonecraft and dangerous radical thought, women authors had to find ways to work within an acceptable tradition. She argues that authors like Elizabeth Hamilton and Amelia Opie “dutifully denounce reformist zeal, only to tuck away parallel plots which vindicate liberty, private conscience, and the defiance of authority, and thus discretely define broad areas where conservatives and progressives could agree” (Johnson xxi). Johnson claims many such writers use “strategies of subversion and indirection” in order to “subvert the anti-Jacobin novel from within” (19, 21). Similarly, Eleanor Ty states many women writers of the post-revolutionary period utilize “narrative techniques and methods of representation which enabled them to explore highly charged political topics without censure” and argues that “they employed more indirect means of examining the legitimacy of masculine authority, the prescribed ideal of the docile female, or the proper kind of education for women” (Ty Unsex’d 20). I argue that these five novels, to varying degrees, use such tactics in order to criticize the options currently available to women, offer various interpretations of what women’s role should be within educative environments, show the necessity of increased educational opportunities for women, and endorse social interaction as an essential element of a woman’s education. Each of the novels discussed in this dissertation portrays socially acceptable moral values while also pointing toward the need for a more rational educational system for women.

In *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution*, Lisa Wood argues that conservative writers after the French Revolution used the novel form in order to provide an “antidote” to the “pleasant poison” of revolutionary philosophy
(14-15). She discusses a number of women writers in this study, including chapters on Mary Brunton and Elizabeth Hamilton, and argues that these women wrote didactic fiction in an attempt to educate readers of the dangers of revolutionary philosophy and encourage domesticity, submission to authority, and the Christian faith. Wood argues that much conservative fiction has been devalued because modern literary criticism favors multiplicity of meaning to the straightforward message contained in didactic fiction. Her goal is to re-evaluate such works as “‘artifacts’ intimately entwined with the culture that produced them” so that she might “complicate our understanding of the relationships among women, writing, power, and politics during the Romantic period” (17). She points to important studies by Gary Kelly, Eve Tavor Bannet, and Christine Krueger which “contribute substantially to a more complex understanding of these writers’ social, political, and ideological positions, by offering a suggestion of the ways in which a single writer may hold contradictory positions – or, at least, positions that seem to us in retrospect contradictory – simultaneously” (22). Similarly, I show how five anti-revolutionary writers, some of whom are viewed as conservative, didactic writers, traversed the spaces between conservative, progressive and even radical fiction. Each author shows the importance of some radical ideas, like greater educational opportunities for women, while also de-emphasizing the aspects of revolutionary discourse that she feels threatening to Britain, the family, or the Christian faith.

These novelists test and extend the domestic boundaries, clearing more space for women both inside and outside of the home. In most of the novels I discuss in the following chapters, the protagonist and main educator is a woman entering into society while being educated and educating others. She does not yet have a home of her own from which to perform her domestic educational role. However, each protagonist has a particular power in her situation as a single
woman and her choices surrounding her marriage and future. Each of these characters is thus operating in a space between the domestic and public spheres; her role as moral guide and educator grows out of a domestic circle but enters into the larger social world. Each is engaged in educational activities outside of her own home, showing the influence women can have outside of the domestic sphere. These female characters also receive an important part of their own educations by being part of the world and engaging in society at large. The movement of these women within society further politicizes women’s roles in educational practices; the portrayals of these protagonists show the need for better education for women and suggest that women can and should have more public roles both in and through education.

* * *

In the first chapter, I discuss Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) in relation to Edgeworth and her father’s theories on education and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. Early in the novel, Edgeworth portrays an ideal domestic education, stating Belinda was “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). This early domestic education prepares her to withstand the many temptations and dangers she faces in fashionable society and resist the negative educations she receives from her match-making aunt and the worldly Lady Delacour. Her education continues in the Delacour home, where she sees the misery of an unhappy and unequal marriage, the consequences of frivolity and coquetry, and where she also learns to see beyond the façade of fashionable society. By combining these two types of education in *Belinda*, Edgeworth argues that both domestic and social educations are necessary for women. She shows how these educations help prepare Belinda for a companionate
relationship of two equals who will raise and educate their children as a team. Belinda is a prudent and rational woman who is able to negotiate the dangerous traps that surround her by careful reasoning and minute observation. She quickly learns that her original opinions of Lady Delacour were prejudices based only on appearances and she soon sees the various dangers that exist for an unmarried woman in society. Because of her superior domestic education and her constant efforts towards self-improvement, Belinda becomes an educator in the Delacour household, reuniting the Delacours with their daughter, reconciling Lord and Lady Delacour, and reforming Lady Delacour from the society coquette to a rational mother and wife. Edgeworth’s portrayal of Belinda suggests her agreement with Wollstonecraft’s argument that women should receive rational educations. As Anne K. Mellor points out:

Belinda Portman is the embodiment of all that Wollstonecraft called for in women: sound sense, wide reading, prudence, personal modesty, and a loving heart. She makes an egalitarian and companionate marriage with Clarence Hervey (after his own foibles have been exposed) and converts her friend Lady Delacour from a life of aristocratic license and personal anguish to a loving domesticity by reconciling and reuniting her with her estranged husband and daughter. (“Mary Wollstonecraft” 155-156)

Edgeworth’s Belinda is a rational feminist who quietly advocates for better education and prudent individualism (19).

Belinda and Lady Delacour are not the only ones who must be educated in the novel. Belinda also teaches her suitor, Clarence Hervey, to value an educated, rational, and well-read woman, which eventually shows him that his Rousseauistic experiment to educate himself a wife
is a failure. Edgeworth shows that Hervey’s experiment, much like that of her father’s friend, Thomas Day, does not create a rational companion, but a submissive, child-like dependent. Hervey helps Belinda reform the Delacour household which further shows him that a woman who has gained prudence and virtue through her interactions in society is much more desirable than a woman whose innocence has never been tested. Like Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth criticizes Rousseau’s view of women’s limited intellectual capacities and his proscription of limited educations for women. Such educations force women to remain in a perpetual state of childhood; they are wholly dependent on men to form their opinions and direct their lives, much like Hervey’s pupil Virginia. These women are ill-suited to be companions to their husbands or educators of their children. Belinda and Hervey’s relationship grows most when they are united in their efforts of educating and reforming Lady Delacour, which points to their future union where they will one day work together to educate their children. Edgeworth suggests that their home will mirror that of the Percivals whose home is well-regulated and filled with domestic affection. In addition, the Percivals’ home models Edgeworth’s ideal form of education for children with various scenes highlighting the children’s experiments, educational experiences guided by their parents, and the rational conversations that occur between adult and child which, in turn, is modelled on Locke’s system.

Edgeworth also criticizes how the modern system of education teaches women to focus on appearance, rather than teaching women to reason and make rational choices. Mrs. Stanhope educates her nieces solely to marry them off to society bachelors; they are only taught to appear pleasing and how to catch a husband, but they have no internal substance. Edgeworth satirizes this situation by showing how the nieces end up as jokes and outcasts due to the horrible failures of all their marriages. By teaching women only to please men without giving them a rational
education, society creates women who are unable to make rational decisions and judgments both before and after marriage. They end up marrying men whose appearances are just as deceiving as their own and they have nothing to fall back on when those sham relationships fail.

In chapter two, I turn to Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1804). Opie, a one-time friend and supporter of both Wollstonecraft and Godwin, is the most overt of these five novelists in her treatment of Wollstonecraft’s ideology. She so successfully hides her support of Wollstonecraft in a seemingly conservative moral tale that contemporary reviewers saw only criticism of Wollstonecraft and Godwin and her novel was well received as an anti-Jacobin work. However, *Adeline Mowbray* provides a sympathetic portrayal of Wollstonecraft and Godwin and their radical ideology. The novel does criticize Godwin’s argument in favor of cohabitation, particularly as it relates to women, but Opie clearly supports Wollstonecraft’s demand for better education for women and agrees with her criticism of the double standard created by sexualizing virtue. Claudia Johnson reads Opie’s novel alongside Austen’s *Mansfield Park* as expressing a reformist position:

Rather than compare a radical social position unfavorably to a Burkean one, Opie plays both ends off against the middle . . . Both [Opie and Austen] proffer an abundance of orthodox pronouncements, not as definitive and incontestable truths around which to structure their novels, but as propositions that their novels test and turn inside out. (23)

Throughout her novel, Opie tests and questions conservative assumptions about education, marriage, and woman’s role in society.
In *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie shows the dangers of limiting women’s education through her portrayal of Adeline’s early education and subsequent fall. She shows that it is not what Adeline learns that puts her in danger, but the way in which she learns it. The novel points to the failures of her mother, grandmother, and society to properly educate Adeline. Adeline is drawn to the radical philosopher Mr. Glenmurray because he represents the educational opportunities from which she has been excluded. However, despite his superior education, she spends the first half of the novel educating him. She teaches him that if he truly believes that cohabitation is superior to marriage, he must be the shining example of the truth of his theory for society. In fact, his unwillingness to stand firmly with Adeline in support of his radical beliefs harms Adeline as much as their actual cohabitation does.

After his death, Adeline pursues work as an educator, for which she is eminently qualified by the education she received from Glenmurray during their time together. She opens a small village school, writes educational works for children, attempts to reform Mr. Berrendale, and teaches Colonel Mordaunt to value marriage and child-rearing which prepares him to marry the spotless Emma Douglas. Adeline eventually comes to support the institution of marriage, but this support cannot be read uncritically, as Claudia Johnson points out:

Adeline finally concludes that marriage is ‘beneficial to society’ because it protects children, enforces constancy, and ‘has a tendency to call forth and exercise the affections, and control the passions.’ . . . This entirely Burkean conclusion would be unassailable if any marriage in the novel actually were presented in a benign light. But on the contrary, without making an issue of it the novel shows that marriage does no such thing. . . . Living outside marriage may
not be good for women, but in Adeline Mowbray living within it is certainly not much of an improvement. (23)

Adeline denounces cohabitation and espouses a belief in the importance of marital bonds, yet her own experiences make the reader question her statements. Her unsanctioned relationship with Glenmurray is an ideal, monogamous relationship based on mutual respect and love. Her subsequent sanctioned relationship with Mr. Berrendale is one of abuse and deprivation. He eventually leaves her and their daughter for a rich heiress in Jamaica, completely disavowing their marriage.

The end of the novel returns Adeline to her parental home where she closes her educational tale. Adeline leaves her daughter in the care of her properly chastised mother after writing explicit instructions describing how young Editha is to be educated. Adeline’s daughter will thus get a progressive intellectual and philosophical education provided Mrs. Mowbray, but it will be tempered by the strict moral teachings of the Quaker educationist, Mrs. Pemberton, and the cautionary educational tale penned by Adeline herself. The novel is thus bookended by the educations of the two Edithas – the faulty education of the mother begins the novel while the carefully constructed education of young Editha closes the book. The novel ends in the seemingly conservative death of the fallen Adeline, but this does not negate its reformist message. As Patricia A. Matthew points out, “Adeline does not die the death of a fallen woman but of a female warrior on a domestic battlefield, setting the terms for her daughter’s future” (388). Adeline martyrs herself in order to be an example for her daughter, but makes sure her daughter will have a very different future than she experienced. She carefully chooses her daughter’s future guardians and dictates the proper education for Editha before she dies.
In my third chapter, I discuss Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) which shows the dangers of bad education at all levels in society and uses the elderly protagonist, Mrs. Mason, to demonstrate how to properly educate and regulate a family and a village. In *Politics and Genre in the Works of Elizabeth Hamilton, 1756-1816*, Claire Grogan states “the same problems beset [Hamilton’s] fictional aristocratic Longland family, the middle-class Stewart family and the working class MacClartys – namely an appropriate education for children, filial obedience and respect” (129). In each family, Hamilton shows that the lack of proper education has been detrimental to the children and threatens to destroy not only the individual, but also the family and even the community. Much of the novel shows Mrs. Mason attempting to teach her relative’s family the importance of cleanliness, responsibility, and self-discipline. Although her attempts with the MacClarty family fail, she is able to educate other cottagers, help set up a school, and create a stronger sense of community in Glenburnie. She also helps in the education of the Stewart daughters during a brief layover on her journey from one permanent teaching position to the next.

Mrs. Mason gains respect from people of all stations due to her work as an educator and advisor. She began her life as a servant of nobility, but her usefulness and faithfulness as a governess eventually allow her to become an independent woman. Education has thus enabled her to be useful to people of all different stations and has also allowed her to improve her social station. However, her improved social position is not portrayed as a threat in the novel nor was it seen so in contemporary reviews of the work, since Mrs. Mason uses her independence to help improve the lives of others as seen in her continued work in Glenburnie. Her eventual independence is a gift for her lifelong dedication to educating children, bestowed upon her by the current Lord Longlands, who had been her pupil for many years.
Mrs. Mason’s educational story shows the importance of women educating one another and the limitations in women’s education. She is largely self-educated, gaining knowledge from whomever she could throughout her life, reading voraciously, and learning through her experiences. Mrs. Mason learns a great deal from various women throughout the novel, including Molly, the maid she works with as a servant at Hill Castle, Miss Osbourne, a dependent relation of the Longland family, and Miss Malden, the elderly aunt of Lady Longlands. By learning from women in various social positions who have very different educations, Hamilton shows an alternate form a female education that grows directly out of women’s experiences. Grogan discusses the importance of women’s educational role in Cottagers:

Along the way Cottagers of Glenburnie teaches its readers how to manage a household, to manage domestic finances, to develop and practice Christian faith, to establish a small rural school and to transform a neighbourhood – not through political revolution but through a moral and spiritual one. It is very much a practical handbook in which Hamilton demonstrates the power of the female to effect positive change. (129)

The novel shows the importance of education for women and gives examples of how this education can be performed. It offers a role of authority for the female educator in society, but it also shows that women have important lessons to teach one another, no matter what role they have in society. Mrs. Mason’s role as an educator is not simply within her own domestic circle. She begins as a governess in an aristocrat’s home, but expands her role from that of educator to reformer as she helps modernize an entire village. Grogan points out that the reform of Glenburnie has implications for the nation as well: “Mrs. Mason argues that a ship-shape house
keeps the family in line and through each family the nation itself: thus domestic economy affects a national revolution” (128).

In chapter four, I turn to Mary Brunton, who views education as a personal and internal process and focuses primarily on religious and moral education, yet also demands that education should be practical. In *Discipline* (1814), Brunton shows that the current system of education does not prepare women for internal virtue or religious devotion as a person must exercise his or her reason in order to become a true follower of God. She also shows the great disadvantages women face when they must support themselves outside of the home because their faulty educations offer no practical knowledge or experiences.

In *Discipline*, one can trace a connection to Wollstonecraft most clearly in Brunton’s portrayal of Ellen Percy’s boarding school education and her attempts to support herself after the loss of her family fortune. After her mother’s death, Mr. Percy sends Ellen to a fashionable boarding school, mostly to keep her out from under his feet and to encourage her connections with aristocratic families. However, all Ellen learns at this school is her own importance and she develops a bitter rivalry with the better-born Lady Maria de-Burgh, which becomes her primary passion throughout the first half of the novel. This education, as Brunton points out, does not prepare Ellen for the future she faces. She is not taught true religious devotion, nor is she taught how to reason. Her lessons in French and reading do not prepare her to read the works of influential French philosophers or any other works of intellectual or moral value. Even her lessons in needlework only prepare her to make trinkets, not clothing or other items with use value.

Brunton also criticizes the domestic ideal, showing how Ellen’s education is badly managed by her doting mother who dies before teaching her daughter anything of value.
Brunton’s portrayal of Mrs. Percy, Ellen’s mother, coincides with Wollstonecraft’s criticism of an educational system that does not prepare women to properly teach their children. Mrs. Percy is a good woman whose feminine meekness makes her too weak and docile to control her spirited child. Brunton shows how women’s educations create weak women who are unable to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Mrs. Percy’s absolute submission to her mother and husband leaves her without any internal strength to withstand the sorrows and trials of life. She fails to teach Ellen to exercise her own powers of reason, she fails to teach her daughter the tenets of her own Christian faith, and she fails to give Ellen any practical knowledge that might allow her to take care of herself. In an ironic twist, Brunton shows that Mrs. Percy has been kinder to the poor Mrs. Wells’s daughters than her own by teaching them active religious faith and trades by which they are able to support themselves and their mother. When Ellen is destitute, she has no such skills with which to support herself and no solid faith to buoy her up during her intense suffering.

Brunton connects Wollstonecraft’s important arguments in favor of rational educations for women with religious education. A woman cannot be a firm and faithful believer if she cannot read, analyze and reason. When Miss Mortimer teaches Ellen to follow God, she does so by urging Ellen to read the Bible and various books on Christian history and by engaging in active discussions of these readings with her pupil. Miss Mortimer explains this rigorous course of spiritual study to Ellen: “the exercise of your highest natural faculties upon your religion is calculated to fix it in your mind, and endear it to your affections” (Brunton 190). When Ellen is almost led astray from Brunton’s true religion by the enthusiasm of a dissenting preacher, Miss Mortimer draws her back by simple reason and a request that Ellen first examine herself and her reason for wanting to leave the established church. Ellen soon realizes the truth of Miss
Mortimer’s “meek reason” and acknowledges that “[r]easoning must convince the understanding” (183, 200). Brunton thus shows the danger of sensibility when not tempered by strong reason and argues that even religious faith must be established by rational inquiry.

My final chapter focuses on Fanny Price in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). I discuss the role of Fanny as the moral center of the novel and the contradistinctions between her, the Bertram sisters, and Mary Crawford. Austen shows that the educations of all the women in the novel, with the exception of Fanny, are flawed and lead to disastrous consequences for the Bertram household. Austen, like Wollstonecraft, criticizes the current system of education that only teaches female accomplishments and fails to provide women with rational educations that would prepare them to be sensible wives and mothers. This education teaches women to put immense value on appearance which creates vain, weak, and selfish individuals. Maria and Julia Bertram are examples of this type of education. They only value their social appearance and even make fun of Fanny when she tells them “she does not want to learn either music or drawing,” since these are the things that their education has taught them to value (Austen 16). Using her characteristic irony, Austen subtly shows the Bertram sisters disdaining Fanny for the very thing that makes Fanny their intellectual and moral superior. She sees no value in the feminine accomplishments and instead pursues an academic education that proves the best education in the novel. Fanny may not excel at dancing or drawing, but she does have an almost perfect sense of right and wrong. Fanny’s superior education makes her a consistent character with internal strength, while Maria and Julia act based on their feelings without rationally considering the possible consequences. The Bertram girls see education as simply something to be endured until they reach marriageable age, while Fanny sees it as a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement.
Fanny receives her education through the help of her cousin Edmund, who becomes her mentor, and her own habits of reading and self-study. She takes over the small schoolroom after her female cousins vacate it and spends her free time reading from the books Edmund has given her which helps her develop her rich internal life. It is this superior education that eventually allows Fanny to move from a subservient dependent relation to a position of power as the future Mrs. Bertram. Maria and Julia Bertram are polar opposites of Fanny; they are perfectly capable of appearing virtuous, but Austen shows their choices are not based on the desire to truly be virtuous. They epitomize “seeming” virtuous as opposed to actually “being” so, which Wollstonecraft stridently criticizes in the current system of women’s education in *Vindication*. Even Sir Thomas comes to realize the system he used to educate his daughters was badly flawed. He acknowledges “[s]omething must have been wanting within” and “principle, active principle, had been wanting” in his daughters (422). This realization allows him to finally recognize the superiority of Fanny and he encourages the union of Fanny and his youngest son, Edmund, happy to secure her as a Bertram forever. As Claudia Johnson points out:

All the worst crimes pursuant upon female immodesty—illicit sex and adultery—come to pass in *Mansfield Park*. But here such effects proceed from causes contrary to what conservative writers conceived. The only character in *Mansfield Park* whose hands remain clean has to think for herself and to defy the figureheads of social and religious authority in order to remain guiltless. (105)

By defying such figureheads because of her implicit trust in her own reason, she eventually earns a place of stability and importance as Edmund Bertram’s wife. Through her portrayal of Fanny, Austen shows that the ideal education for women should be a rational
education modeled on the education given to young men and should be supported by extensive reading and intellectual discussion. Such an education will teach women to internalize the principles they rationally agree to and live them out in society.

Fanny’s education enables her to see the many faults of the various members of the Bertram family, but her subordinate position in the home leaves her without the authority to influence the family. When she does attempt to correct Maria and Edmund, she is rebuffed. Maria ignores her wise advice and continues to behave in ways that eventually lead her to the ruin Fanny had foreseen. Edmund seeks Fanny’s advice, but cannot acknowledge that her reason may be more correct than his own, which almost leads him into a marriage with the corrupt, uneducable Mary Crawford. Fanny is unable to truly gain a role as educator until she returns home to Portsmouth and begins to educate her sister, Susan. Since she is now a member of the Mansfield home, Fanny has a superior position in her sister’s eyes. Susan thus respects Fanny and is open to the teaching Fanny offers. Her role as the educator of Susan boosts her confidence and she becomes more powerful when she returns to Mansfield Park. This power, however, is closely linked to the various disasters that befall the Bertram family; Fanny is unable to prove her value until after Maria and Henry Crawford are proven to be devoid of any moral fortitude and are expelled from Mansfield Park society. Fanny cannot show her superiority except by comparison with those whose moral inferiority is decisively proven. The Bertrams’ class prejudices continue to work against her until the spell is violently broken by the actions of Maria, Julia and the Crawfords. They finally go so far that even Edmund’s intense desire for Mary and Sir Thomas’s immense pride in his familial line are not strong enough to allow them to overlook their flaws. Austen thus criticizes the domestic ideal, showing that an intelligent, virtuous woman
cannot be a positive force for change in the home if she does not have a role of authority in that home.

Each of the novels I discuss in the following chapters shows education as a formative experience and argues that women’s education must be broader in scope if women are meant to maintain the home and create the future leaders of the nation. Without improved educations that focus on developing their ability to reason, women will remain liabilities for the family and the nation. With better educations, women will be able to help their nations improve not only by becoming the true moral and educational centers of their homes but by extending their educational and social roles to areas outside of the home.
CHAPTER ONE

EDUCATIONAL ROMANCE: EDUCATION, COURTSHIP AND FAMILY IN MARIA
EDGEWORTH’S BELINDA

By the time Maria Edgeworth began writing Belinda (1801), she had already achieved fame as an educational theorist and writer of educational works for children alongside her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth. She had co-authored Practical Education (1798) for home use in educating children, written her views on women’s education in Letters for Literary Ladies (1795) and published various moral tales for children, including The Parent’s Assistant (1796). Belinda is one of Edgeworth’s first attempts at a longer sustained work for an adult audience. Despite its generic differences from her earlier works, Belinda explores and showcases her lifelong interest in education. As Alan Richardson argues in Literature, Education and Romanticism, “Edgeworth was uniquely fitted to bring the domestic novel and novel of education together,” combining the two forms to create Belinda, which functions as a novel, but also incorporates and forwards her views on education and educational practices (187). In Desire and Domestic Fiction, Nancy Armstrong argues that the domestic novel helped create an alternate form of power within the home as “the household had to be governed by a form of power that was essentially female” (19). Thus, a woman’s role as moral guide and educator of children gives her a particular power that is separate from the political power wielded by masculine society outside of the home. I argue that Belinda does have a peculiar power due to her moral purity and educational activities within the home. However, Belinda’s educational activities have larger social implications and suggest a more public position as she wrests power from both the masculine and feminine authorities within the Delacour household who are struggling for power with each other.
Belinda’s main pupil is her guardian, Lady Delacour, who is not only older than she, married and a mother, but also a powerful woman of rank within society who domineers over her own husband. Belinda’s educational work also extends to Lady Delacour’s husband, which almost leads to the destruction of her own reputation. Thus, the educational role of the woman in Belinda is reformist, political and powerful, and Belinda’s educational work spirals out of the Delacour home to other influential people, including Clarence Hervey, Mrs. Delacour, and Mr. Vincent. Belinda also shows that since woman’s educational work spreads from within the home out into society, a man’s work should enter into the home to assist in the educational project. In fact, through her portrayals of various pairings throughout Belinda, Edgeworth points to the significance of both the male and the female in educational practices, which reflects her relationship with her father and the success they had in educating children and writing educational works collaboratively. Edgeworth argues that since marriage is an important social institution whose main goal is the education of the future generation of society, both partners must share intellectual and moral equality and similar educational goals in order to fulfill this important mission of their marriage. Education is central to all human relationships and not only forms the individual, but offers personal fulfillment and opportunities to reform society as a whole.

Belinda is clearly the moral center of the novel, as most critics have pointed out. But many of these critics argue that Belinda is a flatly drawn character who does not have any moral growth in the novel and view this as a flaw in Edgeworth’s novel. However, Belinda is immensely educable and learns quickly which allows her to protect her own interest while also taking up the central moral role she holds throughout the novel. As Richardson points out, “Belinda will show how the internally regulated female character develops through testing itself”.

29
against the snares of the marriage market and the fashionable world” (Literature 190). Even though the portrayal of her growth is short, her education is important for the overall thrust of the novel. Edgeworth introduces Belinda’s education at the very beginning of the novel, stating she was “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. Her character, however, was yet to be developed by circumstances” (Belinda 7). The reader also learns later in the novel that Belinda experienced happiness in her young life: “[o]f domestic felicity she had never, except during her childhood, seen examples” (138). Belinda was ideally brought up as a child – in the country with parents who raised her to enjoy the domestic life and encouraged her reading while also demonstrating “domestic felicity” in their marriage relationship. After this idyllic childhood, Belinda moves in with her aunt, Mrs. Stanhope, who “endeavoured to teach her, that a young lady’s chief business is to please in society, that all her charms and accomplishments should be invariably subservient to one grand object—the establishing herself in the world” (7). Mrs. Stanhope thus offers her an education in feminine accomplishments aimed at ensnaring a suitable husband.

These two competing styles of education are juxtaposed on the first page of the novel, pitting the rational education of a young girl against an education of accomplishments aimed only at making her marriageable. The early education Belinda received in her parents’ home gives her a solid background of rational thought and a preference for sensible occupations, which keeps her from fully adopting the dangerous education that her aunt offers. It appears that her cousins and sister, who all marry with mercenary views by following their aunt’s plan, did not have the solid education Belinda received as a child. They are all taken in by Aunt Stanhope’s “documenting” and appear to follow her instructions to the letter. Each one of these women
failed to examine the principles she was being taught in order to discern the proper course for her life. It appears that none of these women was able to acquire the intellectual autonomy that Belinda claims early in the novel. Edgeworth shows that the perfect obedience of all the nieces to Mrs. Stanhope’s authority is a large part of the problem with their educations. We get a glimpse of this unquestioning, and detrimental, acquiescence when Mrs. Stanhope tells Belinda that one of her nieces would not be on the threshold of ruin “[i]f she had taken my advice after marriage as before” (214). This niece carefully followed every piece of advice her aunt gave her in order to gain the wealthiest suitor available and has only learned, after the failure of her marriage, not to follow her aunt’s dangerous advice. It is, however, too late for her to save her reputation and gain a suitable situation in life when her husband does leave her. The novel shows that each niece who followed Mrs. Stanhope’s educational program ends up in a failed and miserable marriage with nowhere to turn after the collapse. Each niece lacked a solid educational background and thus failed to make the wisest marital decision. This same absolute acquiescence to authority is also shown in the figure of Virginia St. Pierre, who appears much later in the novel.

Edgeworth thus shows the importance of providing better educations that will prepare women for the choices they will have to make early in life. The educational model portrayed by Mrs. Stanhope is an example of the system Mary Wollstonecraft disparages in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which she calls a “false system of education” that has been created by men who “have been more anxious to make [women] alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers” (71). Wollstonecraft argues that this system of education has so weakened women’s understanding that “the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their
abilities and virtues exact respect” (71). Edgeworth shows that this type of education is no education at all as it creates silly, mercenary women who are avoided by all decent society and lost to their family and friends. When the other nieces’ marriages fail and they are left destitute, they also have no one to turn to. While Edgeworth does not follow the stories of these women, their falls point to the type of plots seen in the radical fiction of Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft. These young women, driven to Mrs. Stanhope by necessity, learn no useful skills and will cease to exist in the world of Belinda once they are abandoned by their husbands. Edgeworth leaves the careful reader wondering what will happen to each of these women and curious why no mention is made of Belinda carrying on a correspondence with any of her cousins. We also learn, quite surprisingly, that one of these nieces is actually a sister of Belinda, yet she is never mentioned by Belinda or any of the family she adopts once she enters the Delacour household. Thus, a blood sister of our heroine is ruined and possibly destitute, but is easily written out of the novel and her sister’s life just as such a woman is written out of society. Edgeworth leaves this sad story hanging over the novel as we watch Belinda make all of the right choices and finally achieve her happy ending.

While Edgeworth does highlight the importance of Belinda’s domestic education, she is careful to point out that her early education is just the beginning of her educational process. In fact, the novel makes it clear that she has more to learn and states, when she first arrives at Lady Delacour’s, “her character . . . was yet to be developed by circumstances” (Belinda 7). Her character is not fully developed until she lives with Lady Delacour and realizes both the fact and the fiction in Lady Delacour’s life. Belinda’s early education provides her with rational resources, but she still has much to learn while out in society and it is her ability to learn from what she observes that makes her the exemplary character she is throughout the novel. Belinda
must enter society and interact with others in order to truly learn how to be the prudent and rational heroine she becomes. It is only through experience that Belinda is able to see the lies of the fashionable set and learn what is truly valuable which, for Edgeworth, is a domestic life.

Early in the novel, the narrator offers a glimpse of Belinda while she is living with her aunt Stanhope and when she first comes to London:

Belinda was fond of amusement, and had imbibed some of Mrs Stanhope’s prejudices in favour of rank and fashion. Her taste for literature declined in proportion to her intercourse with the fashionable world, as she did not in this society, perceive the least use in the knowledge that she had acquired. Her mind had never been roused to much reflection; she had in general acted but as a puppet in the hands of others. (9-10)

Belinda appears to be a typical, somewhat silly, girl who has been raised to give unquestioning obedience to figures of authority. She is excited to go to London and is described as “charmed” to be staying with Lady Delacour “whom she thought the most agreeable—no, that is too feeble an expression—the most fascinating person she had ever beheld” (10). She is fond of amusement and clearly believes her stay at Lady Delacour’s will be filled with balls, parties, social outings and various other amusements to scintillate her young mind. She has some prejudices for “rank and fortune” and feels that Lady Delacour represents the life she would one day like to lead. She has started to lose some of the preferences she had early imbibed in her paternal home; she no longer spends as much time reading because she sees no use for it in the exciting society life of Lady Delacour. In addition, the narrative states that “[h]er mind had never been roused to much reflection” as she has blindly obeyed those of authority around her. As Edgeworth will show, the
ability to break away from those in authority and make one’s own decisions is a necessity for any rational being. But, early in the novel, Belinda is not yet practiced in the habit of self-reflection that is a hallmark of her character throughout most of the novel and gives her the power to assert her own will against those in authority over her.

The society life at Lady Delacour’s home causes a notable change in how Belinda views society and her place within it. Only one paragraph after the previous quotation describing Belinda’s character and morals before she comes to London, the narrator shows Belinda has begun to change. Instead of describing Lady Delacour as a fascinating woman, she instead sees that the society woman is two different people: “Abroad she appeared all life, spirit, and good humour—at home, listless, fretful and melancholy; she seemed like a spoiled actress off the stage, over stimulated by applause, and exhausted by the exertions of supporting a fictitious character” (10-11). These two paragraphs show the education that Belinda receives at the beginning of her residence with Lady Delacour by showing the two diametrically opposed views that Belinda has of the fashionable society woman with whom she lives. She sees through the appearance to the truth of Lady Delacour’s life. This realization teaches Belinda the difference between what Wollstonecraft separates as “seeming” and “being.” The Lady Delacour that society sees is not the being as she truly is. Belinda begins to recognize the contradictions in Lady Delacour and sees how these contradictions represent women throughout society. This recognition helps Belinda assert herself and retain the authority of self-representation. The narrative states that Belinda “had in general acted but as a puppet in the hands of others” before she comes to London, which implies that Lady Delacour will easily control Belinda once she is in her house (10). However, Lady Delacour does not control Belinda. Once Belinda sees her danger, she wrests control from Lady Delacour and her aunt’s hands and takes firm command of
her own situation. When she first enters the Delacour home, she sees what the rest of the world sees – an exciting, beautiful, fashionable woman – and feels blessed that she gets to live with this fascinating woman. Living with Lady Delacour, Belinda learns to disdain the fashionable falsehoods that are central to Lady Delacour’s existence. She sees the truth behind the façade and loses any fascination with the fashionable world and instead learns how to maneuver in this world without becoming entangled with society men or being dragged down by rumors and suspicion. If she had not been allowed out in society and had not experienced the world as it is, she would never have seen through “the thin veil, with which politeness covers domestic misery” (10). She would have remained enamored with Lady Delacour and all she represents.

Edgeworth makes sure the reader sees the flaws and simplicity of Belinda at the beginning of the novel in order to show that she must first learn in order to become the educator of others. Belinda is not born prudent and rational; her education must teach her these virtues. Like Fanny Burney’s Evelina, a character with whom Belinda is frequently compared, Belinda has not experienced society life and is excited for the events she will enjoy with Lady Delacour. She wants to see the fashionable life and be envied as the guest of Lady Delacour. Unlike Evelina, Belinda is a strong, intellectual woman who cannot ignore the negative things she sees, so she asserts her own independence when she is faced with morally compromising situations. This education is performed by Belinda herself as she sees firsthand the misery of Lady Delacour and the dangers of a life like hers. Edgeworth thus shows the importance of both domestic and social educations for young women so that they can develop rational independence of mind.

Just as Belinda becomes Edgeworth’s ideal woman through her moral and educational activities, Mr. Percival represents the ideal due to his enlightened parenting. Edgeworth’s ideal men are those who, like her father, engage in the educational process, seeking continual learning
and opportunities to educate others. Mr. Percival is described “as a man of science and literature, and his daily pursuits and general conversation were in the happiest manner instructive and interesting to his family” and he finds ways to turn everyday conversations into educational opportunities for his children who he treats “as reasonable creatures” (216). Together, he and his wife raise and educate their children and, instead of lectures or force, “the taste for knowledge, and the habits of application, were induced by example” (216). The novel shows the children continually engaged in experiments, educational games, and educational outings. The Percivals also have an ideal companionate marriage that is based on “a union of interests, occupations, taste, and affection” (215). Lady Anne Percival is an educated, rational woman who has “much accurate knowledge, and a taste for literature” and is thus “the chosen companion of her husband’s understanding, as well as his heart” (216). Both Mr. Hervey and Lord Delacour are redeemed at the end of the novel through their abilities to learn and change into men like Mr. Percival. Mr. Vincent, however, is written out of the novel because of his failure to accept the educational influence of Mr. Percival.

Mr. Hervey shows a significant interest in education throughout the novel which often chafes with his public persona as a man of the world and a man who will never marry. Hervey has had an excellent education and finds education to be important in one’s character. However, Hervey must be reformed from the fashionable man of the world to a rational and reasonable man of virtue and sense in order to deserve the spotless Belinda. Hervey first learns the true nature of his society friends when, on a whim, he jumps into the Serpentine and almost drowns, only to be saved by Mr. Percival when his friends run away. This dangerous, almost deadly, experience sets him on the path to virtue. He meets the admirable Percival family and sees their marriage and habits of children-rearing as idyllic. It is in the Percival home that he begins to
question his own beliefs and realizes how his constant attentions to Lady Delacour have
tarnished both of their reputations. After meeting Mr. Percival and Dr. X—, and seeing the
domestic bliss of the Percival household, Hervey sets out to help reform Lady Delacour and
bring her back into a positive domestic relationship with her husband and daughter.

Mr. Hervey’s interest in education is particularly clear in his reading of Rousseau’s
Emilé, an influential work on education that had greatly influenced Edgeworth’s father and his
circle of friends. Richard Lovell Edgeworth was such an enthusiastic supporter of Rousseau’s
model of education that he educated his first son, Richard, according to the model portrayed in
Emilé. He eventually abandoned this plan of education when his son became unmanageable and
enrolled him in a boarding school. He later admitted that he believed “Rousseau’s system was
founded on ‘mistaken principles’” (Moore 154). Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s closest friend,
Thomas Day, also decided to perform an educational experiment based on Rousseau’s famous
work. He, however, was not interested in educating children; he wanted to educate an ideal wife.
Day, with the assistance of Edgeworth’s father and another friend, adopted two girls from a
Foundling Hospital and began intense training and lessons based on Rousseau’s description of
Sophie’s education. He educated both girls together for a year before choosing the more
promising of the two, the girl he renamed Sabrina Sidney, as his intended wife. For two more
years, he lived with Sabrina alone, giving her a progressive intellectual education while also
subjecting her to intense physical and emotional “lessons.” In How to Create the Perfect Wife,
Wendy Moore explains that he gave up his educational mission when Sabrina was fifteen and
enrolled her in a boarding school because she did not fulfill his high expectations of
submissiveness. He, however, returned to claim her as his bride one more time before declaring
her a failure and determining never to see her again.
In her portrayal of Mr. Hervey and Virginia St. Pierre, Edgeworth not only criticizes Rousseau’s image of women, as Wollstonecraft had before her, but she also clearly criticizes Thomas Day’s experiment in wife-rearing. Edgeworth’s fictional Mr. Hervey, like Day, is disillusioned with women, believing them all to be faithless, fickle, irrational, and obsessed with fashion. He feels society women are what he had once called Belinda, “composition[s] of art and affectation” (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 26). He fears that he will become like the husbands of Belinda’s cousins or even like Lord Delacour, with a beautiful society wife who ‘keeps’ a young gentleman and throws extravagant parties that her husband never attends. In this mental state, he reads Rousseau’s *Emilé* and determines the only way to find an ideal wife is to create her himself. He recognizes that women’s educations are at fault for their behavior and decides to educate a girl away from the corrupting influences of society using Rousseau’s Sophie as a model. Hervey finds a simple, uncorrupted orphan and begins educating her to be the perfect, unaffected wife that he believes will make him happy, just as Day had in real life. Edgeworth, in some ways, shows Hervey’s attempt to be laudable as it shows his recognition of the importance of education and his belief in the equal rational capacities of women. However, Edgeworth criticizes both Hervey and Day by showing that their treatment of these girls is still based on a false belief in male superiority and showing how they harm the reputations and futures of their pupils. Edgeworth also criticizes Day by having her hero treat Virginia much more humanely than Day had treated Sabrina. While Hervey’s experiment is purely intellectual, Day’s experiment, according to Moore, offered a combination of a progressive intellectual education with severe privation and abuse meant to produce utter submission to Day’s will. Hervey wanted an intellectual companion, but Day wanted an educated domestic slave. In addition, Virginia is never left alone with Mr. Hervey as he rents a separate house for her and leaves her under the
care of a governess, yet society still comes to believe she is his mistress. His experiment tarnishes her reputation and he is morally responsible for her character, a responsibility he takes seriously. Thomas Day also claimed never to have debauched his pupil, yet he lived alone with her for two years in full view of society without regard for her reputation. Sabrina’s reputation is badly damaged but Day does not seem to recognize his culpability since she fails to fulfill his requirements. Even many years later, after the death of Sabrina’s husband, Moore shows how the exposure of her true story outrages her now-grown son and causes the poor widow further embarrassment and scandal. Thus, Day’s treatment of Sabrina as a child still has grave implications for her reputation years after his death and well into her widowhood.

Moore also suggests that Edgeworth’s portrayal of Mr. Hervey’s experiment in Belinda is her “literary revenge” against Thomas Day who had previously advised Richard Lovell Edgeworth not to allow his daughter to publish (253). According to Maria Edgeworth, Day had “such a horror of female authorship” that he was shocked to learn his friend’s daughter was considering publication (qtd. in Moore 252). Edgeworth’s portrayal of Mr. Hervey, however, suggests that she is interested in much more than simple literary revenge. Belinda was published more than a decade after Day’s death, so he would never see Edgeworth’s fictional portrait of his history. While Edgeworth does criticize Day’s actions and has her fictional hero behave much more handsomely to his pupil than had Day, her portrayal is also sympathetic. Despite his treatment of Virginia, Hervey becomes the reformed hero at the end and obtains a happy marriage with Belinda. The story of Hervey and Virginia allows Edgeworth to explore the complicated feelings she likely experienced having known Day personally and knowing that her own father was complicit in Day’s unusual scheme. The education Day provided to Sabrina was a more progressive education and suggested a belief in intellectual equality, although it was in
reality an education of deprivation and submission. In addition, Maria Edgeworth had received a superior education because of her own father’s liberality and progressive views on education and Rousseau’s work greatly influenced his ideas on education. Her father’s radical educational experiment caused a rift between him and her older brother and Maria likely benefits because of his absence from the family. Her fictional account allows her to explore the chauvinism at the heart of Day’s radicalism, ameliorate her father’s complicity, and question how these two seemingly contradictory impulses exist in one character.

Belinda and Lady Delacour help correct Mr. Hervey’s dangerous views of women and education, which no one is able to do in the case of Thomas Day. Upon further acquaintance with Lady Delacour, Hervey begins to see there is more to her than her fashionable society persona. He recognizes her wit and intelligence and sees that beneath the makeup and frivolity is a complex, talented woman who can be reformed back to usefulness. He makes the same mistake with Belinda, assuming that she is what the other Stanhope nieces were. In learning his mistake in judging both of these women, and in meeting Lady Anne Percival, Hervey discovers that his views on women and women’s education are false and realizes that his experiment with Virginia threatens to destroy all of his hopes for happiness. But this knowledge encourages him to help Belinda teach Lady Delacour how she might obtain the happiness in her domestic life that he fears he has forfeited.

The more Mr. Hervey observes Belinda, the more he realizes that his educational program does not create a companion, but a dependent; not a wife or lover, but a sycophant. Hervey’s attempt to educate Virginia St. Pierre as an ideal wife points to one of Edgeworth’s strongest indictments of women’s education in the novel. Virginia, a simple country girl who was raised in a tiny cottage far away from society or social intercourse, represents the typical
romantic heroine who must be discovered and rescued by the hero, who appears to be Clarence Hervey. However, in the realistic world Edgeworth creates, the romantic heroine has no depth and represents the debilitating educational practices that weaken the female sex. Having been so sheltered in her early years, she is the perfect subject for Hervey’s Rousseauvian experiment. He privately educates her, keeping her away from interactions with society that he believes will corrupt her and turn her into an empty fashionable women which would thus make her unfit to be his wife. However, he leaves her primarily under the care of Mrs. Ormond, an uneducated, simple woman who is completely unable to give Virginia the progressive, rational education Mr. Hervey envisions. Edgeworth is here criticizing the typical education of women where they are kept out of society and away from educational opportunities with the hope of keeping them pure and untouched. In addition, she shows that an uneducated or mis-educated mother-figure cannot properly educate her charges. It is only in society, as Belinda’s education shows, that a person’s morals can be determined. It is only by experience with the world and observations of both good and bad that a young person can develop into a rational and moral adult. Edgeworth shows that women, just like men, need interactions in society in order to develop and confirm the morals they have been taught. She shows that Hervey learns to despise the fashionable, fake woman through observation and worldly experience and finally realizes the falseness of his society friends through experience. Edgeworth argues that a woman’s social education should be no different. Locking a woman away from the world and society will not fit her to be a companionate wife or raise rational children.

Virginia’s complete exclusion from society atrophies her mind and keeps her from growing past the child-like innocence she possessed when Hervey first met her. And this child-like simplicity, though endearing for a time, fails to inspire any deeper feelings or any sort of
rational connection between Hervey and Virginia. Hervey is portrayed as Belinda’s intellectual equal and educational co-conspirator throughout the novel; however, when Hervey is with Virginia, he becomes a benefactor and father-figure, not only because of his role in Virginia’s life, but because of the intellectual and educational disparity between them. In fact, although Belinda and Virginia are not far apart in age, Virginia appears to be years younger in maturity and experience. Belinda continually practices prudence while living in fashionable society and is not corrupted by her society life. When Hervey tests Virginia by offering her diamond earrings or a moss rose bud, she chooses the rose bud because it reminds her of her time in the secluded cottage. However, the narrative points out “there was more of ignorance and timidity, perhaps, than of sound sense or philosophy in Virginia’s indifference to diamonds” (371-372). Virginia has no use for diamonds because she has no connection to them. She does not know what they are or what uses they might have. And, only one page later, Hervey learns that Virginia does not yet know how to write, which further shows the absolute simplicity of his young charge. This scene also seems to reflect a similar scene between Thomas Day and his erstwhile fiancée, Elizabeth Hall, which Moore recounts in her biography of Day. According to Moore, Elizabeth had been wearing a pair of diamond earrings which Day objected to. Although she promised she would not wear them again, Day demanded “[n]o wife must ever have earrings in their possession” and Elizabeth promptly broke off their engagement (208). Interestingly, Elizabeth “was particularly fond of the earrings because of their sentimental attachment,” as they had been given to her by her grandmother (208). So, Elizabeth Hall’s preference for these diamond earrings matches Virginia’s preference for the rosebud. Both of these items have sentimental value to their owners, regardless of their economic value. In addition, Belinda also would have refused the earrings from Hervey, but for a completely different reason. She would have
recognized the social significance of such a gift from a man and her principle would have forbidden her from accepting them. As Richardson points out, the story of Virginia “contrasts a naïve innocence based on ignorance of the world with an achieved innocence” and through this portrayal, Edgeworth “criticize[s] the most infantilizing tendencies of the conduct-book tradition, showing how too strictly limiting a girl’s education and social experience will produce a credulous and romantic, rather than stable and rational, woman” (*Literature* 194).

As Hervey compares Virginia with Belinda, he becomes aware of the inferiority of his pupil. He begins to realize that “[s]he was so entirely unacquainted with the world, that it was absolutely impossible she could conduct herself with that discretion, which must be the combined result of reasoning and experience” as he sees how Belinda behaves in society (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 379). He acknowledges he feels “gratuitous confidence in Virginia’s innocence,” but this confidence pales in comparison with his observations of Belinda’s prudence on which “he gradually learned to feel a different, and a higher species of reliance.” He finally realizes “[t]he virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment; those of Belinda from reason” and acknowledges his failed experiment (379). Edgeworth thus shows that it is reason – the capacity of the mind – that makes the best companion in marriage and the most complete human. Belinda’s reason makes her a proper companion and future mother, while Virginia’s virtues have no rational component and are likely to fade when not foremost in her heart. Unlike Belinda, Virginia is unable to make moral choices or even make her own decisions; she continually seeks the guidance of Mr. Hervey or Mrs. Ormond to determine her own ideas, feelings, and desires. When trying to determine her true feelings at the climax of the novel, Hervey finally has to command her “Consult no Mrs Ormond. Consult no human creature but yourself” in order to force her confession that she does not love him (469). He is almost unable to reason through her
sentimental evasions in order to get to the truth of her feelings. In fact, he fears she will go mad during his questioning as he sees her “wild animation” (469). She cannot understand his rational questioning and has great difficulty believing that he does not want to marry her and it almost threatens her sanity.

Virginia is the foil that truly highlights Belinda’s striking moral character and Edgeworth’s ideas regarding female education. Both girls are orphans who were raised in somewhat idyllic domesticity before being thrown into the pitiless world. However, the novel clearly shows important differences between these two domestic childhoods. Belinda is educated and encouraged to read and reason while Virginia is simply isolated and allowed to live in a false freedom like Rousseau’s Sophie. Thus, it is not the domesticity that is paramount, but the education that occurs in the domestic realm that matters in raising a child. Both Virginia and Belinda are taken in by people who have their own motives for raising and educating them. Hervey wants to create the perfect wife while Belinda’s aunt wants to marry her niece to a wealthy, titled man who will increase her own social importance. Belinda’s early education prepares her to withstand the new situation she is placed in at her aunt’s home and eventually Lady Delacour’s. Virginia’s education, however, only prepares her to meekly acquiesce to every request of her benefactor without allowing her own ideas or opinions to determine her actions. As such, she becomes a character in a romance plot and she characterizes all of the people she meets as characters in one of her novels: Hervey is her benefactor, the man in the portrait is her hero, and her lost father is a saint. In this odd backstory, Edgeworth shows that the education masculine society envisions for women creates insipid, weak-minded, romantic creatures who are unable to make their own decisions or express their own ideas. This sort of education creates women who are perpetual children, who can only parrot back what they have been taught by
rote, and who fall in love with a portrait of a man they have never met. In contradistinction, Belinda refuses to allow herself to love either Mr. Vincent or Mr. Hervey until she is fully acquainted with her suitor’s morals and character and she will only marry a man whose opinions and ideas agree with hers. She does not allow romantic sentiment, or even the external influence of Lady Delacour and Lady Anne, to affect her principles while making this all-important choice regarding her future.

Belinda’s growth of character during her stay in London is clearly seen in her changing relationship with her aunt, Mrs. Stanhope. As Belinda reads her aunt’s letters throughout the novel, the reader sees her become more discerning and critical of each letter which shows her growth in wisdom and autonomy. Shortly after her arrival in London, Belinda writes her aunt regarding Lady Delacour’s improper conduct and requests “that she might not remain under the protection of a lady, whose character she could not approve, and whose intimacy might perhaps be injurious to her reputation, if not to her principles” (15). This letter shows her growing understanding of moral character and reputation. She clearly sees that they are not one in the same as she points out that her intimacy with Lady Delacour could hurt her reputation without her principles ever changing. She also shows wisdom and an understanding of education in arguing that living with the unprincipled Lady Delacour might actually be dangerous “to her principles.” Belinda, at the young age of seventeen, is aware that principles are not innate and that her education is ongoing. She realizes that there is danger in her remaining in Lady Delacour’s home where she is likely to be led into activities and situations that will encourage, if not force, her to bend her principles. Belinda is wise enough to know that being surrounded by immoral and dissipated people is a danger to her “newly acquired moral sense” (15). She knows that she still has much to learn and fears that having her closest confidant, protector, and guide
be a confirmed coquette who is on shaky footing with her husband could make it very difficult for her to discern the correct path and withstand the pressure she is likely to receive from Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour, later in the novel, shows this belief to be true as she states that her own temper “was once open, generous as [Belinda’s]. You see how the best dispositions may be depraved!” (266). Lady Delacour believes that many of her own flaws came much later in life due to the bad company she began to keep.

In this letter, Belinda, the girl who had once been merely a “puppet,” is beginning to question those in authority whom she had implicitly trusted (10). She realizes that she cannot depend on Lady Delacour for guidance and thus turns to her aunt to fulfill this role. Belinda, unaccustomed to act for herself, actually follows much of the advice that her aunt sends in the response letter. Mrs. Stanhope “rebuked her niece severely for her imprudence in mentioning names in such a manner, in a letter sent by the common post,” which makes Belinda realize the impropriety of gossiping about the woman she is living with: “she blamed herself for having written too harshly of her ladyship’s conduct. . . . [W]hilst she appeared as lady Delacour’s friend, she ought not propagate any stories to her disadvantage” (16). Mrs. Stanhope’s response does not actually reprimand Belinda on moral grounds; she just warns against using names in her tales and demonstrates that dashes and misdirection should be used in any gossip sent via post. Belinda, however, is still able to learn a lesson from her aunt’s letter. She does recognize her error in sending private information from the home where she is staying. She thus learns, through her aunt, of her impropriety and promises never to gossip about lady Delacour again. And she remains true to this promise. When Harriet Freke tries to engage her in gossip about Lady Delacour while she is staying with the Percivals, Belinda declares “[t]he courage to be bad . . . I believe, indeed, she does not possess” and answers Freke’s incredulity by stating “[i]f I had
[quarreled with Lady Delacour] . . . I hope that I should still do justice to her merits’” (226). The lesson that was triggered by her aunt’s advice becomes a lasting lesson in her life. She rationally agrees to this part of her aunt’s letter and makes it part of her character.

This second letter from Mrs. Stanhope also teaches Belinda that she should not be “fool enough to lose her own heart” (16). Once again, her aunt’s advice has a different aim than the lesson Belinda chooses to take from it. Mrs. Stanhope wants Belinda to avoid falling in love because it might keep her from going after the wealthiest and most eligible bachelor. However, Belinda is able to learn a positive lesson from this advice. She realizes the danger of allowing herself to fall in love with an immoral, unsuitable, or previously-attached man and continually checks her heart throughout the novel to ensure she is guarding herself from any attachment that might destroy her future happiness.

In a later letter, Mrs. Stanhope orders Belinda to stay with Lady Delacour, despite a scandalous rumor she has heard regarding Belinda and Lord Delacour, and commands her to marry Sir Philip Baddely, the profligate society gentleman she had previously refused. Instead of obeying the letter, Belinda does the exact opposite. She shows it, unashamedly, to Lady Delacour as “she had sufficient strength of mind to adhere to her resolution of speaking the exact truth to lady Delacour” (202). She realizes the best way to counter such a report is to go directly to her friend and trust in her own innocence. When Lady Delacour reacts with violence, Belinda keeps calm and even attempts to correct and control her friend. She orders her protector: “Compose yourself” and further commands her to “Sit down.” When Lady Delacour begins to hit herself, Belinda grabs her arm “and holding it with all her force, cried in a tone of authority—‘Command yourself, lady Delacour! I conjure you, or you will go out of your senses’” (205). She uses the authority she has claimed for herself to gain control of the situation, commanding Lady Delacour
to sit down and compose herself. She both protects and controls her pupil here, not allowing her

to leave the room in the frenzied state that she is in and forcing her to stop inflicting pain upon
herself. Realizing that her friend is out of control, she refuses to defend herself or reason with
her: “‘When you are really calm, when you can really command yourself, you will do me justice,
lady Delacour; but now it is my business, if I can, to bear with you’” (206, italics in original).
She is well aware that Lady Delacour is incapable of thinking rationally and thus puts off any
reaction against her and continues to attempt to soothe her friend. However, when she realizes
Lady Delacour does not trust her and that her reputation is thus in danger, she acts directly
contrary to her aunt’s advice and walks out of the Delacour home.

In comparing this instance of the impropriety of staying with Lady Delacour with the
feelings she expressed in her first letter regarding remaining under Lady Delacour’s protection,
one can see a striking difference in Belinda’s behavior and decision-making. At the beginning of
the novel, when she felt it was dangerous to stay with Lady Delacour, she wrote Mrs. Stanhope,
trying to explain her position and begging that she might return to her aunt’s protection. When
her aunt refuses, she stays without further protest, implicitly following her aunt’s advice. Even
when she does disagree with her aunt, as in how to regain the money she lent to Lady Delacour,
she feels guilty for disobeying the aunt to whom “she had hitherto paid unlimited, habitual, blind
obedience” (10). Belinda’s maturity is clearly shown in how she handles this dangerous situation
regarding Lady Delacour and her husband. She willingly shares the details of her aunt’s letter
with Lady Delacour and proclaims her perfect innocence, assuming she can trust her friend to do
her justice. When she realizes she cannot trust Lady Delacour and that she cannot stay where she
is suspected of trying to seduce a friend’s husband, she immediately decides to leave without
consulting her aunt. In fact, she contradicts her aunt without even considering how Mrs.
Stanhope will feel about her defection. She simply does what she feels is right without consulting anyone else. Once safely situated with the Percivals, she firmly tells her aunt what she has done without apology: “I have therefore . . . thought it prudent to quit her ladyship” (213). This statement is in direct opposition to her aunt’s commands and shows that Belinda now realizes she does not need permission to do what her conscience tells her to do. She simply states that she has acted based upon her own judgment of the situation and implies that she will continue to make her own judgments regarding her conduct. She also denies any further consideration of Sir Philip Baddely, despite her aunt’s desire that she marry him, and simply states that she left town without seeing him again as “[o]ur meeting could indeed answer no purpose, as it is entirely out of my power to return his partiality’” (213). She firmly breaks any hold her aunt has over her and takes full control over her actions. When she receives her aunt’s angry reply, the narrator describes her response: “as soon as she had read this letter, she got into the carriage with lady Anne Percival, and they pursued their journey to Oakly-park” (215). Belinda does not doubt her decision for a moment but calmly climbs into the carriage with her chosen protector and friend, confident that she has done what is right and unperturbed that she has been thrown off by her aunt.

Once Belinda sees the truth of Lady Delacour’s unhappy marriage and private misery early in the novel, she immediately begins to educate Lady Delacour, trying to reform her and bring her back into relationship with her daughter, her husband, and their relations. This educational relationship is central to the novel as she teaches Lady Delacour the value of a true friend and allows her to see the immense difference between Belinda’s sincere concern for her and Harriet Freke’s desire for a companion to engage in her revelries. Belinda is able to see the disparity between the character of Harriet Freke and that of Lady Delacour and helps show her
that she can have a true, faithful friend, despite her many follies. Belinda also teaches Lady Delacour that she is capable of change and can choose the woman she wants to be. She sees that Lady Delacour, unlike Harriet Freke, is educable and can be reformed. In pitting Harriet Freke against Belinda in a battle over Lady Delacour, Edgeworth offers one of her strongest feminist arguments. Harriet Freke is a character type that Claudia Johnson calls the “freakish feminist, or ‘female philosopher,’” which appeared in novels during the reactionary period at the beginning of the nineteenth century (19). She claims that this character type was used by women authors to disavow any radical leanings, but many writers used this figure as a scapegoat which allowed them to sneak reformist agendas into other areas of their works. Harriet Freke, the immoral, radical “champion for the Rights of Women,” is replaced as Lady Delacour’s friend and confidant by the rational woman, Belinda (Edgeworth, Belinda 229). As Anne K. Mellor points out:

> Belinda Portman is the embodiment of all that Wollstonecraft called for in women: sound sense, wide reading, prudence, personal modesty, and a loving heart. She makes an egalitarian and companionate marriage with Clarence Hervey (after his own foibles have been exposed) and converts her friend Lady Delacour from a life of aristocratic license and personal anguish to a loving domesticity by reconciling and reuniting her with her estranged husband and daughter. (“Mary Wollstonecraft” 155-156)

Edgeworth inscribes all of the negative attributes of Mary Wollstonecraft and her personal history onto Harriet Freke’s body and summarily dismisses her, but gives Belinda all of the positive, progressive traits Wollstonecraft argued for in her Rights of Woman and elevates her as
the rational heroine. Belinda wins the battle for Lady Delacour and helps reform her into Edgeworth’s ideal woman, a woman who is rational, intellectual, and domestic. Edgeworth thus subtly shows the value of Wollstonecraft’s ideals and the type of woman such an improvement in education would create while disconnecting those ideals from the physical body of Wollstonecraft.

In order to help reform Lady Delacour, Belinda must first gain her trust and show her the value of such reform. Belinda begins to gain the trust of her pupil when she sympathizes with Lady Delacour instead of judging her as an unnatural mother as so many others had done after the deaths of her first two children. Belinda is able to discern that these losses are part of the reason why Lady Delacour took up with Harriet Freke and her sympathy urges her to help Lady Delacour regain the reputation that has been tarnished by that relationship. In fact, Belinda realizes that society’s treatment of her as an unnatural mother is part of the reason Lady Delacour began to spiral out of control, and she wisely chooses to start her educational program by reuniting her with her daughter, showing her she can still be the mother she had once desired to be.

Lady Delacour took up with Harriet Freke after the deaths of her first two children, which suggests Lady Delacour was in precarious social and emotional states after these losses. The first child is stillborn and the second dies because Lady Delacour fails to send her out to a wet nurse. As Beth Kowalski-Wallace points out, these losses can be viewed as the failure of Lady Delacour in the maternal role, which determines how she is viewed in her society. Some critics claim Lady Delacour’s dissipated lifestyle and her obsession with fashion are ultimately to blame for the death of her second child. As Lady Delacour states, “[i]t was the fashion at this time for fine mothers to suckle their own children” and sending one’s baby to a wet nurse was
considered unnatural (42). However, Kowalski-Wallace’s reading of the contemporary *Advice to Mothers on the Subject of their Own Health* (1803) convincingly points out that this social fashion was much more than simply a “fashion,” but actually a societal mandate. This work tells women that only ill health on the part of the mother was considered a possible excuse for not nursing a child herself. Lady Delacour had been taught to believe that the healthiest thing for the child is for her own mother to continue to nurse her. Even with her excellent intellect and fairly progressive education, she is still barred from scientific and medical knowledge that would help her contradict such advice. Despite her best efforts, her baby dies, confirming society’s view of her as an unnatural mother and even convincing Lady Delacour that this is her truth. The description of her experiences with childbirth suggests a connection to Wollstonecraft’s belief that women should be taught basic anatomy and medicine in order to properly care for their infant children. Wollstonecraft opines “how many children are absolutely murdered by the ignorance of women” and claims that infant mortality rates would go down dramatically if women were given proper instruction on medical care for infants (278). Edgeworth suggests that if Lady Delacour had better access to medical knowledge, her second child may not have died under her care. It is only through retrospect that Lady Delacour is able to see that she should have sent the child to a wet nurse, which she does for her third child. It is only after she personally learns the fallacy of the advice she has been given that she is able to make an educated choice for her third child. Edgeworth thus shows a major flaw in women’s education. Lady Delacour is unable to make the right choice for her child until she learns the wrong choice through experience which, in this case, is the tragic death of a child. She sends her third child, Helena, away to save the girl’s life and the novel shows this is clearly the best choice for Helena as she returns to her maternal home as a healthy, happy, rationally-educated young woman.
Helena ends up nurtured in the idyllic home of the Percivals, loved as a daughter by the admirable Lady Anne, and progressively educated by a family practicing the principles of Edgeworth’s own *Practical Education*. Thus, Edgeworth implies that Lady Delacour is actually a commendable mother because she saves Helena by sending her away for nursing and a superior education. She also saves the child from the experiences that life in the dissipated Delacour home would likely have taught her. Once she has received the saving domestic education of the Percivals, Helena is ready to return to superintend the home and encourage her mother’s newly-restored virtue.

After the deaths of her children and her decision to send Helena away to school, Lady Delacour turns to Harriet Freke and Colonel Lawless for comfort and friendship. The novel clearly shows that society has pushed Lady Delacour out of the bounds of the domestic and thus also shows the failure of domestic ideology to explain the situation of Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour’s most dissipated years occur after the losses of her first two children. She is driven away from the home by the failure of her own body to support a child. She is considered an unnatural mother because of circumstances that are outside of her own control. Her body fails in its efforts at maternity, through no clear fault of her own, and the natural failure of her body causes her to be castigated as an unnatural mother. Because she does not perform the role of mother according to the socially acceptable ways, she is an outcast. Because she has to make the difficult choice of sending her child away – for its own benefit—she is no longer considered a mother and barely considered a wife. In addition, society and her husband cannot understand the individual grieving process that Lady Delacour must face after the deaths of her children. So, just as Lord Delacour turns to social interactions and drink to ease his disappointment, Lady Delacour turns to excitement with a woman who will not judge her maternal failures. Lady
Delacour explains to Belinda, “‘[y]ou see I had nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children, to engage my affections. I believe it was this ‘aching void’ in my heart which made me, after looking abroad some time for a bosom friend, take such a prodigious fancy to Mrs Freke’” (43). Harriet Freke, despite her deviant and abhorrent behavior, offers Lady Delacour the escape she needs from the claustrophobia of a quiet, childless home. Lady Delacour’s use of the phrase ‘aching void’ points to the maternity that has failed within her. She also states that she “look[ed] abroad some time for a bosom friend,” which shows her desire for companionship after the traumas she has experienced. Lady Delacour, in her usual manner, makes it appear that she is the one that found Harriet Freke and “[t]ook a prodigious fancy to [her]”; however, the fact that she had to look for “some time” to find a friend also implies that it was very difficult for her to find someone who would befriend her after her reputation had been so tarnished. She is unable to find a worthy friend because of how society views her failures as a mother. In fact, she is more accepted in society as a coquette (and the possible mistress of Mr. Hervey or Colonel Lawless) than she is as an unnatural mother. Her difficulty in finding a friend after her losses suggests that the power of choice was taken away from Lady Delacour, despite her social position. She has countless acquaintances “who would not care if [she] were in the black hole at Calcutta this minute” (142). She has no real friends and has been all but abandoned by her husband and his relations. Thus, Lady Delacour feels she has no choice but to turn to the other fashionable failure, Harriet Freke. She, like Lady Delacour, represents aberrant female characteristics. By connecting these two women, Edgeworth shows that the “freakish feminist,” Harriet Freke, early in her social career, is equated with the unnatural mother, Lady Delacour. Freke is the only woman who will befriend Lady Delacour as she is. The mother of three is considered no mother because of her body’s rebellion. In turn, she chooses to rebel with her own body and teams up
with Harriet Freke. She cannot fit into the traditional roles of mother and wife, so she chooses non-traditional behavior to criticize society’s narrow view of women’s roles.

Harriet Freke, however, turns out to be as faithless as her many society friends and leaves Lady Delacour alone and, she believes, dying. It is not until Belinda enters her home that Lady Delacour learns that she can have a true friend; she is then able to let down her guard and find the relief and help that she needs and desires. Belinda endeavors to teach Lady Delacour that the labels she has been given by society, and even by her own self, are not true representations of her character. Just as Belinda had to break free from authority, she urges Lady Delacour to break away from the false identity those in authority have forced her to create. Lady Delacour tells Belinda her secrets and Belinda helps her reinvent herself and her life. Belinda helps teach Lady Delacour the truth of her own body. Lady Delacour believes she is dying because of a wound to her breast caused by the backfire of a gun during a duel. She refuses to share her secret with anyone but Marriott, her faithful servant, because she has experienced how society views any form of womanly or maternal failure. As Kowalski-Wallace points out, the image of the “bad breast” symbolizes Lady Delacour’s failed maternity and is “the center of her excruciating hurt, the psychic wound which she suffers in connection with her inability to perform the mother’s role” (“Home Economics” 250). Lady Delacour believes this injury is fatal and is a direct result of her failures as a mother. She also realizes that society will view her damaged breast as another sign of her failed motherhood and refuses the shame of false sympathy and judging pity, of which she has already been the target. Belinda teaches Lady Delacour that her body lies to her. She helps Lady Delacour realize that, despite what she believes and what she has repeatedly been told, she is still a mother and the breast wound she suffers from is not fatal. Instead of pulling her away from her pain and distracting her, as Harriet Freke had done, Belinda forces Lady Delacour
to examine her own breast by confronting her problems, analyzing them, and using her reason to verify the truth. She eventually persuades Lady Delacour to have a reputable surgeon examine her breast to determine the truth about the wound and her prognosis. Her submission to be examined represents Lady Delacour’s need to examine her own breast and determine the truth of her body, her mind, and her heart. Belinda shows her that she needs to examine her own heart to determine if she truly wants to remain the dissipated society leader or if she wants more from her life and relationships. Belinda forces her to confront the lies she has believed about herself, about her husband, about her marriage, and about her daughter. She forces her to confront the beliefs she holds that she is an unnatural mother, that she is unloved by and does not love her husband, that the society life is the only one she is capable of living, and that she is dying likely as a punishment for the life she has lived. By encouraging her to submit to examination, Belinda teaches her how to examine herself and then remake herself as the woman she wants to be instead of the woman society has forced her to become, just as Belinda had to do at the beginning of the novel. Edgeworth thus shows the importance of women engaging in self-examination through rational inquiry.

Belinda, with the help of Mr. Hervey, reunites Lady Delacour with her daughter, Helena, to show her that she can be a mother, despite her early failures. Belinda teaches her that she can make her own truth regarding her maternity by bringing her daughter home and taking her maternal authority back from Lady Anne and the others to whom she has surrendered it. Belinda begins by giving the macaw from Lady Delacour’s house to Mrs. Margaret Delacour as a peace offering with “hopes that these terrible family quarrels might be made up, if either party would condescend to show any disposition to oblige the other” (Edgeworth, Belinda 163). Mrs. Delacour, Lord Delacour’s aunt, is close with the Percival family and despises Lady Delacour for
her reputation in society and for abandoning her daughter. By offering the macaw, Belinda enters into relationship with Mrs. Delacour, Lady Anne, and young Helena, which enables her to begin the process of reuniting the families. They see that an intimate friend of Lady Delacour is reaching out to them and Belinda’s goodness is thus attributed to Lady Delacour. Helena desires to replace the macaw at her mother’s house with the goldfish she won during an educational game at the Percivals’ home. Helena’s innocent gift of the goldfish becomes the catalyst for further relationship between the two households and begins the educational relationship between Belinda and Mr. Hervey.

The goldfish are the first gift Lady Delacour has received in a long time that are given purely out of affection and not due to some motive for gaining her influence. Belinda here teaches Lady Delacour that what she is – what all people are – is heavily influenced by society. Helena has no ulterior motives for her gift; she only desires to offer her love to the mother she misses. Lady Delacour has been taught to be suspicious and can easily see through the machinations of society women, but she is unable to understand the simple motives of a pure and innocent heart. Thus Belinda, with the help of Helena, teaches her that there are other kinds of people that have been untarnished by fashionable society and the daughter of her own flesh is one such person. Belinda also corrects Lady Delacour’s earlier belief that Lady Anne had “robbed [her] of the affections of [her] child” (123). Lady Delacour believes it is too late to gain her daughter’s love and she is certain that Lady Anne’s time with Helena has completely effaced the memory of her mother. Belinda shows that Lady Delacour’s broken heart is mirrored in her daughter, who wishes only to be by her mother’s side and be of some use to her.

Helena’s first interview with her mother gives Belinda an additional opportunity of correcting Lady Delacour’s views on women in society and their roles. Lady Delacour despises
Lady Anne Percival, believing that Lady Anne feels herself superior to Lady Delacour and that she will have taken all opportunities with Helena to show her superiority to the girl’s own mother. In other words, Lady Delacour views Lady Anne as a “good” form of herself. She assumes Lady Anne is manipulative, showy, and controlling in all of the socially correct ways. Just as Lady Delacour wants all people of fashion to bow to her superiority, she believes Lady Anne wants the same kind of adoration for her goodness. She assumes even this morally superior woman’s motives and desires are for public recognition and power. She learns, however, that Lady Anne’s motives for doing good are simple and pure. She has not been secretly trying to capture all of the girl’s affection for herself. She does not wish comparison or competition, but cooperation with Lady Delacour. This realization begins to attract Lady Delacour. She has seen the good in Belinda, but does not trust it partly due to her fear that it is all an elaborate act and partly due to Belinda’s youth and inexperience. She feels that society will, in time, destroy Belinda’s simple morality as she herself has tried to do. However, in Lady Anne, she sees a happy woman who is not wholly devoid of fashion or wit but who functions in society without having lost her moral goodness or the love of her husband. In fact, her significance in society has grown as her beauty has decreased. She has added to her life the adoration of her children, a growing companionate relationship with her mate, and sincere respect from all male and female society who enter her home.

Once Belinda reunites Lady Delacour with her daughter, she helps her re-establish a relationship with her husband and teaches both of them the value of a companionate marital relationship. Belinda’s first glimpse of Lord Delacour is when he is being carried into the house drunk by two footmen which Lady Delacour describes as the daily “funeral of my lord’s intellects” (11). Belinda meets him the next morning and expects that he will be no better sober.
However, Belinda’s stay with the Delacours teaches her not to trust to appearances or first impressions. She later recognizes that Lord Delacour has “much more good sense, and symptoms of a more amiable character than his lady had described, or than she ever would allow that he possessed” and that he “was in reality attached to his wife” (138, 137). These realizations allow her to see the possible positive relationship the two could have if either party would make an attempt towards compromise. She sees that their marital difficulties are caused by both parties and begins a program of reconciliation. Belinda teaches Lord Delacour to value the domestic enjoyments of home and assists in returning their daughter to their mutual care. By placing Helena at the center of the efforts to restore their relationship, Edgeworth points to the importance of both parents in raising and educating children, highlighting not just the maternal educational role, but the engagement of the paternal figure as well. The significance of the paternal figure is also shown in Mr. Percival’s active involvement with his children and points to one of the reasons Mr. Hervey is the inevitable choice for Belinda. Hervey, like Belinda, is active in educational schemes throughout the novel and will thus be an active partner in educating his children.

Belinda also corrects Lord Delacour repeatedly throughout the novel, attempting not only to turn him from his habits of drinking and carousing, but also trying to return him to his useful roles of husband and father. She helps him forgive Lady Delacour and corrects him when he speaks negatively of her: “But is it fair, my lord, to make use of wit yourself to abuse wit in others?” said Belinda with a smile, which put his lordship into perfect good humour with both himself and his lady” (155). She kindly and respectfully reprimands him, offering her rebuke with a compliment on his own wit, something Lady Delacour has continually disparaged. She thus admonishes him without hurting his pride and does it in a way that puts him “into perfect
good humour.” She realizes that she cannot treat Lord Delacour in the same way she treats Lady Delacour and knows she cannot use his wife’s supercilious and biting way of reprimanding him. She encourages Lord Delacour to spend more time with his wife and to consult her in matters that concern her. When Lord Delacour attempts to return the bank notes that Lady Delacour borrowed from her, Belinda returns them to his pocketbook and begs that he give them to Lady Delacour so that she may return them to her. She forces him not only to see and speak with his wife, but also to engage her in the activity of returning the bank notes. She realizes that the money should pass through Lady Delacour’s hands, the very hands that took it. Thus, the money she received from her aunt gains interest as it passes from hand to hand, eventually becoming a peace-offering between Lady and Lord Delacour before it is returned to Mrs. Stanhope.

As she sees Lord Delacour listen to her advice and begin to change his behavior toward his wife, Belinda encourages Lady Delacour to reward such behavior by reciprocation. With the help of Hervey, she teaches Lady Delacour how to treat her husband who may be her inferior in wit, but who is still deserving of her respect and attention. When Lady Delacour finally agrees to undergo surgery, Belinda demands that Lady Delacour share the truth about her illness with her husband, arguing “‘[s]urely a husband has the strongest claim to be consulted upon such an occasion! Let me entreat you to tell lord Delacour your intentions, and then all will be right. Say Yes, my dear friend! Let me prevail upon you” (179). Not only does she greatly desire the reunion between the two, but she also realizes that Lady Delacour cannot go to a respectable surgeon unless her husband is involved. For the sake of their marital relationship, and her friend’s life, she begs her to tell her husband. Belinda realizes that much of her other activities can be forgiven by a husband, but this step would likely destroy any chances of reconciliation. She claims that he “‘deserves this from you, by the great interest, the increasing interest, that he
has shown of late about your health; his kindness and handsome conduct the other morning
certainly pleased you; and you have now an opportunity of showing that confidence in him,
which his affection and constant attachment to you merit”’(179). Belinda sees the changes Lord
Delacour has made in his conduct toward his wife and points out that Lady Delacour owes him a
response.

Belinda also teaches her that, despite her protestations and her belief in “first loves,” she
truly does love her husband. Lady Delacour claims her behavior toward Belinda regarding her
supposed affair with Lord Delacour has no excuse because her emotions were fueled by
“‘jealousy without love’” (266). She feels that her treatment of Belinda was particularly bad
because she believed Belinda was courting the affections of a husband she had never loved.
However, Belinda responds “‘[t]hat indeed would admit of no excuse . . . therefore you will
pardon me if I think it incredible—especially as I have detected you in feeling something like
affection for your little daughter, after you had done your best, I mean your worst, to make me
believe that you were a monster of a mother’” (266). Belinda uses a prior lesson to show Lady
Delacour that she may, again, be wrong. Belinda has convinced Lady Delacour that she can be a
mother to Helena and will also teach her friend the truth of her own heart and the value of her
own husband. Persuaded by Belinda’s words, Lady Delacour finally confesses the truth to Lord
Delacour and opens up her secret boudoir to his inspection. At this moment, Lady Delacour
learns what Belinda has already discovered about Lord Delacour – he still loves her and is
willing to give up anything to restore their relationship. He willingly gives up his relationship
with Lady Delacour’s social enemy, Mrs. Luttridge, and would even “let his hand be cut off” to
save his wife (268). Belinda, however, does not let the lesson end here. When Lady Delacour
declares that she reproaches herself “‘for having been for years the torment of this man’s life,’”

Belinda responds:

   You may do better than reproach yourself . . . you may yet live for years to be the
   blessing and pride of his life. I am persuaded, that nothing but your despair of
   obtaining domestic happiness has so long enslaved you to dissipation; and now
   that you find a friend in your husband, now that you know the affectionate temper
   of your little Helena, you will have fresh views and fresh hopes; you will have the
   courage to live for yourself, and not for what is called the world. (269)

At this most important moment, Belinda offers her wisest lesson, encouraging Lady Delacour to
turn from her dissipated lifestyle in order to find domestic happiness. Belinda chooses a moment
when Lady Delacour has become a malleable pupil due to the gratitude she feels for her teacher.
Belinda has returned to her home to aid her in her illness, despite the treatment she received from
Lady Delacour, and has forgiven her. Lady Delacour has also witnessed two miracles through
Belinda: the restoration of her daughter and the returning love of her husband. She is now fully
open to Belinda’s lessons and willingly acquiesces to her friend’s wise words.

   Belinda also helps to educate other characters in the novel. When Juba, Mr. Vincent’s
   servant, becomes very ill because he believes an obeah-woman is going to kill him, Belinda
discerns that Harriet Freke is playing a trick on him and immediately begins a project of not only
showing Juba that he is not in danger, but also teaching him how to explore such unexplainable
things in the future. Her program is very simple but also very successful. She realizes that Harriet
Freke has used phosphorus to light up an image in order to scare Juba. Belinda requests the
Percival children show Juba how the phosphorus works and then has Mr. Vincent draw a figure
on Juba’s wall. When he again sees the figure, he is able to connect it to what he has already seen from the children and then even draws his own figures. This effectively demystifies the figure and breaks the hold his fear of the obeah-woman has over him. While this scene definitely has colonial significations which are explored in essays by Susan C. Greenfield and Andrew McCann, this scene also shows the importance of education as a process of demystification which leads to empowerment. Education allows the gender and class subjects who are subordinate to gain an understanding that allows them to equal the subjects of gender and class that retain power. Edgeworth is here showing that “otherness” is very much determined by one’s education and educational experiences. Juba is not portrayed negatively because of his fear of the obeah-woman. Instead, Edgeworth shows that Juba is educable but has not been given appropriate opportunities to learn. Once an educational situation is created before him, he is able to make the rational connections necessary to realize that the obeah he fears is not what is causing the unusual scenes he sees in his room at night. Having learned this, he is now better equipped to further interrogate future events that may at first appear unexplainable and is thus able to question his fears and beliefs. Belinda has helped teach him to think rationally about what he sees and believes and seek the truth through experimentation and trial. As McCann argues, “[t]he rational demonstration of Juba's error recalls Rousseau's demonstration of the scientific principles informing the conjurer's magic in the fairground passage of Emilé” (64). This process of experimentation and demonstration, based on Rousseau and Locke, is very similar to the educational methods used by the Percivals and also reflects the educational theories developed by Edgeworth and her father which encourage experimentation and the development of reasoning skills.
Mr. Hervey is shown to be the appropriate choice for Belinda because of his continued interest in education and his willingness to learn from both experience and from the tutelage of others. Both Mr. Hervey and Mr. Vincent, the East India merchant who also courts Belinda, have opportunities to learn from the estimable Percival family. Mr. Vincent, at the age of eighteen, is sent to Mr. Percival by his father in order to improve his education, while Mr. Hervey meets the Percival family at a time when he is running with a fashionable, dissipated crowd. Both men respect the Percival family, but only Mr. Hervey is able to learn from them. Mr. Vincent is sent to the Percivals specifically to improve his education, but he fails to take advantage of the educational opportunity that is given him. Mr. Hervey, on the other hand, discerns for himself the value of the Percivals and chooses to spend more time with them in order to improve his education, his intellect, his social connections, and his morals. Mr. Hervey is described as “not a marrying man” early in the novel, but once he meets the Percivals, Dr. X—, and Belinda, his views on marriage change (28). Like Belinda, he begins to see that his greatest chance of happiness is in a home like that of the Percivals. Once he meets this new group of friends, he is never again shown in the company of Sir Philip Baddely and his set. Unlike Mr. Hervey, Mr. Vincent does not seem to learn from Mr. Percival. He clearly respects Mr. Percival, but when the entertainments of the Percival house fail to please him, he quickly falls back into his gambling habits and returns continually to Mrs. Luttridge’s parties, which eventually costs him Belinda. When Mr. Hervey realizes that he has likely made a decision that will negatively affect the rest of his life, he bravely gives up Belinda and promises to marry the young woman he has raised and educated who now believes she is intended to be his wife. He has made a mistake that may be detrimental to his future plans of happiness, but he chooses to do right by marrying Virginia. Unlike Mr. Hervey, when Mr. Vincent makes a mistake, he refuses to give up and accept his
failure. When Mr. Vincent begins to lose money by gambling at Mrs. Luttridge’s, he continually returns, hoping to win his money back. He is unable to accept that he is mistaken and continually goes back in order to prove his superior “moral instinct” (423). He is drawn continually to the table and eventually loses everything. Instead of seeking to correct himself and confess his errors, as Mr. Hervey does, he decides to kill himself and is saved at the last moment by Hervey.

The interruption of Mr. Vincent’s suicide attempt, at the last possible moment, shows Hervey’s educational bent throughout the novel. Hervey knows that Mr. Vincent is in danger of losing everything at her E O table, but he has discovered that Mrs. Luttridge’s table is rigged. Instead of telling Mr. Vincent, however, Hervey allows him to gamble away his fortune, hoping that the shock and despair he feels at the loss of everything will forever correct him from his dangerous addiction. Hervey realizes that it is unlikely Mr. Vincent will listen to him until he has lost everything and is in utter despair, so he allows it to happen under his watchful eye. He then follows Mr. Vincent to his hotel room and “snatched [the pistol] from Vincent’s grasp with so much calm presence of mind and dexterity, that, although the pistol was cocked, it did not go off” (431). This tactic is much like the watchful father who allows a child to go wrong before finally saving him in hopes that the fear and despair he feels will permanently correct his behavior. He tells Mr. Vincent that “[t]he misery that you have this night experienced . . . was necessary to the security of your future happiness”; he then explains his educational reason for allowing this dreadful night to happen before restoring to him his entire fortune (432). He wisely allows Mr. Vincent to experience absolute despair before saving him. Hervey takes full control of the situation once he enters the room and turns it into an educational experience. He orders Mr. Vincent to “command yourself for a moment, and hear me; use your reason” (432). He appeals to Mr. Vincent’s reason and explains that he wishes to be his friend and can help save
him from ruin. He then fully explains his educational program and makes Mr. Vincent swear he will never again gamble, which he willingly does “with a fervent and solemn adjuration” (434). Thus, Mr. Hervey cures Mr. Vincent of his fatal flaw, which neither his father nor Percival had been able to do. Not only is Hervey capable of accepting his mistakes and doing his best to correct them, he also chooses to help educate another for the sake of a woman he loves but believes he will never have. He reforms both options that Belinda has for husband – himself and Mr. Vincent. As Lady Delacour describes Clarence Hervey, “‘He is not a man who, when he does go, goes wrong, and won’t be set right’” (12, italics in original).

Belinda and Mr. Hervey’s most important actions throughout the novel are focused on education, which is central to the growth of their relationship. As I have shown, both characters engage in educational practices and both characters educate themselves throughout the novel. Edgeworth shows that education is a continual process and it is only when two people are both in the process of learning that they are able to grow together. The importance of learning and growing together is also seen in the relationship between Lady and Lord Delacour as they are unable to reconcile until Belinda helps them both grow into the people they desire to be. Both Belinda and Mr. Hervey show themselves to be educable and they both attempt to improve society through education. Belinda quietly reforms the Delacour household while Hervey attempts to educate a new type of woman and eventually reforms an inveterate gambler. Their joint efforts at education are what eventually lead to their union and foreshadow their joint educational activities in the future.

Their partnership begins when Mr. Hervey brings the goldfish that Helena has sent to her mother as a gift. He praises Belinda: “‘I perceive that miss Portman is indeed a real friend to lady Delacour. How happy she is to have such a friend!’” (165). He realizes that Belinda has been
trying to reform Lady Delacour and recognizes how similar their opinions of and desires for
Lady Delacour are. He states, “I think, from what I have observed, that miss Portman’s ideas on
this subject agree with mine” (165). The importance of agreement between romantic partners is
reflected later in the novel when Belinda discusses her relationship with Mr. Vincent. Lady
Delacour suggests that Belinda “do[es] not think it necessary, that a heroine should be in love at
all” and tells her friend “I hope Mr. Vincent is of the same opinion” (338). Belinda responds that
if he does believe they can have a happy marriage without being in love, they “shall then agree
perfectly” (338). Here, she shows she is looking for a man who shares her opinions on the things
that are most important in marriage, which include mutual trust and respect, companionship,
domesticity, and self-control. However, she has already found a man whose ideas agree with
hers, and those ideas are on the extremely important topic of education and the character of their
mutual friend. She and Mr. Hervey work together to save a family nearing ruin, while she and
Mr. Vincent do not appear to truly connect on any level. This scene between Belinda and Mr.
Hervey is considerably more intimate than any scene between Belinda and Mr. Vincent even
though the purported reason for her lengthy acquaintance with Mr. Vincent is for them to get to
know one another in preparation for a possible union. Through Belinda and Mr. Hervey’s shared
interest in education, they are able to get to know one another much better and more intimately
than their other interactions and any interactions between Belinda and Mr. Vincent. After Mr.
Hervey explains his desire to see Lady Delacour “as happy in domestic life as she appeared to be
in public,” Belinda admits that “she certainly was not sorry to hear from his own lips a distinct
explanation of his views and sentiments” as it gives her a better understanding of Mr. Hervey’s
character (165, 166). She sees that he truly wants Lady Delacour to be happy in a domestic life
instead of miserable in her social life. The narrator also points out the significance of Mr. Hervey
and Belinda’s shared educational mission, noting “[n]othing tends more to increase the esteem and affection of two people for each other, than their having one and the same benevolent object. Clarence Hervey and Belinda seemed to know one another’s thoughts and feelings this evening better than they had ever done before during the whole course of their acquaintance” (174). Thus, their joint educational efforts draw them closer, give them shared mutual ground, and also help show them their compatibility in an educational environment like the Percivals’ household.

In addition, education gives them a comfortable topic to turn to that they can both expiate on at length. When Mr. Hervey offers Belinda a compliment that causes him some discomfort, Belinda is able to change the subject by turning the conversation back to their favorite topic: “Clarence Hervey appeared under some embarrassment, and seemed to be restrained by some secret cause from laying open his real feelings: his manner varied continually. Belinda could not avoid seeing his perplexity—she had recourse again to the gold fishes, and to Helena: upon these subjects they could both speak very fluently” (167). They are unable to talk about other topics due to propriety and timidity, but they are both able to “speak very fluently” about their schemes for reforming Lady Delacour and returning her daughter to her care and love. It is important to note here that they have a topic of shared interest that is of utmost importance to both of them and their future together. This conversation animates them and is their first union as “[Belinda] assured him that no effort that she could make with propriety should be wanting, to effect the desirable reconciliation between her ladyship and her family; as she perfectly agreed with him in thinking, that lady Delacour’s character had been generally misunderstood by the world”’” (166). They unite in this one goal and work together to effect the reconciliation despite the fluctuations of their own relationship and the distance that often separates them. While Belinda works with Lady Delacour at home, Mr. Hervey sends didactic letters from abroad and works to improve her
reputation with Lord Delacour’s aunt: “I have prepared Mrs Delacour to think somewhat more favorably of her niece than she was wont to do” (166). Belinda engages in this educational relationship with Mr. Hervey on a project that implicitly needs both of them. It needs one person who is in the home, able to influence Lady Delacour and who can act as informant and an encourager, but it also needs the external partner who can do reconnaissance with her family and learn the best ways to help her.

When Mr. Hervey brings the goldfish intended for Lady Delacour, he and Belinda work together to rouse Lady Delacour’s curiosity so that she will agree to see the person responsible for the goldfish gift. They know that she will refuse to see Helena if they tell her ahead of time who the giver is. Mr. Hervey cleverly juxtaposes Lady Delacour’s guesses regarding the giver and the reason for the gift with the true reason and true giver of the gift. She lists multiple women she thinks the goldfish could have come from and has reasons for each of them. Every one of her friends would only give her a gift in order to get something from her. Hervey points out that the person who sent the goldfish would go with her anywhere and Belinda further states that they are “from a person who wants nothing from you but—your love” (168). Together, the two pique her curiosity, making her willing to see anyone, just for the gratification of her own curiosity. They thus prepare her for an excitement and make the reunion an event that Lady Delacour will not forget. When Helena comes, Edgeworth shows how important this moment is as the narrator states that “Miss Portman ran down stairs to the hall to receive her” (169, italics mine). Breaking decorum, Belinda “ran” down to meet the little girl which implies the excitement that Belinda feels for the impending meeting. It also shows her desire for their scheme to succeed and likely also shows her understanding that the young girl will need a
friendly face to support her. The reunion of Lady Delacour and her daughter is of utmost importance to Belinda as she believes this is a crucial step toward her friend’s reformation.

Lady Delacour even recognizes that Belinda and Mr. Hervey are working together for her reform and even accuses them of purposely marking a book in a certain place in order to subtly suggest that she behave differently to her husband. She states “‘So! this is a concerted plan between you two, I see . . . you have contrived prettily de me dire des vérités! One says, ‘Let us try our fate by the sortes Virgilianæ’, the other has dexterously put a mark in the book, to make it open upon a lesson for the naughty child’” (174). She immediately recognizes herself and Lord Delacour in the story and accuses her friends of conspiring against her. While it does not appear that they have actually contrived this scene, Mr. Hervey does offer her Marmontel’s Tales, a collection of moral tales, and Belinda’s bookmark does open the book to a tale about a woman of talents managing her husband. The subject matter of the work suggests that Belinda is thinking of Lady Delacour in her reading material. Belinda’s mark in this particular tale also shows her efforts as a teacher. She has seen Lady and Lord Delacour fight over Lady Delacour governing her husband and Lord Delacour’s disdain at appearing to be governed, so she begins to research the topic. Her reading of this tale suggests that she is seeking guidance from the author in order to better understand the Delacours and to learn how to help save their relationship. Lady Delacour, to some extent, acquiesces to their attempts to educate her and proclaims to Belinda, “My fate, I find, is in your hands: if lady Delacour is ever to be ‘la femme comme il y en a peu’, which is the most improbable thing in the world, miss Portman will be the cause of it” (175, italics in original). She does not think she will ever be “a woman like few others,” but acknowledges that if anyone could reform her, it would be Belinda. Mr. Hervey replies that it “is the most probable thing in the world,” which shows his faith in both Lady Delacour and Belinda.
He has discovered Lady Delacour’s redeemable character and fully trusts in Belinda’s wisdom and prudence, so he is confident in their eventual success. He also comments on the scent of the leaf of myrtle that Belinda had left as a bookmark: “‘This myrtle has a delightful perfume,’ added he, rubbing the leaf between his fingers” (175). This statement shows that he has confidence in their shared mission, in Belinda’s morality and in her ability to teach Lady Delacour. His statement that the myrtle has “a delightful perfume” points to his delight in their educational relationship and what this myrtle has succeeded in doing – it has made Lady Delacour think about reforming and realize that Belinda is just the person to teach her and help her. Thus, a moral, educational program meant to help reform a friend and bring her back into relationship with her husband and daughter is “delightful” to Mr. Hervey. He is also showing his admiration of the woman who left the mark and his approbation of her moral reading.

Lady Delacour further acknowledges Belinda and Mr. Hervey’s educational activities when she tells Belinda, “if I live, I will be, what I have never yet been, a mother to Helena. If I die, you and Clarence Hervey will take care of her—I know you will. That young man is worthy of you, Belinda” (178). She acknowledges her desire to reform and be a good mother to Helena, but doubts she will live long enough to enact the change. However, Lady Delacour knows that Belinda and Mr. Hervey will be good models and teachers for her daughter as she has seen their educational projects in action. If they are unable to reform her due to her death, she wants them to employ all of their educational talents to help raise and educate Helena. Lady Delacour’s growing interest in educating Helena correctly is also seen when she is preparing for her surgery and, she believes, her death. She tells her daughter not to follow her mother’s example, advising her not to throw her life away, as her mother had, “to win the praise of fools” and further admonishes her to “choose [her] friends well” (298). She tells her daughter “You are too young,
too innocent, to hear the particulars of my history now; but you will hear them all at a proper time from my best friend miss Portman. I shall leave you to her care, my dear, when I die” (298).

Having received an education from Belinda and being forced to examine her own breast, Lady Delacour makes sure that her daughter knows the truth and encourages her not to imitate her dissipated mother. She also asks that her own story be told to the girl when she is older as a cautionary tale, just as the heroine of Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* writes down the story of her own fall and leaves it with her mother to be used to educate her daughter.

Belinda’s positive morality and wise choices while living with Lady Delacour give her significant social power for change. She thus has the chance, near the end of the novel, to educate the larger society as Mrs. Margaret Delacour asks that she visit Virginia despite her reputation as the kept mistress of Clarence Hervey, because Belinda’s visit would encourage others to also seek an acquaintanceship with the naïve Virginia. Thus Belinda’s social position in Lady Delacour’s house and her reputation for spotless morality give her a special power for educating and reforming society at large. As Clarence Hervey’s wife, her authority will be significantly increased. She will thus have a powerful situation like that of Lady Delacour without the dangerous reputation that Lady Delacour had when Belinda first arrived in London combined with a reformed, educationally-minded husband who enters into her domestic and social activities. Their shared belief in the importance of education will strengthen their relationship as they work in unison to raise and educate their children and improve the educational opportunities for others in society.
CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATING EDITHA: ADELINE MOWBRAY AND WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1804) has long been read for its fictionalization of the famous relationship between two important radicals of the time, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, both of whom Opie spent time with during the 1790s. Most contemporary reviews praised *Adeline Mowbray* as an indictment of the Jacobin ideals of Wollstonecraft and other radicals, and in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler reads the novel as “the usual cautionary tale of the anti-jacobins” (121). Other scholars, including Claudia Johnson, Eleanor Ty and Roxanne Eberle, however, argue that Opie is a cautious Jacobin, highlighting the dangers of the modern philosophy, but not necessarily condemning the radical thinking of the time. Eberle reads this novel as ‘a vindication’ of the fallen Mary Wollstonecraft that attempts to cautiously defend her reputation, and she discusses a minor character that she believes clearly shows Opie’s support of Wollstonecraft. Eberle states “[t]hroughout the novel Rachel [Pemberton] preaches about both religion and women’s education. . . . Rachel represents the aspects of Wollstonecraft’s life and work which requires no defense at all” (152). Amelia Opie uses *Adeline Mowbray* to support the important cause that Wollstonecraft famously voiced and Godwin’s memoir of her threatened to destroy. Opie focuses this novel on women’s education, trying to revitalize Wollstonecraft’s attack on the social system that relegates women to an inferior, subordinate role and denies them the education that will make them “affectionate wives and rational mothers” (Wollstonecraft 71). Opie sees that this important political argument Wollstonecraft made is in danger of being lost due to society vilifying its most outspoken proponent. *Adeline Mowbray* is thus primarily a novel about education and how the lack of
education and improper education are extremely dangerous for young women. She shows how the piecemeal education system which aims primarily at teaching girls just enough to make them marriageable actually leads to great danger. This system tempts them into behaviors that are viewed as unacceptable in society and fails to give them the intellectual tools needed to fully investigate issues of moral or philosophical importance and make wise, rational choices. Adeline Mowbray is such a victim. Her unusual education has opened her eyes to the possibilities that exist in the world but has failed to give her the ability to explore the societal implications of these possibilities. Once Adeline realizes the flaws in her own reasoning and links them to her education, she focuses the rest of her short life on educating others, especially children. Opie’s novel takes up the topic of women’s education, arguing that women must be given better education and better access to the world; Adeline’s faulty education and her lack of social interaction lead to her eventual fall and untimely death. Adeline is a victim of a society that does not properly educate its women and Opie shows how denying her a fully ‘masculine’ education leads her to wholly commit to a radical philosophy before she truly understands the implications of her choice, which eventually leads to bitter regret, abuse, assault and her untimely death.

Many scholars have pointed to Mrs. Mowbray as the primary cause of her daughter’s fate. Mrs. Mowbray was considered a ‘genius’ as a child and was indulged by parents who could not understand their daughter’s intellectual abilities but doted upon her as their only child and heir. Mrs. Mowbray is primarily self-taught, studying abstract philosophy and glorying in her position as an intellectual woman who feels herself far superior to the commonplace women that surround her. Her self-pride coupled with her habits soon exclude her from society, and her only society at the opening of the novel is her aged parents, her young daughter and an old friend, Dr. Norberry, with whose wife she refuses to associate. After her husband dies, Mrs. Mowbray is
solely in charge of her daughter’s education, and developing an educational curriculum for teaching young Adeline becomes her passion. Mrs. Mowbray devotes herself to the pursuit of a system of education which will cause her to be “held up as a pattern of imitation to mothers,” imagining one day that she will “be prevailed upon, though with graceful reluctance, to publish her system, without a name, for the benefits of society” (Opie 43-44). Unfortunately, while Mrs. Mowbray is studying everything she can about education and preparing to write her system of education, she fails to educate her daughter at all and exposes “that child to the dangers of idleness” (44). In her desire to create the perfect system of education, she ends up failing to educate her daughter. She wants to educate Adeline in a way that is superior to her own education and superior to the typical education for a woman of the time, but she does not know how. She has ideas on education and reads all that she can find about education, but she is unable to create a system that fulfills her lofty goals. She has never been taught how to apply the things she has learned or how to impart her knowledge to someone else.

Mrs. Mowbray is inconsistent in the few things she does attempt to teach her daughter: “Now it was judged right that she should learn nothing, and now that she should learn every thing” (43). Opie shows that the ideal of educating young girls at home as women’s work is much more complicated than it appears as women are not naturally born teachers. They must be taught to fulfill this role just as a man must be taught how to practice a profession. Here Opie points to one of the arguments Mary Wollstonecraft made in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, showing that women must first be properly educated before they can be expected to wisely educate their children. Mrs. Mowbray’s poor education, done primarily by herself only in areas that interest her, fails to prepare her to educate her daughter as she is unable to organize her thoughts to create an appropriate and timely system. She also cannot give Adeline a more
traditional female education as she has never learned the basics of housewifery that most other women have been taught from the time they were born. She is thus stuck in a middle space; she is a transitional character that points to a more thorough, ‘masculine’ education that may one day be a possibility for a greater number of women. However, with her incomplete and piecemeal education, she is unable to properly educate her daughter and is unable to find a space in society for herself and her daughter.

While it is clear that Mrs. Mowbray failed to properly educate her daughter, Opie also points out that it is not Mrs. Mowbray, alone, who is to blame for her Adeline’s mis-education. When Editha Woodville was young, her parents learn they have a daughter that is considered to be a genius and allow their pride and their ignorance to interfere with wisely raising and educating her. The Woodvilles’ treatment of their daughter is highly telling:

Mrs. Mowbray . . . was the spoiled child of rich parents; who, as geniuses were rarer in those days than they are now, spite of their own ignorance, rejoiced to find themselves parents of a genius; and as their daughter always disliked the usual occupations of her sex, the admiring father and mother contented themselves with allowing her to please herself; saying to each other, “She must not be managed in a common way; for you know, my dear, she is one of your geniuses – and they are never like other folks.” (Opie 47)

The narrative never shows why the Woodvilles believe their daughter is a genius, which makes the reader question the true reason Mrs. Mowbray behaves the way she does. While it is clear that Mrs. Mowbray is an intelligent woman, it appears likely that her parents inadvertently taught her how to be a genius, or at least taught her to act how society feels a genius should act. It also
appears that they taught her fairly early that they had nothing to teach her and she is thus left to educate herself. Editha’s parents doted on and spoiled her so when they attempted to force her to fulfill “the usual occupations of her sex,” they were met with the stubbornness of a daughter who did not want to obey and they just allowed her “to please herself.” The narrator also points out that “geniuses were rarer in those days” hinting to a growing fad of ‘genius’ children that are to be raised and treated differently than other children. Regardless of Editha’s intellectual abilities, the Woodvilles raise their daughter to be a genius; they raise her to disdain menial, feminine tasks and she acts the part admirably. She spends hours in ‘abstraction’ which keeps her parents in awe of the powers of her mind. Instead of seeking out the best method of educating the daughter they believe to be a genius, they leave her completely to herself. Here, we see a pointed critique of Mr. and Mrs. Woodville and their failure to properly educate their child. When they decide their daughter is a ‘genius,’ they leave her to herself, allowing her to imbibe whatever philosophies she can find, but they never introduce her to the society of intellectual equals or well-educated people with whom she could converse. They fail to supervise her education in any way. In fact, when Editha attempts to bring her parents into her intellectual life, however misguidedly, they fail miserably, reading only three pages of John Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding which she had given them and convincing their daughter that “learning was not [their] taste” (51). Here, they make learning a matter of taste and fail at their minor attempt to read what their daughter has been learning. Editha tries to bring her parents into her world, but fails and ends up doing the same thing to them that they had done to her as a child: “she left [them] to please [them]selves” (51). A very similar scene occurs when Editha orders Adeline to put down Rousseau’s Julie, or the New Heloise, which she herself has not read, because she believes it has a dangerous moral message. The narrator informs the reader that this
novel might actually have been to Adeline’s benefit due to the penitence of the heroine after her affair. This novel may have given Mrs. Mowbray a chance to discuss Adeline’s firmly-held beliefs and could have given her entrance into Adeline’s mind and education. Instead, Mrs. Mowbray’s attempts at educating her daughter mirror what she has seen in her own parents; she ignores what she does not like or understand and remains a distant figure of authority.

The Woodvilles further destroy their child’s education by the first lesson they teach her: her own importance. At the beginning of the novel, Opie describes Editha Woodville’s education: “one of the first lessons which Editha Woodville learnt was that of egotism, and to consider it as the chief duty of all who approached her, to study the gratification of her whims and caprices” (41). She believes herself far superior to others and considers herself to be the genius she has always been told she is, so she has never learned to submit her ideas to public scrutiny or to explore her ideas with other intellectuals in the hopes of improving her mind and refining her ideas. Thus, when she goes to London with her husband, she is unable to accept her own insignificance and fails to take advantage of the society of educated people who could help her refine her own understanding. Instead, she returns to her home and small community “where in beauty, in learning, and in grandeur she was unrivalled, and where she might deal out her dogmas, sure of exciting respectful attention” (55). In a wider society, Editha Mowbray could have learned how to properly use her intellectual abilities and could have further canvassed her ideas with other intellectuals, which would have prepared her to properly use her intellect to effectively manage her estate and superintend her daughter’s education. Instead, Editha locks herself and her daughter in the closed-off world of Rosevalley until Adeline is already at a marriageable age. Opie thus shows that the constraints and restrictions put on women’s education effectively make it impossible for Editha to receive a proper education. Her intellect is too
superior to remain dormant, yet there are no positive outlets for her intellect and no opportunities for her to learn to harness the powers of her mind. She hides her intellect, and that of her daughter, in seclusion at Rosevalley.

Adeline’s education is also greatly affected by her grandmother, Mrs. Woodville. Mr. and Mrs. Woodville tell Editha she is a genius, so she believes she is one. In the same way, Mrs. Woodville tells her granddaughter she is not a genius and educates her “according to the old way,” teaching her the basics of housewifery and preparing her to fulfill a typical female role (48). Adeline excels at the household affairs because she is “stimulated by the ambition of being useful, (for she had often heard her mother assert that utility was the foundation of all virtue,)” (47). Here, Mrs. Mowbray’s inadvertent lessons have taken hold of Adeline and she learns all she can about the household affairs in order to be useful to the mother who barely notices her. Her desire to learn all she can in order to be useful is her first attempt to put into practice the philosophy that her mother espouses. This description of Adeline’s desire to please her mother foreshadows the dangers of Adeline’s future as she is already determined to live by what she believes is right in any way that becomes available to her. Her success at learning the housewifery taught by her grandmother hints what might have happened if her intellectual pursuits had been superintended as her domestic pursuits were. Mrs. Woodville attempts to remedy the mistakes she made in raising Editha by teaching everything she knows to Adeline. She prepares Adeline for a future domestic role by teaching her how to cook, clean and care for the sick and needy. She even teaches Adeline how to do accounts which enables her to take over the duties of overseeing the estate. Mrs. Woodville puts young Adeline forward in front of Mrs. Mowbray, when Mrs. Mowbray claims her daughter knows nothing of accounts. Mrs. Woodville tells her “‘Dear me! how mistaken you are, child! She knows accounts perfectly’” (48). Editha
does not know that her daughter has been taught anything and she learns that her mother has been educating Adeline because she thought it was “a pity that the poor girl should learn nothing, like, till she was to learn every thing” (48). This is both Mrs. Woodville’s atonement for her daughter and indictment of her. She realizes that she failed to teach any of these things to Editha, but also points out that Editha has not done much better with her daughter.

The education Adeline receives from Mrs. Woodville helps sustain her and is part of the reason that Adeline is shown to be superior to so many other women in the novel. She combines the domestic ideal with a strong intellect. Throughout the first half of the novel, Adeline is consistently and adeptly laboring beside the sickbed. While her abilities to assist the sick can be attributed to her grandmother, the reason for this commitment is actually a lesson that Adeline learned from her mother. She remembers her mother nursing her when she was deathly ill and continually remembers that time whenever she doubts her mother’s love. The time of her illness was the one moment in her life where she truly felt her mother loved her. This memory is so important to her history with her mother that she re-enacts this scene repeatedly through the novel as a way to show others her love. She sits by her grandmother in her last moments. She comes to her mother’s sickbed hoping to receive her forgiveness. She spends most of her relationship with Glenmurray at his bedside. To her, this is love. Glenmurray also portrays Adeline as attending a sickbed to his cousin, Berrendale, and Berrendale fancifully imagines her leaning over his “gouty couch” taking care of him in his illness, which makes him desire to have her as wife (173). Through this portrayal of Adeline, Opie defends the intellectual woman. Adeline is just as proficient as other women at feminine tasks. In fact, even though Mrs. Norberry was always jealous of Mrs. Mowbray, she is still able to accept her because anytime her husband praises Mrs. Mowbray’s intellect, she is able to point out that “she can’t write a
market bill” or “knows nothing of the component parts of plum pudding” (126). She can counter any praise of Mrs. Mowbray by criticizing her lack of skill at typical feminine tasks. But, Mrs. Norberry and her daughters are unable to compete with Adeline because “Adeline was as conversant in all branches of housewifery as [Mrs. Norberry]” (126). Thus Adeline combines both worlds – she admirably fulfills the traditional female role but is also considered an educated, intellectual woman. Opie shows that the problem is not in letting women learn, but in making them learn in secrecy and seclusion without proper teachers. When given the option, women can fulfill both roles commendably.

Mrs. Woodville attempts to mold Adeline in exactly the opposite way that she did her own daughter, but unfortunately goes too far in this opposite direction. She and Mr. Woodville taught Editha her own importance, so she teaches Adeline the traditional feminine virtue of humility. Unfortunately, Adeline accepts this humble view of herself in a negative way, primarily due to her grandmother’s comparing her unfavorably to her mother. Adeline feels she cannot discuss the subjects her mother reverences because of her grandmother’s admonitions: “nor dared she venture to expatiate on subjects which she had often heard Mrs. Woodville say were very rarely canvassed, or even alluded to, by women” (53-54). She is thus effectively silenced by her grandmother. As the narrator points out, “even had Adeline had an opportunity of discussing her new opinions with Dr. Norberry, it is not at all certain that she would have had the power” (53). Adeline is too humble to forward her opinions and believes she is far inferior to her mother, so she keeps her ideas to herself where they have time to take firmer roots. Her grandmother teaches her to live in awe of her mother, just as Mr. and Mrs. Woodville lived in awe of Editha’s talents, which forces her to retain a deferential distance between herself and her mother and Dr. Norberry. She thus never announces her opinions against marriage until she is in
Bath and surrounded by company. Dr. Norberry, who might have corrected her, is not in attendance, her mother does not take much notice of this first avowal of her beliefs, most of the company leaves in disgust, Sir Patrick is excited by the license she has unconsciously just given him, and Glenmurray is surprised and flattered. When she is finally bold enough to declare her opinions, there is no one there to reason with her and her mother fails even to show that she is shocked at the avowal and attempt to explain to her the dangers of her ideas.

While Adeline is thankful that her grandmother taught her these lessons, it is the fact that the only ‘motherly’ character in her life, her grandmother, makes it clear that she is inferior to her mother that pushes her not only to mimic the intellectual pursuits of Mrs. Mowbray, but also to go a step farther and live by her ideals:

Whenever the old lady reminded her that she was no genius, Adeline had felt as much degraded as if she had said that she was no conjurer; and though she was too humble to suppose she could ever equal her mother, she was resolved to try to make herself more worthy of her, by imitating her in those pursuits and studies on which were founded Mrs. Mowbray’s pretensions to superior talents. (51-52)

Her grandmother’s words make Adeline desire to be more like her mother not only to prove her grandmother wrong, but also to distance her from the simplistic morals and values of her grandmother. Once again, Mrs. Woodville attempts to create the ‘daughter’ she wants. She wanted a genius, but finds her relationship with Editha unsatisfactory. She now has the chance to have a traditional daughter and an imitation of herself. But, in attempting to push Adeline away from Editha’s intellectual pursuits, she simply sets the girl more firmly on this path. Adeline also sees that the only way to gain her mother’s attention – and love – is to focus on what Mrs.
Mowbray loves most. She takes up the works of the philosopher, Mr. Glenmurray, primarily to gain the attention of her absent mother. She eventually decides to live out Glenmurray’s ideals, with the author himself, to please her mother. She even tells Mrs. Mowbray she will cohabitate with Mr. Glenmurray “that you might have the pleasure of beholding one union founded on rational grounds and cemented by rational ties” (78). Adeline desires her mother’s praise and wishes to negate her grandmother’s criticism of her, so she devotes herself to her mother’s beloved philosophies. At one point, she humbly offers some rhymes she has written to Dr. Norberry and is rewarded by the praise that has long been her mother’s main sustenance: “‘Zounds! girl—I protest you are as clever as your mother!’” (54). Here, Adeline not only receives the praise of someone her mother admires, but sees what she must surely interpret as motherly pride on the face of Mrs. Mowbray. This moment of praise, just like the one moment of praise she received from her mother earlier in the novel that “endeared to her the practice of truth,” teaches her to continue her pursuits of philosophy in order to gain the attention and respect of her mother (45). Instead of using this time to explore her daughter’s ideas and complete her education, Mrs. Mowbray decides to show them both off in Bath, to the detriment of their small family.

Many readings of the novel see the portrayal of Mrs. Mowbray as an indictment of intellectual women, but Opie shows Editha’s inconsistencies and failures are not caused by her intellect or her studying philosophy, but by the way in which she studies these:

Happy would it have been for miss Woodville, if the merits of the works which she so much admired could have been canvassed in her presence by rational and unprejudiced persons: but, her parents and friends being too ignorant to discuss
philosophical or political controversies, the young speculator was left to the
decisions of her own inexperienced enthusiasm. (41)

This same statement becomes the prediction for Adeline as well. Neither woman is prepared to interact in society at large; they both naively believe that superior intellect and superior morals will automatically provide the admiration and respect each feels she deserves. Neither woman is aware how her opinions will be viewed in society or how they will affect her future relationships and future happiness. Their separation from society and seclusion in Rosevalley has given both women a dangerously idealistic view of the world. The estate of their seclusion, Rosevalley, is aptly named as both women see the world as a valley of roses – a safe place where respect is given to superior talents and actions are only judged based on the intent behind the action. It is only out in society that Adeline learns how dangerous her opinions truly are and Mrs. Mowbray learns what her daughter’s education has actually been.

In Bath, Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline attract notice, but quickly lose any acquaintances they make due to their unusual opinions on women and marriage and their willingness to voice these opinions boldly in public. Mrs. Mowbray fails to notice how she and her daughter are being treated and thus cannot discern the reason for other people’s behavior towards them. The only two acquaintances they manage to retain are Mr. Glenmurray, the author of the radical theories they adore, and Sir Patrick O’Carrol, a licentious baronet who uses Mrs. Mowbray’s interest in him to gain access to her daughter. When Mrs. Mowbray hears someone mention Glenmurray’s name at the pump-room, she immediately decides to speak to her favorite author and the gentleman she accosts replies that it should not be difficult because no one else talks to him “for all persons have not the same taste as Mrs. Mowbray” (60). The narrative points out that this man pronounces the author’s name “with a sneer” and his response to Mrs. Mowbray is sarcastic,
which clearly shows how Glenmurray is viewed in society. However, “the sarcasm with which he spoke entirely escaped her observation” since she is already focused on Mr. Glenmurray (60). She fails to even register the disdain the gentleman as shown and boldly accosts Mr. Glenmurray. Mrs. Mowbray immediately engages Mr. Glenmurray in conversation and introduces her young daughter to the man who has published radical philosophy against the institution of marriage. Not only does she forward the connection, but Mrs. Mowbray is the first to share the fact that Adeline reads and supports his work: “Speak, Adeline . . . do we not almost daily ready and daily admire Mr. Glenmurray’s writings?” (61). It is thus Mrs. Mowbray who boldly initiates the relationship between Adeline and Mr. Glenmurray. She clearly knows and supports Adeline reading Glenmurray’s work, but is oblivious to the possible danger to her daughter. Sir Patrick O’Carrol is the exact opposite of Glenmurray, but he also attracts Mrs. Mowbray’s attention, causing her to ignore all those around her and thus miss the many proofs of her daughter’s danger in society. Mrs. Mowbray’s infatuation with Sir Patrick causes her to finally break with Glenmurray since Sir Patrick incites her against him in an attempt to keep Glenmurray away from his true desire, Adeline. It is only when the man she desires tells her that Glenmurray is scorned in society that she finally recognizes how he is viewed. However, the narrative clearly shows that her decision to reject further acquaintance with Glenmurray is not based on rational judgment, but on her desire to please Sir Patrick.

Mrs. Mowbray never seems aware that she has not actually educated her daughter. After the duel between Sir Patrick and Mr. Glenmurray over Adeline, Mrs. Mowbray reprimands her daughter for visiting Mr. Glenmurray alone: “‘What! visit a man alone at his lodgings, after the education which you have received!’” (77). Adeline answers honestly: “‘my education never taught me that such conduct was improper; nor, as you did the same this afternoon, could I have
dared to think so.” This exchange shows the flaws in Adeline’s education and the hypocrisy of Mrs. Mowbray. Adeline has never been taught such an activity is improper nor has her mother shown this by her actions. Having been secluded from society, she has rarely had the opportunity of observing interactions between men and women. Her mother, who has just come from visiting Sir Patrick unchaperoned, cannot understand why her daughter does not know such behavior is improper and even this assertion by Adeline does not convince Mrs. Mowbray that her daughter’s education has been flawed. In fact, Mrs. Mowbray does not realize the problems with Adeline’s education until the end of the novel when Mrs. Pemberton states that Adeline could not have known how society would view her opinions as “she had not lived in the world . . . she did not mix in general society” (268). Adeline’s response to her mother also shows the beginning of the most dangerous part of Adeline’s education as she begins to doubt her mother and, at the same time, begins to resemble her mother by trusting her own ideas and choices without consulting the opinions or ideas of anyone else. This repeats the earlier exchange between Mrs. Mowbray and Mrs. Woodville, when Mrs. Mowbray is shocked to learn that her daughter knows accounts and when she is led to believe that “almost unconsciously she had educated [Adeline] into a prodigy” after Dr. Norberry praises Adeline’s verses on the American War (54). She does not know what her daughter has learned or what she believes. In fact, she does not really even know who taught her daughter.

Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline delighted themselves in Mr. Glenmurray’s radical philosophical writings while living in Rosevalley. The character and works of Frederic Glenmurray are loosely based on William Godwin and his radical theoretical work, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1798). In this work, Godwin explores his philosophical views on morality, reason, and government. *Political Justice*
argues for a reconstituted society without the corrupting influence of government, which Godwin believes is the source of immorality and corruption in the individual. Godwin argues for the perfectibility of the individual through rational investigation and confirmation of truth. Like Rousseau and Locke, he believes that humans are not born into sin and only learn evil through interactions with the social world which is controlled by corrupt authority. He advocates that the individual must work toward perfect morality in his everyday life primarily through absolute sincerity. He does not believe that such radical change can be accomplished by an immediate revolution and recommends gradual change through individual reason and the individual’s conscious action towards improvement. 

Godwin criticizes monarchic and aristocratic privilege, showing that such a constitution of society enforces arbitrary submission to laws without appeal to the individual’s rational judgment which corrupts the individual and society. His focus on the importance of the individual’s rational capabilities leads to his criticism of marriage. He argues that relationships between men and women should be based on friendship and rational consent, believing that both partners should be able to leave the relationship when their judgments determine they should. Godwin believes marriage and any form of permanent cohabitation will inevitably lead to one or both partners compromising their own rational judgment as “it is absurd to expect the inclinations and wishes of two human beings to coincide, through any long period of time” (445). His most direct criticism of marriage is that it forces both partners to agree to take part in a fraudulent social relationship: “The institution of marriage is a system of fraud; and men who carefully mislead their judgments in the daily affair of their life, must always have a crippled judgment in every other concern” (445-446). Godwin claims “that marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties. So long as two beings are forbidden by a positive institution to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice is alive and vigorous” (446).
Marriage is thus a social institution that enforces prejudice and thwarts the development of the individual’s mind. He claims that the desire to possess another person is an extreme form of the corrupting influence of owning property: “So long as I seek to engross one woman to myself . . . I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies” (446).

Glenmurray’s radical theory, which reflects Godwin’s, is a passionate and reasoned indictment of marriage as a social institution that forces people to tie themselves to one another for financial and social reasons. While Godwin promotes free love, Glenmurray proposes a relationship based on rational agreement between people of the opposite sexes due to affinity in their beliefs and intellects. Such an agreement does not require the permission or protection of the state. Opie’s novel clearly criticizes the flaws of Godwin’s ideas and shows that while some of his ideas might be inspiring, they are greatly detrimental to the female sex as society will not accept a woman’s acquiescence to such a relationship. Opie, as Eberle points out, shows the Godwinian character to be motivated primarily by selfish reasons in his choice to cohabitate but portrays the Wollstonecraft figure, Adeline, in a very sympathetic and positive light. Opie sees the good Wollstonecraft was trying to do in her decision to cohabitate with Godwin and her greatest indictment of her erstwhile friend is that perhaps she was misled by the beauty of Godwin’s arguments and her belief in the purity of their love.

In Bath, Opie shows how their exclusion from society has hindered both of the Mowbray women:

Their opinions on most subjects were so very different from those of the world, and they were so little conscious, from the retirement in which they had lived, that this difference existed, or was likely to make them enemies, that not a day elapsed in which they did not shock the prejudices of some, and excite the contemptuous
pity of others; and they soon saw their acquaintance coolly dropped by those who, as persons of family and fortune, had on their first arrival sought it with eagerness. (57)

While Mrs. Mowbray lectures her daughter on society and its customs, it is clear that she does not truly understand how society functions and has become both egocentric and oblivious due to her long retirement from the world. She does not notice how people treat them nor does she realize that they are ridiculed in Bath. She also does not recognize the significant social distinction between a wealthy, eccentric widow and a pretty, unmarried girl of seventeen. She fails to understand her daughter’s precarious situation and take the necessary precautions for young Adeline’s introduction to society. She does not even appear to know how Mr. Glenmurray and his theories are viewed until Sir Patrick informs her that he “is shunned for his principles and profligacy by all the world” (78). Mrs. Mowbray is also shocked that her daughter would consider living with Mr. Glenmurray outside the bounds of marriage: “‘[l]ittle did I think that you were so romantic as to see no difference between amusing one’s imagination with new theories and new systems, and acting upon them in defiance of common custom, and the received usages of society’” (79). Her statement here is telling: she never considered the fact that her daughter did not know the difference between ideal society and society as it is. The reader does not get any hint that Adeline has ever left Rosevalley before she goes to Bath with her mother, so she really cannot have an understanding of ‘common custom’ or how society works. Her education has almost fully been out of books in the confinement of her mother’s home. She has not experienced how the world works and can have no understanding of how society will view her beliefs. Opie seems here to be pointing to another Wollstonecraft idea of educating children by introducing society to them, under supervision, from a young age so that they can
experience the world but also view it through the lens of their parents’ admonitions and
guidance. Perhaps had Adeline seen the pitiful child cursing his own mother for his disreputable
birth before she ever considered cohabitation or motherhood, she might have been able to make a
wiser choice with regard to Glenmurray.

Instead, as a young teenager on her first social outing, Adeline learns a contradictory
lesson: “Conscience, and the conviction of what is right, she then for the first time learned, were
not to be the rule of action” (79-80). What she fails to learn here is that perhaps her own
convictions and conscience have been built on faulty logic. Adeline truly believes that she is
honoring her mother by living up to the ideals her mother worships. She tells Glenmurray:

‘... can you think so meanly of my mother, as to suppose her practice so totally
opposite to her principles, that she would require her daughter to submit to a
ceremony which she herself regards with contempt?—Impossible. I am sure,
when I solicit her consent to my being yours, she will be pleased to find that her
sentiments and observations have not been thrown away on me.’ (77, italics mine)

This statement shows quite clearly how Adeline has been educated by her mother: with
sentiments and observations, not consistent teaching or a strong example. Adeline has learned
from her mother only the things that Editha has commented on or shown strong feelings about.
Mrs. Mowbray has not discussed any of Glenmurray’s theories with her daughter and very few
others are aware of what Adeline has learned in her childhood. She never explained to Adeline
that Glenmurray’s philosophy of marriage provided an ideal view of a companionate relationship
between intellectual and moral equals, but that such an ideal could not now be practiced openly
in society without extreme consequences. In fact, Adeline believes that her mother will be proud
of her decision to live by their philosophical beliefs and will be her champion. It seems likely that, since she grew up without a father, Adeline believed her mother was remaining single due to her firm commitment to Glenmurray’s claims regarding “the absurd ceremony of marriage” (77). Adeline learned to cherish the philosophy of Glenmurray but never discussed her growing ideas with her mother, Dr. Norberry or anyone else until it was too late. Adeline, herself, eventually comes to voice this truth to her mother after her mother informs her that she would never dare act by Glenmurray’s principles: “Would to heaven, my dear mother . . . that you had said all this to me ere my mind had been indelibly impressed with the truth of these forbidden doctrines” (80). Adeline is the one who finally realizes that she needed someone to teach her how to analyze what she read and help her separate moral truths and experimental ideas. It is too late for her mother’s words or example to affect Adeline; her mother’s inconsistencies in Bath and her unexpected denunciation of the radical philosophies she had always adored have destroyed her credibility before her daughter. Adeline is even more set in her ways as Mrs. Mowbray has now inadvertently taught her daughter that she, not her mother, has the superior intellect and character. Adeline has made up her mind never to submit to marriage to Glenmurray or anyone else and to depend on only herself for moral decisions, and now that her mother has proven herself inconsistent, she is even more dependent on herself.

It is significant that during her argument with her mother, Adeline acts as an enlightened woman. Adeline tries to reason with her mother in explaining her choice to live with Glenmurray. She even pulls out the book that her mother worshipped – Glenmurray’s own work – and points to the passage that proves her point: “‘and see here, in Mr. Glenmurray’s book, the very passage which I so often have heard you admire’” (78). Adeline attempts to use reason on her mother and it fails; Mrs. Mowbray seizes the book and throws it in the fire. She denounces
reason, symbolically throwing it into the fire, and instead responds to her daughter with the fire of passion, burning up the words that she had loudly admired before her daughter only months prior. Adeline’s mind revolts against the passion and anger her mother shows. While she consents to stay away from Glenmurray to please her mother, she does not denounce any of her ideas. Her attempts to use reason and logic with her mother show why her mother fails to convince her that acting upon Glenmurray’s opinion is wrong. Only reason could change Adeline’s mind and no one attempts to reason with her before she begins her relationship with Glenmurray. In fact, she does not hear reason oppose her ideas until she meets Mrs. Pemberton, after she is already pregnant with Glenmurray’s child. Once again, Opie points to the hypocrisy inherent in women’s educational systems. Women are supposed to blindly follow authority and be beings of sentiment. No one considers using reason or intellectual arguments to correct Adeline’s ideas until it is too late. It is reason – not sentiment – that convinces Adeline that Glenmurray’s ideas are right and reason is what will eventually show her the faults in his system.

The first person to use reason in an attempt to show Adeline her danger is Mrs. Rachel Pemberton, a Quaker minister and teacher. Rachel Pemberton represents the ideal combination of an intellectual education, philosophical contemplation, sound religion, and feminine virtue. As Eberle points out, Rachel Pemberton is a very important character in the novel as she is the perfect example of a moral, intellectual woman who is greatly involved in education. She, like Adeline, has suffered great loss and turns to religion and teaching to heal her soul: “she had taken refuge from sorrow in the active duties of her religion, and in becoming a teacher of those truths to others, by which she had so much benefited herself” (Opie 187). She is a Quaker minister and thus represents those things that are most important to Adeline, religion and education. She is an independent, intellectual woman who is devoted to God and supports herself
through her teaching. She enters into the novel at very significant moments and acts as an instructress to all of the Mowbray women, including little Editha, and even corrects Dr. Norberry, plainly telling him he cannot save Adeline when it is beyond hope and teaching him to respect her intellect and her religion. She is the ideal woman who has never strayed from propriety, but is yet a radical who is attempting to improve society and actively supporting women’s education. It is Mrs. Pemberton who first reasons with Adeline in an attempt to turn her from her path while she is living with Glenmurray. When Adeline defends her relationship, she pointedly asks “[b]ut hast thou well studied the subject on which thou hast decided?” (154). She questions Adeline’s education, asking her how well she studied the subject she has made the center of her whole life. The novel never shows that Adeline read other authors on the same subject or studied other intellectuals’ opinions, and Mrs. Pemberton points this out to her. She does not simply criticize Adeline or spout religiosity. Instead, she uses reason to make Adeline think over her opinions more carefully and fully than she had previously. Mrs. Pemberton encourages her to study and make sure she has considered all of the evidence available to her regarding her unusual situation. She also offers her own counsel to Adeline, should she ever need it, unwilling to leave her without leaving open “one gate that may lead to amendment” (154). She comes to Adeline as a “monitress,” unable to refrain from attempting to teach her and turn her from the dangerous path she has chosen (156). In the same way, she eventually becomes a monitress for Mrs. Mowbray, helping to reform her and prepare her to be a mother again.

In showing how Adeline’s education progresses, Opie shows that the modern educational system for girls is completely limited by their small spheres of experience, and if they wander out into the world, they will likely face a very similar fate to that of Adeline. While Adeline’s education is faulty in this way, we see that hers is not the only one. When walking with an
unnamed friend in Bath, the girl is shocked that Adeline speaks to Mr. Glenmurray. She tells Adeline “‘they say one should not notice him, because he is . . . I do not exactly know what; but I believe it is a French spy, or a Jesuit’” (62). This girl, unlike Adeline, has been taught to fear Glenmurray and his opinions, but her ‘conventional’ education is just as bad as Adeline’s atypical education. This girl has been told that Mr. Glenmurray is dangerous, but she is just as unaware why as is Adeline. Not only does this young woman have no idea what is wrong with the man, but she also has no clear teacher to whom she may impute her knowledge. She simply blames an unnamed ‘they,’ which clearly points to how society teaches women – strong admonition without reason or explanation, implying women are incapable of using reason to make up their own minds. This interaction is another moment of failed education for Adeline. Had this young woman been taught the true danger of Glenmurray and been able to discuss it intellectually with Adeline, she may have had a fair warning of what lay ahead of her in choosing to devote herself to Glenmurray and his philosophies. Instead, Adeline is pushed toward Glenmurray by the prejudice this girl shows against him without any reason or understanding of the man and his works. Adeline responds to the girl intellectually: “[b]ut I am used to have better evidence against a person than a they say before I neglect an acknowledged acquaintance: therefore, with your leave, I shall turn back and talk a little to poor Mr. Glenmurray” (62, italics in original). Her reason rejects the girl’s prejudice even though the facts that led to the prejudice might be valid. Unfortunately, neither of these girls is correct in this moment. Neither of these young women has been taught the works and beliefs of Glenmurray in a critical way that might enable either girl to make a wise rational choice. While this young unnamed girl seems to have the ‘right’ education, she is in just as much danger as Adeline. This unnamed woman represents every girl in Bath or London or elsewhere searching for a husband. She has had a simple
education and parrots back what she has been taught without critical thought. This girl is just another empty vessel to be filled by whatever her mother or other nominal educator pours into her. Unlike Adeline, she has no moral compass of her own and will likely become just like Glenmurray’s cousins and the society women Wollstonecraft warns about – she will retain her appearance of morality so her reputation remains pure, but she will practice her vices in secret under the protective covering of ‘respectability.’

The only formal education Adeline receives in the novel is from Glenmurray, and it is shown as an ideal education:

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Hours, days, weeks, and months spent in a manner most dear to the heart and most salutary to the mind of Adeline!—Her taste for books, which had been cultivated in a partial manner, and had led her to one range of study only, was now directed by Glenmurray to the perusal of general literature; and the historian, the biographer, the poet, and the novelist, obtained alternately her attention and her praises. . . . In her knowledge of the French and Italian language, too, she was now considerably improved by the instructions of her lover. (103)

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This scene shows Adeline’s education being completed, but Opie is not showing that Adeline needs to be educated and guided by a man – her absent father and grandfather have failed her and it is a man’s radical philosophy that has led her astray. Instead, Opie is showing that Adeline, like her mother before her, needs better access to the educational system that is offered only to men. It is only with Glenmurray that she gains access to the education that has been denied her by society and the ignorance, vanity and selfishness of those who should have been her guides. This education only receives a few lines in the novel, but this time is described as the happiest
time in Adeline’s life. Glenmurray becomes her private tutor and finally gives her the education she has long desired. And, despite her mother’s superior intellectual abilities, it is highly likely that Adeline now has a superior education to Mrs. Mowbray’s because she has finally been given the access to education from which they have been barred due to their sex. Opie clearly shows that what draws Adeline to Glenmurray is his superior intellect. He represents the education and knowledge that Adeline most desires. He offers her a world she will never experience in her mother’s home. This scene shows that many women have a natural desire and aptitude for education and will be drawn to opportunities for education. Both Editha and Adeline Mowbray seek education in whatever ways are available to them and these pursuits, unfortunately, prove disastrous due to their exclusion from intellectual institutions. While Glenmurray is the tutor and Adeline the pupil, the novel seems to show them more as a pair of students learning together. He teaches her from the university education he has received, but she teaches him to live up to his ideals and together they learn the flaws in the theory that they had both thought unanswerable.

Though Glenmurray does complete Adeline’s formal education, he fails at the most important thing he needed to teach her, which was the danger of expressing her agreement with his own opinions. When she first voices her determination never to marry, Glenmurray immediately sees that Sir Patrick interprets her words very differently than she intended. Sir Patrick’s reaction clearly shows Opie’s belief that Glenmurray and Godwin’s ideas regarding cohabitation are not as well-reasoned and well-thought out as they each believe. Glenmurray, it appears, has never considered the gendered double standard nor given sufficient thought to how the female partner in his theoretical relationship would fare in society. He might lose face and friends, but she would be utterly ostracized by decent society and treated as a prostitute by the remaining members of society. It seems this is the first time he has considered what his ideas on
cohabitation sound like coming out of the mouth of a woman. Adeline’s avowal of Glenmurray’s statements against the institution of marriage is what leads Sir Patrick to continually harass and attack her because he sees it as a license for his own licentious sexual behavior. Glenmurray has the opportunity to teach Adeline and he resolves “to hint to her, as delicately as he could, that the opinions which she had expressed were better confined in the present dark state of the public mind, to a select and discriminating circle” (68). He knows her danger and considers telling her, but he never succeeds, perhaps because he values her love more than her reputation. Here, Opie suggests that part of the reason he fails to tell Adeline his fears is his sexual desire for her. Opie hints that Glenmurray and, by extension, Godwin, allowed his loved one to suffer because of his own selfish pride and sexual desire. She shows that this rational liaison was still tainted by masculine superiority and desire.

Adeline, however, immediately begins to teach Glenmurray the flaws in his theories due to her commitment to education and moral superiority. She becomes his research partner and helps him experiment with the theory on cohabitation he has published. She shows him what he has failed to see in his theory, like the difficulty in separating his ideal of cohabitation from the doctrine of libertinism. She also teaches him how cohabitation affects a woman’s reputation in society much more negatively than it does his and begins to show him how much it would hurt their child if it were born to them while they were yet unmarried. As the novel shows, Glenmurray does rethink his theory: “I will own that some of my opinions are changed; and that, though I believe those which are unchanged right in theory, I think, as the mass of society could never at once adopt them, they had better remain unacted upon” (179). While he does not renounce his philosophy, he does step back from fully endorsing his ideas and comes as close as his pride can to rejecting these ideas. Shortly before his death, he encourages Adeline to marry
his cousin, effectively turning his back on his youthful idealism. He regrets that he never married Adeline and thus tries to remedy the situation with his cousin.

Adeline continually attempts to teach Glenmurray what he has failed to learn: if he believes in his doctrine of free love and equality, he must also live it. Just like Mrs. Mowbray, Glenmurray loves his theory but is unable to put it into practice. He is portrayed as a man who lacks the strength to live by his convictions. He is primarily a sympathetic and good character, yet it is Adeline who tries to try to teach him to stand behind his beliefs. Adeline’s demand that his behavior should match his beliefs suggests a similar statement made by Godwin in *Political Justice*, which would likely also be reflected in Glenmurray’s philosophy:

He, that would break through a received custom because he believes it to be wrong, must no doubt arm himself with fortitude. . . . He who comes forward with no other idea but that of rectitude, and who expresses, with the simplicity and firmness which conviction never fails to inspire, the views with which he is penetrated, is in no danger of being mistaken for a coward. If he hesitate, it is because he has not an idea perfectly clear of the sentiment he intends to convey.

(311)

Adeline is thus encouraging him not only to live up to his ideals by avoiding dueling and refusing to submit to the institution of marriage, but to arm himself with the fortitude his own words demand. Her criticism of Glenmurray thus suggests that he does not truly believe what he has written. Adeline’s criticism also reflects Opie’s criticism of Godwin for going against his ideals by marrying Wollstonecraft. In a letter to a friend after their marriage, Opie writes:
“‘Heighho! what charming things would sublime theories be, if one could make one’s practice keep up with them’” (qtd. in King and Pierce x).

In addition, it is highly due to his unwillingness to truly take a stand that Adeline’s life after his death is so difficult. Instead of proudly introducing her as his partner, a woman who embraces his ideals and wishes to provide an example of an egalitarian relationship “not according to the ties of marriage, but with no other ties or sanction than those of love and reason” for the good of society, he forces her, against her will, to hide from society and slink away from acquaintances that will reject her (74). Had he fully acknowledged and celebrated their relationship, they might have found a small society of like-minded people with whom they could associate, just as Wollstonecraft and Godwin had done. Instead, he fully accepts society’s view of her as a fallen woman and keeps her to himself. This relationship, in many ways, is just as imprisoning as Adeline’s eventual marriage to Berrendale. Both men refuse to acknowledge her and view her only as society does – a fallen woman, a kept mistress. In fact, just as Glenmurray taught her to disdain the institution of marriage, he also teaches Adeline to believe that she truly is a fallen woman, once she has already entered into the illicit relationship with him. He teaches her to say, “‘I am an improper companion for them, not they for me!’” (106, italics in original). However, the novel repeatedly shows that the women who Glenmurray hides Adeline from are actually not proper companions for her. As Eberle points out, just as Glenmurray accepts society’s view of Adeline, he accepts the false societal view of reputation regarding other women, including his own cousins.

In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft states that “[a] person is not to act in this or that way, though convinced they are right in so doing, because some equivocal circumstance may lead the world to suspect that they acted from different motives.—This is
sacrificing the substance for the shadow” (179, italics in original). She later states that “morality is very insidiously undermined, in the female world, by the attention being turned to the shew instead of the substance. ... sometimes virtue and its shadow are set at variance” (214). In Adeline Mowbray, Opie dramatizes these statements in portraying two sets of “immodest” women who are fully accepted by society while the truly modest and faithful Adeline is not only ostracized, but considered an improper acquaintance for these women. Both of Glenmurray’s cousins are promiscuous; one is having an affair with her husband’s closest friend while the other, a widow, has a steady stream of lovers. Yet both are accepted by society due to their sanctioned titles though clearly lacking the moral and intellectual character of Adeline. In telling Adeline they will be visiting, Glenmurray “never once expresse[s] a desire of combating their prejudices for Adeline’s sake” (Opie 157). The fact that she accedes to Glenmurray’s request and refrains from forcing an introduction shows her superiority: she chooses not to damage their assumed delicacy by putting herself forward against their and Glenmurray’s wishes. The portrayal of this double standard suggests Opie’s support for Wollstonecraft’s ideas. She points out Adeline’s clear superiority to these society women and hints that they are a tiny sampling of such hypocrites in society. She shows that many of those judging harshly of Wollstonecraft have dark secrets of their own hidden from society’s view. She thus asks those who are demonizing Wollstonecraft to take a look at themselves and see if they could measure up to the pure morality of Adeline and, by implication, Wollstonecraft.

While the novel does eventually show that Adeline’s refusal to marry Glenmurray is a mistake, it does not indict her reasons for doing so. She repeatedly reprimands Glenmurray for his unwillingness to live up to his high moral character. When he tells her that she cannot form
an acquaintanceship with Maynard’s sisters, she tells him to defend her and defend their relationship:

‘Mr. Maynard seems so amiable a man, that I should think it would not be difficult to convince him of his errors: surely, therefore, it is your duty to call on him, state our real situation, and our reasons for it, and endeavor to convince him that our attachment is sanctioned both by reason and virtue.’ (106)

Glenmurray’s response is telling: “. . . Maynard is of the old school: besides, a man of forty-eight is not likely to be convinced by the arguments of a young man of twenty-eight, and the example of a girl of nineteen” (106-107). He no longer completely trusts his theories and does not dare try to combat the prejudices of his old friend. Adeline immediately argues against his excuse with her response: “[i]f age be necessary to give weight to arguments . . . I wonder that you thought proper to publish four years ago” (107). She once again uses reason to combat his argument. She is well aware that Glenmurray’s excuse is but a pretext and the response her reprimand elicits points the reader to what lies beneath Glenmurray’s refusal to live boldly with Adeline: “[w]ould to God I never had published!” (107). Glenmurray was never prepared to live the life he proposed in his writings. He cares more about society’s opinions than he had previously let on. He does not want Adeline, his lover, viewed by licentious eyes. He does not want to share her but he fears to defend her. In many ways, he wants her as a wife – as a paragon of old virtue – not as a martyr for a cause he has ceased to adore. He repeatedly tries to get Adeline to marry him, for her sake, but he is unable to convince her because he lacks conviction that it is the right decision. Adeline, continually, teaches him that to give in to marriage would be to give up on his beliefs and become a joke and an imposter in society. The narrator points out
that Glenmurray’s reasons for marriage are not necessarily as pure as he wants Adeline to believe. The narrative insinuates that Glenmurray desires ownership – he wants to own Adeline and keep her for himself. He wants to marry her for all of the reasons he was against marriage in his writings – to bind her to him by society’s mandate, to force her to take his name, and to keep her from leaving him. This inner conflict is why he is unable to truly convince her to marry him; he is unable to give up his high-minded ideals and his desire for marriage is contrary to the reason he espouses. Unlike Glenmurray, Adeline’s choice regarding their relationship is completely based on conviction. She chooses to live with Glenmurray not simply because she feels his theories are correct, but because she believes that he should be actively living out his beliefs in order to teach the nation that his words are true. She believes that society will actually be improved by seeing a successful relationship based on Glenmurray’s philosophy and they will thus help change the way society views marriage and cohabitation.

Adeline successfully teaches Glenmurray the importance of living up to one of his firmly-held beliefs after his duel with Sir Patrick. In one of his works, he had written a scathing indictment of dueling just as Godwin had done in *Political Justice*. Godwin claims dueling is a “despicable practice [that] was originally invented by barbarians” and argues that “[m]en of the best understanding who lend it their sanction, are unwillingly induced to do so” (310). He clearly states that a man who is truly convinced that dueling is wrong will be able to reject a duel through the use of his reason without being in “danger of being mistaken for a coward” (311). After Glenmurray’s duel, Adeline admonishes him and punishes him by reading his own words against dueling in order to show Glenmurray how he has failed himself. Just as she does later in the novel with her mother, Adeline uses reason and Glenmurray’s actual words to prove her point. In this instance, her lesson takes. When Major Douglas later challenges him to a duel, he
refuses to fight and goes to the Major to explain their unusual situation. When he leaves, he has
made three good friends and even enlisted them to help him. Here, it is clear that Adeline’s
lesson has sunk in. By following Adeline’s advice, he proves his own theory is true, showing that
a man can honorably refuse a duel and end up gaining his point with his friend. This scene also
shows that Adeline’s other argument regarding their relationship may also be true. While
Glenmurray does not win the Douglas family completely to their side, he does gain sympathy
and friendship. They wish to assist him and Adeline and do not show any desire to castigate or
shun her. In fact, once Emma Douglas learns of Adeline’s situation, she promises to do anything
in her power to teach Adeline to “sacrifice her opinions to her welfare” (Opie 117). Her brother
is pleased to hear that she will write to Adeline, but she firmly responds: “‘No; I will see her, and
argue with her’” (117). This response echoes Mary Wollstonecraft’s statement in her
introduction to Rights of Woman:

I am at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather
to persuade by the force of my arguments; than dazzle by the elegance of my
language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the
turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach
the heart. (74)

Like Wollstonecraft, Emma Douglas refuses to use a feminine, sentimental form – in this case,
letter-writing – in attempting to persuade Adeline. Instead, she wants to use all her faculties to
convince Adeline not only of the truth, but also of her sincerity. She will use masculine reason—
argument—to breakdown the masculine theory that has ensnared Adeline. She, like Mrs.
Mowbray and Adeline, is an educated and intelligent woman. Unlike these other two, she has

103
learned the importance of voicing one’s opinions in public and debating the truth of various opinions. She wants to engage Adeline intellectually and use reason to show Adeline where her opinions may be in error. The reader feels that, had Emma Douglas gotten the chance to argue with Adeline, perhaps her tragic ending might have been averted. Emma also points to the importance of female mentors, stating that she and Mrs. Douglas will attend the wedding ceremony as “‘[Adeline] will repeat her vows with more heartfelt reverence, when two respectable women, deeply impressed themselves with their importance, shall be there to witness them’” (Opie 118). Opie shows here what Adeline and other young girls need in order to make wise and good decisions in their lives. Young women need the wise examples of other women who are strong in their beliefs and firmly live them out for others to see.

Growing up, Adeline witnessed her mother voice her opinions loudly, but never saw her mother act out any of her beliefs in society. She never learns that her mother still believes in marriage until Adeline has already confirmed her opinions against the institution of marriage. And her mother’s example in marriage confuses Adeline even more. Her mother marries a man who only wants her money and access to her young daughter. For Adeline, her mother’s marriage is an example of what is wrong in marriage and gives no weight to her mother’s words. When Adeline later learns of the fate of Sir Patrick, she is certain her mother will accept her back, stating “I should think . . . my mother must have had too much of marriage to wish me to marry” (123). She believes that her mother’s bad experience will return her to the philosophies she had once so strongly supported. She also wants to believe that her mother is not truly inconsistent, but just erred due to her feelings for Sir Patrick. She wants to believe that Mrs. Mowbray is the woman she grew up believing in and that Mrs. Mowbray is still the superior,
genius woman she had always admired and loved. She needs to see her mother return to her early
beliefs and support her daughter’s relationship. Once again, she is let down.

Mrs. Mowbray has multiple chances to save her young daughter, but she continually fails. If she had commanded Adeline to marry Glenmurray, Adeline would have acquiesced as she believed her duty to her mother was sacrosanct. Later, Adeline envisions her mother accepting them back to Rosevalley and describes the romantic scene to Glenmurray: “‘You shall continue to write for the instruction of your fellow-creatures; while my mother and I shall be employed in endeavouring to improve the situation of the poor around us, and perhaps in educating our children’” (134). Had her mother lived up to the ideals she espoused, she could have helped Adeline create this ideal community. Had she forgiven her daughter and Glenmurray, they could have lived together in peace and given society a positive example of Glenmurray’s ideal relationship based on reason since she has the money, social position, and property to make just such an attempt. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Mowbray finally does fulfill this romantic vision of Adeline’s, but without her daughter or Glenmurray, because her change of heart comes too late. This ideal vision points again to the theme of education throughout the novel. Adeline still believes her mother has the opportunity to be a good educator, with her own assistance. She wants to combine her mother’s genius with her own knowledge, practice, and the masculine education she received in order to educate her children. However, her educational goals go beyond the home. Adeline and her mother will also “improve” the situation of the poor around them. While this statement clearly points to using financial resources to help others, the use of the word ‘improve’ also implies an educational aspect. Adeline envisions herself and her mother educating the poor around them and helping them to improve their stations and their lives. She and her mother will educate the people they have access to that are within the acceptable female
sphere. They will educate the poor and the children while Glenmurray will be given the time, opportunity and healthy surroundings he needs to continue to write for those who control society: the men in higher stations, in the government, and in the universities.

This ideal vision never comes to fruition for Adeline, but she does not wholly give up on it or her belief in the importance of education. After Glenmurray’s death, she starts a school in a small village and is extremely effective as an educator: “no sooner were scholars intrusted to her care, than she became the idol of her pupils; and their improvement was rapid in proportion to the love they bore her” (192). When Adeline has to give up the school due to her past, one of the mothers, Mrs. Beauclerc, regrets she is leaving as she has seen her daughters change under Adeline’s tutelage: “while she contemplated their daily improvements under her care, [she] felt grateful to Adeline for the unfolding excellencies of her daughters” (196). Opie shows that Adeline is a very successful teacher at this village, but the reason she is such an effective teacher also becomes part of the reason she has to leave. She would never have received the education she needed to be a good teacher of children if she had not gained access to a masculine education through her relationship with Glenmurray. But, her relationship with Glenmurray disqualifies her from the position for which she is eminently qualified. She desires to educate children, and she is remarkably good at it, but she is unable to practice her talents. Even this failure, however, does not deter Adeline in her pursuit. Spurred on by the “success she had met with in instructing children,” she also succeeds “in writing little hymns and tales for their benefit” which she begins writing shortly after leaving the school and continues intermittently throughout her marriage to Berrendale (200). In writing for children, Adeline enters both the literary world and also is able to aid in instructing children throughout the nation and perhaps even farther. These hymns and tales reflect the popularity of Anna Letitia Barbauld’s Lessons for Children and Hymns in Prose.
for Children and point to the possibilities that exist for Adeline in this field. In his biography of Anna Letitia Barbauld, William McCarthy discusses the significant impact of Barbauld’s work for children, arguing “Lessons can be seen as the first public step in her campaign to form a new kind of citizen” (191). McCarthy believes Barbauld’s works for children were part of a larger goal to improve society, which is the goal Adeline works towards throughout the novel.

McCarthy also states that eleven editions of Lessons and twelve editions of Barbauld’s Hymns were published in London during her lifetime, and they continued to be published after her death, also becoming extremely popular in America. These works thus become an important part of Anna Barbauld’s legacy, making her an expert in the education of children and spreading her literary fame. Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth and many other women authors also contributed to this discourse by publishing works aimed at children. Reading this small paragraph on Adeline’s occupation in the light of Barbauld’s fame, one is able to see the major influence that Adeline might have throughout society with her works for children. Once these works enter the public domain, they might become new models of education to be passed down to children for many generations. Eberle points out, “[t]he text never suggests that imparting morality to young minds is an inappropriate task for the heroine” (111). By writing works for children, Adeline has become what her mother had greatly desired to become at the beginning of the novel, a published expert in educating children. Mrs. Mowbray read, studied, and attempted to write her massive plan of education while ignoring the educational needs of the daughter she was supposed to be teaching. In contrast, Adeline actually spends time teaching children, which prepares her to write simple hymns and tales that could one day make her as famous as a Barbauld or Edgeworth. Opie has her character enter into a respectable literary realm and an area
of study that is starting to gain much attention at the time and is destined to have a large impact on society.

Adeline, however, does not confine her educational instincts to children. Just as she tried to teach her mother and Glenmurray to live up to their ideals, she also tries to correct Colonel Mordaunt and his way of life. Adeline writes another educational work, a long letter that reprimands Colonel Mordaunt. Her letter points out what she feels are the most important things for men “at that time of life when they might become happy husbands and fathers, with the reasonable expectation of living to see their children grow up to manhood, and superintending their education themselves” (Opie 239). She first points out that he needs to give up his libertine ways, but also states that he needs to be actively improving society by marrying and being involved in the education of his children. She clearly points out that it is not only the mother that should be educating the children, but the father as well, especially since he has had access to a superior education. Through this letter, Adeline states some of her strongest opinions on education. She states that educating children is the single most important thing society can do as “[i]t is evident that on the education given to children, must depend the welfare of the community” (256). Opie thus argues that education is the only way to improve society. While she does not explicitly state it, this letter implies that the Colonel’s position in society and his social activities have very little benefit to society if he is not producing children and educating them. Adeline discusses the importance of parents in this endeavor, stating “whatever is likely to induce parents to neglect the education of their children must be hurtful to the welfare of the community” (256). She thus urges Colonel Mordaunt and, through him, society, to focus on educating his children and to do so within the bounds of a virtuous marriage. She encourages him to give up his libertine ways and find a good woman to marry and raise children with in
In order to live a life of purpose and happiness. This lesson prepares him for his future meeting with Emma Douglas, the type of woman that he has now been taught to appreciate, whom he eventually marries. The marriage between the dashing Colonel and the plain Emma Douglas portrays another of Wollstonecraft’s ideals. He is taught, by a beauty, to respect the mind and thus is able to overlook Emma’s lack of beauty due to her superior mind. The coupling of Colonel Mordaunt and Emma Douglas is an ideal relationship according to Opie as it unites two people of good character and superior abilities in a companionate union who will raise wise, rational children that will improve society.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that successful marriages will never exist until women are given the opportunity to become educated and become the friends, companions, and confidantes of their husbands as love and sexual desire are certain to fade with time. Opie offers three relationships in the novel that embrace this ideal. The most significant is the relationship between Adeline and Glenmurray. They are truly devoted to one another and engage with one another intellectually. Together, they weather a miscarriage, familial opposition, poverty, and illness without a rift ever appearing between them. She is at his bedside when he breathes his last and even thinks about him with sorrow as she lay dying. The second relationship is between the reformed rake, Colonel Mordaunt, and the spotless Emma Douglas. The third relationship is that between Mrs. Mowbray and Dr. Norberry. Dr. Norberry appears to have a successful marriage and shows affection for his wife, which becomes particularly clear when he is telling Mrs. Mowbray of Mrs. Norberry’s death. However, Opie shows the reader that Dr. Norberry spends much time at Rosevalley with Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter. Opie is careful not to sexualize the relationship between Mrs. Mowbray and Dr. Norberry, but it is clear that Editha is the intellectual companion that he lacks in his wife. In
many ways, and in ways that Wollstonecraft would consider extremely important, these two are in a very significant and passionate affair – an affair of the heart and mind. There may be no sexual relationship, but their relationship is more honest than his relationship with his wife, where he keeps his most important friendships and feelings to himself and flatters her with empty compliments while she hides letters from him. In contrast to his quiet acquiescence to his wife’s demands, he passionately reprimands Mrs. Mowbray for her treatment of her daughter and her willingness to cast off the young Adeline. He debates and discusses important issues with Mrs. Mowbray, but has no similar intellectual conversations with his wife. The narrator points out that Mrs. Norberry had always been jealous of Mrs. Mowbray “because Dr. Norberry spoke of her knowledge with wonder, and of her understanding with admiration; not that he entertained one moment a feeling of preference towards her, inconsistent with an almost idolatrous love of his wife, whose skill in all the domestic duties, and whose very pretty face and person, were the daily themes of his praise” (126). Opie thus shows that Dr. Norberry desires a combination of these two women. He wants a pretty wife to take care of his children and cook his dinners, but he also desires an intelligent companion and friend with whom he can discuss ideas, politics and literature. Interestingly, Mrs. Norberry dies shortly before Adeline finally returns home. She dies after her daughters are grown, at the time of life when sexual attraction and desire have faded and a faithful companion and friend are more to be desired. At this time, when Mrs. Mowbray is going to be raising a granddaughter, Dr. Norberry returns to Rosevalley and re-enters into the companionate relationship he had long cherished. He is at Adeline’s deathbed as she passes away and thus plays the part of father to Adeline and grandfather to young Editha. Having been chastised by experience, Dr. Norberry can also aid in the education of this little girl and make sure that she does not repeat the errors that he saw with Adeline. He saw the errors in Adeline’s
education, but failed to act in time. He finally reprimands Mrs. Mowbray after Adeline has run away with Glenmurray, stating Adeline’s fall was “owing to the pretty books which you let her read” and urges her to forgive her daughter since the mistake is “a fault which both your precepts and conduct occasioned” (132). He has now been taught not to hold back his criticisms if they might save another. He also will not be restrained from any activities to benefit the Mowbray women by the jealousy of his wife. He is at Adeline’s bedside when she dies, implying he will remain there as a part of the “sisterhood” that will help to raise and educate little Editha. This sisterhood includes Mrs. Mowbray, Savanna, Adeline’s devoted servant and friend, and Rachel Pemberton, the Quaker woman who had attempted to teach Adeline earlier in the novel.

Mrs. Pemberton is also the person who finally completes the education that Adeline had begun with Mrs. Mowbray, just in time for her to see her daughter one more time and accept responsibility for her now motherless granddaughter. Before Mrs. Mowbray meets Mrs. Pemberton, she has already begun to learn from her daughter: “with the remembrance of her daughter had recurred to her that daughter’s benevolent example. She remembered the satisfaction which used to beam from Adeline’s countenance” when she helped the sick and poor, so she resolves to see if such benevolence might ease the pain she feels regarding her lost daughter (266). She thus gives up her old habits of abstraction and devotes herself to others. She is quick to help the sick and needy who surround her and she is rewarded for learning this lesson. Mrs. Mowbray’s newfound benevolence also allows her to befriend Mrs. Pemberton, who completes her education and helps prepare her to oversee the education of her granddaughter. Mrs. Pemberton is only willing to aid Mrs. Mowbray in her search for her daughter once she receives favorable reports of Mrs. Mowbray’s benevolence. Mrs. Pemberton quickly begins to correct Mrs. Mowbray, teaching her fortitude, patience and providing her a proper education.
She explains to Editha how she failed in educating her daughter: “‘Ah! ’tis as I suspected . . . Thy daughter’s faults originated in thee! her education was cruelly defective’” (267, italics in original). Mrs. Pemberton immediately sees the many mistakes Mrs. Mowbray made in raising Adeline. Mrs. Mowbray tries to argue, explaining the “voluminous manuscript” she wrote for her daughter, but Mrs. Pemberton interrupts with a pointed question: “‘But where was thy daughter; and how was she employed during the time that thou wert writing a book by which to educate her?’” Mrs. Mowbray finally learns her errors and sees how she has failed her daughter; at this moment, “she recollected that, while she was gratifying her own vanity in composing her system of education, Adeline was almost banished her presence; and, but for the humble instruction of her grandmother, would, at the age of fifteen, have run a great risk of being both an ignorant and useless being” (268). After years of blaming Adeline and holding on to the pride of her intellect, she finally sees that her ideas on education never came to fruition and she had not educated her daughter at all. Mrs. Pemberton, however, does not stop teaching at this moment. She tells her that “[a] child’s education begins almost from the hour of its birth” and points out that a mother needs to be aware of this truth and take advantage of any circumstances that occur “in order to fashion her child’s mind and character” (268). She offers Mrs. Mowbray a wealth of knowledge which will enable her to succeed with the orphan she will soon have under her care. Mrs. Pemberton also points out that when Adeline was reading the books from her library, Mrs. Mowbray should have questioned her daughter and discovered what deductions she was making from the books so she could have been “the warning voice of judgment and experience” (268). Here, Mrs. Pemberton offers a Wollstonecraftian ideal, explaining that it is a parent’s or educator’s responsibility to acquaint herself with what the child is reading and discuss what ideas she is getting out of these books. In discussing the works of Madame Genlis which she finds both
positive and negative, Wollstonecraft states “I should not let a young person read her works unless I could afterwards converse on the subjects, and point out the contradictions” (180). Mrs. Pemberton explains that Mrs. Mowbray could have saved her daughter if she had sat down with her and discussed the works they both adored. In this way, she would have known what the young girl’s opinions were and could have corrected them before she put them into action. Mrs. Pemberton thus uses her experience and knowledge to teach Mrs. Mowbray and to prepare her for a future role as a useful mother and educator. Now, Mrs. Mowbray will be able to fulfill Adeline’s earlier ideal vision, as Mrs. Mowbray’s education has been corrected and she can now add educating young Editha to her activities in aiding the poor around her.

Early in the novel, Adeline chose to be a martyr. She chooses to live with Glenmurray as an example of truth, stating “never can I respect or believe firmly in the truth of those doctrines, the followers of which shrink from a sort of martyrdom in support of them” (Opie 124). She offers herself as a willing martyr to the cause she believes in and wishes to prove to society the truth of Glenmurray’s words. At the end of the novel, she gets her wish. She dies as a martyr, only for a different cause. She chooses to die for the cause of education. She chooses to die because she wants her daughter to have the best education she can and fears that her own example, if she remains living, will endanger Editha. She states “I can never, now, be a correct example for my Editha, nor could I endure to live to be a warning to her—Nay, if I lived, I should be most probably a dangerous example for my Editha” (257). She refuses to live, believing that she will one day be respected due to her sincere repentance and benevolence. Her past errors will be forgotten and her daughter will thus be taught to believe “one false step may be retrieved” and may be tempted into similar errors thinking she can one day repent, just like her mother (257).
Concerned only for Editha’s future, Adeline very carefully prepares her daughter’s education for after her death. Berrendale’s death and the ambiguous situation of her marriage to him allow her to disappear with her child and have full control over her future education. She chooses who will raise young Editha after her death, without any fear of interference. She leaves Editha in the capable hands of Mrs. Pemberton, in the home of her youth with her now properly chastised mother, who has been educated not only by Mrs. Pemberton, but also by Adeline herself, and even her faithful servant, Savanna, who has not refrained from admonishing her for her treatment of Adeline. She also leaves a letter for her mother, laying out her educational plan for Editha and telling her not only what to teach her daughter, but what to make sure she never learns: “Oh! teach my Editha to be humble, teach her to be slow to call the experiences of ages contemptible prejudices, teach her no opinions that can destroy her sympathies with general society . . . Be above all things careful that she wanders not in the night of scepticism” (275). As she is dying, Adeline’s main thought is for the education of her daughter and she makes sure the sacrifice of her own life is not in vain. She mandates what Mrs. Mowbray should teach Editha, pleading with her not to let the little girl walk in the paths of her mother. Emboldened by her certain death, she points out where her mother failed in educating her, hoping her words will educate her mother and protect her daughter. Mrs. Mowbray promises that she “will love her as my child . . . and behave to her better than I did to—” (278). This line confirms Mrs. Mowbray’s transformation. She promises not to raise little Editha the way she raised Adeline. She acknowledges that she failed to educate Adeline properly and will do better with Adeline’s child. Adeline, ever the educator, will not let her mother finish the statement. She has confirmation that her mother has learned the lesson and that her daughter is in good hands, which is all she desires. Mrs. Mowbray has now accepted her mistakes in raising Adeline and takes much of the blame.
for her fate upon herself. She no longer has the pride of her own power and intellect to buoy her up, but instead promises to raise this girl – this second chance – differently than she did Adeline. Adeline’s choice to die for education also implies a way to read Wollstonecraft’s death. Opie shows that there are multiple ways to read Wollstonecraft’s life and death and suggests that one should look at her also as a martyr for women’s education.

Adeline leaves behind the teaching material for her daughter’s education, written by herself. She writes her own story as a warning to the young Editha so that she will see how the wrong ideas she fell into as a girl led to great misery for the rest of her life. This memoir comes as a direct result of Mrs. Beauclerc’s advice, given to her years earlier, when she claims “to preserve my children from evil I should only wish them to hear your story” (196). Adeline realizes the power of her own story to educate children and does not want this story hidden from her daughter. She wants to die as a warning, as a way to teach the future generation. She has also published children’s books and hymns from which Mrs. Mowbray can educate the little girl. And she carefully places Editha into her mother’s hands knowing that Mrs. Pemberton and the faithful Savanna will watch over Editha and make sure her education is everything that Adeline’s was not. She dies as a martyr for her daughter’s education; she dies martyred to be the most powerful example of the importance of virtue and education her daughter will ever see.

While Adeline Mowbray, the titular character, is the centerpiece of this novel, Opie’s focus on education can be clearly seen in the two characters that bookend Adeline’s story – the two Edithas. The novel begins by showing the dangerous education Editha Woodville receives and ends by placing Editha Berrendale, her granddaughter, into her arms to educate better than she educated her own daughter. This Editha will learn from the mistakes of both her mother and grandmother, but will also be guided by her grandmother’s experiences and improved education.
Editha Mowbray, abandoning her idealistic manuscript on education, will now use Adeline’s “plan of education,” along with her own intellectual abilities, to recreate Adeline. She will raise a second Adeline, a second daughter that will finally fulfill the promising future that once lay before her first daughter. Dr. Norberry once lamented Adeline’s fall, stating, “What a glorious champion would that creature have been in the support of truth” (124). Now, he will get to see a glorious champion of truth reborn in the baby Editha. She is Adeline’s child, but bears Editha’s name, suggesting she will be the combination of these two women’s virtues and a model for an educational system for women that will improve upon the limited systems available to her mother and grandmother.
CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REFORM IN ELIZABETH HAMILTON’S

THE COTTAGERS OF GLENBURNIE

In The Cottagers of Glenburnie (1808), Elizabeth Hamilton crafts a masterful tale of education that speaks to all levels of society, offering a strong critique of current systems of education in Scotland while also proposing a positive model for improvement that can affect not only the laboring classes in society but the entire nation. Cottagers is aimed at the laboring classes in rural Scotland and is meant to sit “on the Farmer’s Inglenook,” as the subtitle suggests, as a work of instruction for the improvement of the peasant family. Cottagers was extremely well-received and continued to be popular with people in all stations of life in Scotland, and its popularity spread as far as Ireland. Claire Grogan states that Cottagers “was reputed to be on every Scottish cottager’s shelf alongside the Burns and the Bible” (11) and also includes a quotation from Maria Edgeworth who states “it had probably done as much good to the Irish as to the Scotch” (qtd. in Grogan 131). Even though Hamilton aims her tale at the peasantry, she also strongly indicts the evils she sees in the gentry and aristocracy. In doing so, she argues that the souls of individuals are equal and moral improvement is necessary for every individual in society, regardless of gender or social position and shows that it is both the duty and right of women to be actively engaged in educational processes that can improve the individual, the village, the estate, and the nation. As Gary Kelly has argued, Hamilton’s portrayal of Mrs. Mason “show[s] the way forward to social reform without political revolution, through the feminization of private and community life” (“Hamilton”). Similarly, Joyce Goodman argues that Elizabeth Hamilton and other “women educationists depicted education as an important area
in which they could actively participate in upholding the national interest and in shaping national character” (279). Hamilton thus shows the power of the female individual to affect positive change through education.

_The Cottagers of Glenburnie_ offers an educational system administered by a wise, educated woman that creates a role of significance and power for women while also highlighting the need for better educational opportunities for women in all levels of society. Mrs. Mason, the heroine educationist in the tale, moves through all levels in society as an educational reformer whose lifelong pursuit of education makes her an expert who benefits every class she enters. She begins her educational work with the aristocratic Longlands family, offers her expertise to the middle class Stewart family and finally ends up living with two poor laboring families where she reforms a rural Scottish village by improving the education of the children. In each situation, Mrs. Mason has significant power that does not disrupt the masculine social power, but instead highlights its weaknesses and points to an alternate form of power that is specifically feminine. Mrs. Mason assumes the role of educational matron in each family and it is each individual’s acceptance or rejection of her educational authority that ultimately determines that individual’s future. While Mrs. Mason does not usurp the role of mother in each family, she does work as an extension of the mother, which shows Hamilton connecting the female educator with the mother-figure. Thus, her independent female educator is inextricably linked to the role of mother and her authority grows out of acceptable maternal power. The connection between mother and educator allows Hamilton considerable freedom in suggesting reforms throughout the novel. As Goodman points out, for Hamilton “the central figure in the construction of national identities is the female preceptress, charged with the education of the heart and the ‘domestic affections’” and she further states that “Hamilton uses arguments about national identity to construct the preceptress
as an authoritative figure on the basis of ‘metaphysical’ theory for the everyday use of women” (280). The authority Mrs. Mason represents can bring about significant change and reform, but she still works out of the acceptable domestic sphere.

Early in the novel, Mrs. Mason tells Mary Stewart about her love for the Meriton children she has helped raise: “[y]ou may imagine how much I became attached to them, and yet it is impossible that you should: for none but a mother, and a fond mother, can know what my heart felt, and still feels towards them” (Hamilton, Cottagers 83-84). Mrs. Mason tells the young girl that she cannot yet understand a mother’s love for her children as she has not yet become a mother. Significantly, Mrs. Mason has also never been a mother, but feels her role as their governess and teacher makes her a mother to these children. She views herself as a “fond mother” because of the educational role she has played in helping to raise the four Meriton children, which again connects the female role in education to role of mother. Hamilton complicates this idea by the distinction Mrs. Mason places between a mother and a ‘fond’ mother. Mrs. Mason states that only a mother could understand the love she has for the Meriton children, but then corrects herself and states that only a ‘fond’ mother could understand her feelings. There is a distinction between the woman who is simply a mother and the fond mother whose relationship with her children is more than biological connection. Hamilton seems to suggest that the difference between these two types of mothers can be seen in the education the mother provides for her children.

Cottagers clearly shows that one such mother who falls into the first category is Mrs. MacClarty of Glenburnie. Mrs. MacClarty’s love for her children is highly selfish, because she loves them not as individuals but as extensions of herself who might one day increase her importance in the eyes of her neighbors. After Mrs. Mason advises her to teach her children
habits that would make “them more useful, both to themselves and you,” Mrs. MacClarty responds, “As for my bairns . . . if they pleasure me, they do weel eneugh” (134). Mrs. MacClarty does not consider her children’s futures, but instead shows that she believes her children’s purpose is to bring pleasure to her. Even though Mrs. Mason has just explained that better habits might be useful not just to her but also to the children themselves, she still shows no interest in trying any of Mrs. Mason’s advice. Her refusal to listen to Mrs. Mason shows that her focus is not on finding ways to benefit her children, but on how they will benefit her. She sees any sort of change as extra work for herself. She overlooks or excuses her children’s misbehavior and takes sides with her children against their father. She is concerned only with the present and does not consider how current behaviors might affect her children’s futures.

In contrast, the fond mother dedicates herself to her children’s futures and is willing to discommode them now in order to guarantee them the best possible future. Mrs. Morison is a foil to Mrs. MacClarty as she represents the fond mother who loves her children dearly, but is unwilling to overlook their flaws and wishes to educate them to the best of her ability. When Mrs. Mason tells Mrs. Morison that she will teach her daughters three rules for becoming useful servants, Mrs. Morison stops Mrs. Mason in order to call her husband to listen to this important advice: “‘Come, William, and hear Mrs Mason tell our lassies a’ the duties of a servant’” (194). She feels this is an important occasion and makes sure the whole family is there to hear these rules. She makes her children’s education of primary importance and even places intellectual nourishment above physical nourishment, forcing the family to wait for dinner until after Mrs. Mason shares her advice with the girls. The fond mother is the mother-figure that shows true interest in her child’s future. Hamilton initially claims authority for the female intellect through the maternal connection, but she extends this authority farther by showing that Mrs. Mason’s
educational abilities are highly connected to the fact that she has never been a mother and thus has had the freedom for greater educational opportunities and experiences. Hamilton thus argues for the importance of women receiving better educations in order to fulfill roles as educators of their children, as most peasant women will not have the opportunities of seeking out an education as Mrs. Mason has done. Until such opportunities become more readily available to these mothers, this role can be fulfilled by a woman educationist who has made education her profession, as Mrs. Mason has.

Mrs. Mason, the ideal preceptress in the tale, has been wholly educated by women outside of any formal learning environment. Her education implies the relative insignificance of the classroom in educating women, which also suggests Hamilton’s more conservative politics. Hamilton is not necessarily arguing for equal access to masculine forms of education for women, but instead proposing a female-centered, woman-powered educational system that offers greater opportunities for women while also benefiting the nation as a whole. Betty Mason’s education begins in the home of her mother who taught her “to subdue [her] own proud spirit, and to be tractable and obedient” while also teaching her Christian principles, the ability to read, and how to knit (60). These simple and pragmatic lessons taught from the heart of a good but simple mother enable Betty to obtain a position as a servant at Hill Castle which eventually leads to greater educational and personal opportunities. Hamilton places the weight of all Mrs. Mason’s eventual success on these few early years with her mother. By focusing her efforts on educating her daughter’s inner self, she raises a daughter who is educable and who takes every possible opportunity to increase her knowledge.

Betty Mason’s early education allows her to seek out positive educational opportunities throughout her life. She believes “our progress in every thing depends upon our diligence, and as
even in childhood we soon learn what we resolve to learn” (64). Mrs. Mason’s history shows how this diligence allows her to have great influence and gives her the opportunity to improve her situation in society. Betty enters Hill Castle with the desire to learn everything that her superiors teach her and she eagerly grasps any learning that comes her way. She quickly learns the needlework Mrs. Jackson teaches her and becomes very proficient which eventually allows her to work with the dowager countess “in the embroidering of a set of chair-covers, which were to be done in a fancy way of her own contrivance” (64). She thus learns the fancywork of the upper class and shows her mistress her abilities and diligence through her work. When she is moved to assist the housemaid, Molly, she quickly learns her new tasks and her willingness to learn encourages Molly to “take pains with [her]” (65). Mrs. Mason admits that she has “often since found the advantage of having learned from her the best way of doing all sorts of household work” (65-66). Hamilton thus shows that women’s expertise has great value. Molly teaches her orderly way of doing the housework to Betty Mason who later shares this knowledge with the MacClartys, the Morisons and many other families in Glenburnie. Hamilton shows that women need greater educational opportunities, but she also shows that women in all areas of society have many valuable things to teach others. Molly’s way of doing her household chores, Betty Mason and her mother’s knitting abilities, and Mrs. Jackson’s needlework are all talents that need to be shared with other women. Hamilton’s portrayal of these scenes of education shows a separate, female education that is distinct from the masculine education of power as it implies cooperation between women of varying classes. Before Lord Lintop comes to live with his grandmother, Hill Castle represents a female educational institution as Betty Mason learns from women in all positions in society while within the confines of the home. She learns from the head servant, Mrs. Jackson, from the housekeeper, Molly, from the poor relation, Miss
Osburne, and even from the lady of the house. While this educational system is not without its challenges, as shown in Mrs. Jackson’s jealousy and the dowager countess’s lack of concern for Betty’s comfort while sitting for hours without breaks, it still represents a microcosm of Hamilton’s ideal educational system for women. Women from all levels in society aid in the education of young Betty, giving her both an intellectual and a practical education that is specifically female. This education prepares her for the more strenuous and more significant roles she will soon take on as the governess of the four Meriton children and the eventual reformer of Glenburnie.

When Miss Osburne, a poor cousin of the countess, comes to live at Hill Castle, Betty Mason has another opportunity to increase her education. She feels a kinship with Miss Osburne and enjoys serving her. Betty states “[m]y attention did not escape her notice, and O how richly did she repay it! Finding that I read indifferently, and not so as to understand what I read, she proposed giving me a daily lesson” (70). Miss Osburne recognizes the efforts Betty makes for her and desires to pay her back in any way she can. She pays her back by offering what she has – her superior education. Betty has to work harder to get this education, as she must get up earlier to make sure she does not fall behind on any of her chores, which shows the high value she places on the opportunity. Through her relationship with Miss Osburne, Betty “not only learned to read with propriety, to write a tolerable hand, and to cast accounts; but what was more valuable than all these, from her [she] learned to think” (70). Thus, Miss Osburne opens up her mind and helps her to move from simply attaining knowledge to an understanding of how to learn. In addition, Miss Osburne helps her grow in her Christian faith as she “taught [her] to explore [her] own heart” (70). From Miss Osburne, Betty learns to examine herself and thus learns how to further educate herself. Mrs. Mason claims “it was naught until I had learned from
this dear young lady to search the scriptures for instruction, instead of running them over as a 
task, that Christian principles were rooted in my heart” (70). She advances from the simple moral 
behaviors her mother had taught her to a more complex and significant Christian faith. In this 
short scene, Hamilton shows that education is absolutely necessary for moral growth and 
 improvement as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Brunton also believe. Betty claims she is unable 
to reason for herself until this friend teaches her how to think. She learns the importance of self-
 improvement and how to examine her own mind and heart in order to root out any dangerous 
ideas or feelings that might negatively affect her in the future. She learns to study the Bible 
rather than just read it, which teaches her how to be a critical reader not only of texts but of 
people and situations. These lessons while she is still young enable her to become a lifelong 
learner as she continues to educate herself and improve her mind throughout her life, despite the 
fact that she has very little access to educational materials. Hamilton here shows the 
responsibility of the upper classes for the education of the lower classes. Mrs. Mason could not 
have become the educationist and reformer she becomes had not Miss Osburne, and later Miss 
Malden, shared their knowledge with her. It is the responsibility of these women, and others like 
them, to offer better educations to those with fewer opportunities who are willing to learn. In 
addition, as I will show, both women ultimately receive recompense for their educational labors 
with Betty as Mrs. Mason eventually helps educate their descendants.

It is significant that although Miss Osburne is the educator in their relationship, Betty 
Mason, the simple servant girl, is also able to teach Miss Osburne. Miss Osburne was born into a 
higher station and has the advantages of education over Betty, yet she sees that Betty has learned 
something she has not: “you were thankful for getting leave to come to be a servant . . . what a 
lesson for me!” (69). Miss Osburne has lost her parents and is poorly treated by her relations, but
she is able to learn patience from the superior fortitude of Betty. These two girls of different social levels become friends through their shared feelings of loss and their shared love of education. Betty’s improved education eventually gives her the chance to become an independent woman, but this time of relative equality between the two girls also shows that social disparities are largely an effect of education. Through their shared experiences of loss and loneliness, they forge a bond that eventually enables Mrs. Mason to be treated as an equal and a friend in the Stewart household.

The class distinctions between young Betty Mason and Miss Osburne are further complicated when Mrs. Mason comes to the Stewart home at the beginning of the tale. She has now surpassed Miss Osburne in educational experience and takes every opportunity to educate and correct the two Stewart girls. She tells the younger daughter, Mary, “every one must have their trials; and were it not for the contrariety of dispositions and tempers, how few trials should we have to encounter in domestic life . . . and would neither exercise our patience, nor forbearance, nor fortitude” and reminds her to look to God for friend and guide (59). Later, Mrs. Mason also corrects both Bell and her husband, Mr. Mollins, which allows them to be “more reasonable and happy than [Mr. Stewart] had at one time any ground to expect they would ever be” (215). Mrs. Mason is now the educator of her old friend’s children. She offers wise advice to the well-educated daughter Mrs. Stewart left behind while also correcting the daughter that Mrs. Stewart failed to properly educate. While ostensibly the pupil when they first became friends, Mrs. Mason is now the educator in Mrs. Stewart’s house and does more towards correcting the older Stewart daughter, Bell, than Mrs. Stewart ever had the opportunity or ability to do. Thus, women’s educational roles and responsibilities continue throughout life and can affect a great many people. The short time Miss Osburne spent educating a young servant girl eventually has
an extremely important effect on her own children years after her death. In addition, Miss Osburne’s educational work has wider reaching effects than she could ever have imagined when she began teaching Betty to read properly, to write, and to do accounts. By offering a better education to Betty, her work eventually touches the multitudes in Glenburnie. Thus, the education she gives to Betty flows back into her life by touching her family and the village a short distance from her home. In Hamilton’s work, women’s education and women’s educational practices are fluid and could perhaps be represented as circular which contrasts with the linear educational system offered to and by men.

Betty Mason’s strict Christian morality, taught by her mother and reinforced by Miss Osburne, helps her save her place in Hill Castle and eventually leads to a greater promotion in Lord Longlands’s household. He offers her a position as a waiting maid for his new wife when he learns she has been released for refusing to lie to protect his son. In this position, she obtains an even greater education both through Lady Longlands’s aunt and her own efforts at self-education. In Lord Longlands’s home, she “had the comfort of finding a very well regulated family, where, though there was a number of servants, there was no confusion, every one’s business being so well ordered, and so distinctly defined” (81). She thus sees a well-regulated home which helps form her ideas on cleanliness and order. She also learns that this order is due “to the advice of an old aunt, a maiden lady” who lives with Lady Longlands. This lady has her maid read to her at night due to her poor eyesight, but her maid despises the task and complains about it to Betty. Always anxious for opportunities of improvement, Betty Mason volunteers for the task because she realizes the woman has “a great deal of good sense” and “a sober and religious turn of mind” (81). Betty Mason willingly takes on a task that others find unbearable in order to have an opportunity to learn. Mrs. Mason later acknowledges that she “learned a great
deal from the comments of this good lady” and that “there was no sort of knowledge without its use” (82). Once again, Betty Mason seeks out learning in order to improve her situation and gets a far superior education than her station normally would allow due to her efforts. Miss Malden is willing to educate Betty because she observes that Betty “took pleasure in understanding what [she] read” (82). In showing her desire for learning, and in attempting to educate herself through reading to Miss Malden, she gains another friend in this family who takes pains to teach her.

Miss Malden, in turn, realizes she can help her niece by educating Betty. She recognizes that her niece’s major fault “was an extreme indolence of temper” and she “did what she could to counsel her against the consequences” (83). She has taught much to her niece, but sees that Lady Longlands’s indolence will likely keep her from passing this education on to her children, despite Miss Malden’s attempts to counsel her. She instead offers her knowledge to Betty Mason and even recommends that the care of the nursery be given to Betty. Once again, Hamilton shows the importance of the female in education. This wise aunt, knowing she will soon die, wants to ensure her grandnieces and grandnephews receive the best education possible. She doubts that their mother is up to the task, so when she finds an intelligent, educable woman in the household, she prepares her to take on the task. In so doing, she not only saves these children from becoming the spoiled, heartless man their eldest brother becomes, but her appointment of Mrs. Mason eventually saves the whole family from tragedy.

Miss Malden only appears in the story for approximately three pages, but her importance to the plot is significant. Hamilton suggests that this aunt has superintended her niece’s education and has advised her how to organize a large house and direct her large staff of servants. Thus, an elderly, unmarried woman who appears simply to be living off the bounty of her niece’s wealthy husband is given a role of extreme significance in the story. Miss Malden appears to be a cast-off
character, as she likely would have been viewed in society. Having failed to charm a man into marriage in her youth, she appears to have nothing to leave her niece upon her death but advice. She has no fortune, no children and nothing to pass on. However, Hamilton shows that this maiden aunt has something of extreme worth to pass on – her knowledge. She has helped raise her niece into the kind woman that she is and she also prepares Mrs. Mason to take on an extremely important role in the lives of her niece’s children. Miss Malden only meets one of her grandnieces, Harriet, as she dies when the girl is only six week old. However, through the moral and intellectual lessons Miss Malden gives to both her niece and Mrs. Mason, she passes on a strong moral legacy to the next generation of her family. Her family rewards her efforts by becoming model members of society who represent what the aristocracy should attempt to be at the end of the novel. Miss Malden’s role in education also prefigures Mrs. Mason’s eventual role. Mrs. Mason will also be an elderly, unmarried woman who would seem unlikely to have an impact in society as she has no political connections and no male relatives. However, Mrs. Mason copies Miss Malden in going to live with a relative and attempting to assist in the education of her cousin and her cousin’s children. When her attempts fail, she spreads her educational talents much farther and helps reform a community. Thus, the informal education offered by an upper class woman to a servant again appears in the tale, showing the responsibility of the upper classes for the educations of the lower orders and the great significance such actions may have in society at large.

Hamilton’s repeated portrayals of members of the aristocracy educating the lower orders suggest her belief that this is a responsibility of the upper classes, which reflects the educational system enacted in Scotland during the Reformation. Protestant reformers believed in the importance of the individual experiencing God’s Word for themselves and thus felt that all
people should have the ability to read in order to be followers of God. The Scottish Parliament passed acts for national education beginning in 1616 which required landowners to support parish schools in support of the goal of universal literacy. While this ideal was far from realized, this national system of education was a source of pride for Scottish people and G. Clark, in 1972, claimed Scotland had “the most enlightened peasantry in the world” (qtd. in Houston 4). In addition, Lawrence Stone argued that Scotland was “one of the best educated countries in Europe” with an educational system “catering for an unusually wide range of social classes” (qtd. in Houston 8). While R. A. Houston, T.M. Devine and many others have criticized such optimistic and far reaching conclusions, showing the literacy rates in Scotland to be on par with those in England and throughout Europe, critics still discuss the significance of such an early national system of education in the national consciousness. This system of education was a source of national pride and Hamilton draws on this in her novel. She reminds her upper class readers of their legal and moral responsibility to the laboring poor on their estates by showing members of the aristocracy who become involved in the education of the lower orders. In fact, when Mr. Meriton takes over the Longlands estate after the death of his brother, he visits Glenburnie to inspect and approve the school Mrs. Mason and Mr. Morison oversee. Hamilton implies that he will continue to monitor the school and community which proves his suitability as the new Lord Longlands and as a representative of enlightened aristocracy.

Mrs. Mason becomes an excellent director of children because of her willingness to learn: “I knew nothing of the management of children, but resolved to fulfil the trust to the best of my abilities, and to spare no pains to learn the best modes of treating them” (Hamilton, Cottagers 83). She educates herself on how to best manage the nursery, because “[i]n order to be able to instruct them, I was at pains to instruct myself” (84). In order for her to educate the next
generation of lords and ladies, she must first teach herself the material necessary for their
educations. Hamilton shows the necessity of educating women to manage and teach children, but
shows that this education may come from unconventional sources, like Mrs. Mason’s efforts at
self-instruction and self-improvement. Through her extensive reading on the subject, Mrs. Mason
devises a way of teaching reading to the children. She gives them “very short lessons,” and she
makes them “attend to their book while they were engaged with it, and took care that they should
never find it wearisome” (84). Mrs. Mason recognizes the capabilities of her pupils and makes
sure that she keeps her lessons short and entertaining in order to keep their attention. She varies
the activities so the children do not become bored with the material. This system of education is
in direct contradiction to rote classroom learning that leaves children bored and leads to
misbehavior, as Mr. Gourley points out later in the tale. Mrs. Mason also stresses the importance
of strict honesty in her treatment of children. She is disgusted when Mrs. Dickens “made herself
agreeable by flattering [Lady Longlands] about the children, whom she praised as if they had not
been human creatures” (85). Hamilton, through Mrs. Mason, lampoons the idealized view of
childhood and reminds the reader that children are “human creatures” who must be treated as
such. While Hamilton supports associationist philosophy based on Locke’s view of education,
she rejects the view of the child as a “blank slate.” As Goodman points out:

[Hamilton] maintains that early associations that affect the heart are rendered
permanent and have consequences for the later development of the intellect. This
enables her to reverse a contemporary viewpoint which she regards as masculine,
that early education is a ‘blank’ and that education begins with the development
of the intellect. Instead, she portrays early education as of paramount importance
and with it she stresses the importance of the preceptress. (286)
Mrs. Mason shares the truth about the children partly for their sakes but also to educate their mother. Since Mrs. Mason “wish[ed] my lady to throw her praise and blame into the proper scales, [she] was at pains to point out their faults, as well as their perfections” (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 85). This same attribute is later shown in Mrs. Morison who “though she loved her children as fondly and as dearly as any mother in the world,” she never tried to “defend their faults” (195). Hamilton criticizes both Mrs. MacClarty and Mr. Stewart who defend their children’s faults or simply excuse them away instead of taking whatever opportunities they have to correct their children’s bad behavior. Mrs. MacClarty regularly defends her children, unwilling that any one should think badly of them, and even hides their flaws from their father. When she begs Mrs. Mason not to tell Mr. MacClarty that Meg skipped school, Mrs. Mason responds “Alas . . . you know not how much you are your child’s enemy!” (127). Hamilton repeatedly shows that love and friendship must be connected to a person’s inner value. The housekeeper who helped Betty Mason get a job at Hill Castle tells her she “would always be [Betty’s] friend as long as [she] was good, and obedient” (61) and Lord Longlands later asks his son “will you be a good boy . . . that I may love you?” (77). Hamilton believes that appreciation for a child should be based on the individual’s merits and behavior, not simply offered due to situation or relationship. Affection must be earned and should be offered as a reward for good behavior. Mrs. Mason and Mr. Morison introduce such a system of rewards for the children in their school.

The extended backstory of Mrs. Mason highlights Hamilton’s belief in the importance of early education. She comes to the Stewart home as an independent woman who has found great success and freedom due to diligent service to the Longlands family. However, all of her success is traced back to her mother’s influence on her before she reached the age of ten. Thus, early
education is of utmost importance in raising children and a mother or other preceptress must be properly prepared to administer this education. Mary Stewart is surprised by Mrs. Mason’s extensive knowledge and the wise advice she offers. Mary states, “You must, like [my mother] have had the advantage of an excellent education. . . [B]ut I understood that you were not, when young, in a situation in which you could be supposed to receive the benefit of much instruction. I now see you had greater advantages than I imagined” (60). Mary connects a good education with a particular social position, but Mrs. Mason contradicts this idea both with her words and the history of her actual education. Mrs. Mason acknowledges that “[her] advantages indeed were great” but states that her greatest advantage in life was that she “had a good mother” who oversaw her moral education (60). She takes the words Mary uses and turns them around, taking the power out of one’s social position and tying it directly to one’s moral qualities which she argues are the result of early education. Mrs. Mason believes that her advantage was that she was early taught to be a Christian and submit herself to God and others. This advantage becomes more striking throughout the novel as Hamilton portrays many young people who are ruined by the lack of such an influence when young. Interestingly, she does not specifically indict the children who grow up as vain, conceited, willful children, but instead places the blame on their bad educations. Their delinquency is not shown to be simply the fault of the individuals, but the fault of the parents who fail to properly educate them and society which fails to offer better educational opportunities to its teachers and parents.

The importance of early education is also voiced by Mary Stewart who was educated early by her mother, the former Miss Osburne, and now only desires to “follow the example that was set us by the best of mothers” as she is certain she and her sister “cannot have a better model for [their] conduct” (53). In fact, Mary has taken up where her mother left off, acting as a mother
figure for her two younger brothers and even her elder sister. She attempts to instill some of the virtues she learned from her mother into Bell, hoping to correct the behavior of her sister. When Bell reproaches Mary for her kind treatment of Mrs. Mason, whom she believes below their notice, Mary responds “in a mild tone of expostulation,” asking her what could be “improper” in her behavior toward Mrs. Mason (52). While both gentle and loving toward her sister, she defends her own conduct and endeavors to correct her sister’s bad behavior. When Bell later complains she has nothing to wear to visit her genteel friend, Mrs. Flinders, Mary points out that she would not have this difficulty if she took care of her items. She advises Bell: “your things are very good . . . if you would be persuaded to keep them properly” (58). When she is helping her sister fix her hair for her intended outing, Mary “could not avoid taking the opportunity of giving her a few cautionary hints, with regard to forming hasty intimacies with the strangers she met at Mount Flinders” (58-59). Mary sees the danger that may befall her sister and attempts to warn her. She realizes that their father is unable to control her and attempts to become the mother-figure for her sister. Unfortunately, her advice falls on deaf ears and Bell ends up eloping with one of these “strangers she met at Mount Flinders,” Mr. Mollins.

Before her death, Mrs. Stewart had seen the virtues of her youngest daughter and had made sure that she left her two sons “to [Mary’s] particular care” after her death. Mary clearly recognizes the significance of this task and respects the importance of properly educating her brothers as she explains to Mrs. Mason: “‘I deeply feel . . . the importance of this trust; and I daily pray to God for strength to execute it: but, what, alas! can I do for my brothers, but give them the best advice I can, when they are at home with me, and write to them when they are at school?’” (59). Mary has been instructed at home by a well-educated, virtuous mother and continues to seek wise counsel from her father, Mrs. Mason, and God. When Mrs. Mason begins
her story, she fears that Mary will be bored, but Mary begs her to continue: “‘I take a great interest in it . . . and I have learned from it more of the consequences of early education, than from many of the books I have read upon the subject’” (63). With her brothers entrusted to her special care and direction, Mary takes a great interest in education and, even at a young age, studies the topic in order to be the best educator she can be for her brothers. She has searched out “many” books on the topic, which shows her dedication to her task. When she finds in Mrs. Mason a wealth of new information and advice, she begs her to continue her story. Mary takes every opportunity available to learn more about education so that she may be better prepared to teach her brothers and, eventually, her own children. Mrs. Mason had done the same when she was entrusted with the care of children, studying all she could find while preparing for her task as educator of the Meriton children. Both she and Mr. Gourley recommend the same actions to Mr. Morison when they ask him to become the teacher at the Glenburnie school. Mr. Gourley tells Mr. Morison he is the perfect candidate as he “will honestly enquire, and candidly follow, what appears to be the best, nor obstinately refuse to adopt improvements that have been suggested by others, when their utility has been placed beyond a doubt” and explains “by candid enquiry, and vigilant attention, you will soon become qualified” (201). Mr. Gourley thus offers wise advice for Mr. Morison in undertaking the direction of the school. Hamilton points out that he does not necessarily need a masculine education to undertake the task, but must educate himself on the best methods and practices for educating children. By offering this wise advice to a male teacher and showing him to be far superior to the learned Mr. Brown who had formerly run the school, Hamilton subtly points back to her repeated scenes of women educating themselves in preparation for roles of authority over children. This repeated motif of women educating themselves in order to educate children points to her argument in *Letters on Education*
where she states “the woman who would educate her children with success, must begin by educating herself” and also highlights her belief that women should study educational theory in order to be better educators (qtd. in Grogan 13). As Claire Grogan points out, “Hamilton goes even further to suggest that females should not only read but they should also study theories of moral development – that they have a responsibility to do so, as they provide the early education of children” (14). Both Mary Stewart and Mrs. Mason study to educate themselves before undertaking the educations of children.

The importance of female power in educating children is portrayed in a number of scenes throughout the novel that juxtapose a well-meaning educational act of a father-figure with an anti-educational act done by a female figure of authority. In all such scenes, the negative education completed by the woman has a greater effect on the child than the positive education of the father. Hamilton thus shows that it is the female who has the most influence on the education of children, for good or ill. The first educations shown in the novel are those of Bell and Mary Stewart, the middle class daughters of a farmer who assists in the management of the Longlands estate. The daughters represent two competing styles of education and clearly show the domestic education of the younger daughter, Mary, to be the far superior education. The older daughter, Bell, was spoiled by living with her grandmother, who “could not discriminate” between indulgence of the heart and “the indulgence of the passions, which engenders pride and selfishness” (Hamilton, Cottagers 99). When Bell returns home after her grandmother’s death, Mr. Stewart “saw that she was too unmanageable for her mother’s gentle spirit to control; and [he] therefore urged sending her to a school” where “instead of getting quit of her [b]ad habits, she lost the good that counterbalanced them” (99). He sees her flaws, but is unable to correct her because he “cannot bear being treated by the child [he] doat[s] on as a tyrant” (98). He lacks the
strength, patience, and fortitude to correct his daughter and instead gives in to her whims and leaves all attempts at correction to his younger daughter, Mary. Mr. Stewart is highly guilty for Bell’s faulty education and realizes his error. Mr. Stewart, “though he saw, and hourly felt, the consequence of his indulgence, wanted the firmness that was necessary to enforce obedience, and to guide the conduct of this forward and self-willed child” (56). Throughout the tale, Hamilton clearly shows the dangers of indulging children’s self-will. She shows that even the righteous Mr. Stewart fails with his daughter because he does not have the skill, knowledge, and fortitude to counteract the bad educations she received from her grandmother, at the boarding-school, and continues to receive at Mount Flinders. Mrs. Mason tells him that he might “by a little firmness, teach her the propriety of submitting to your will” (99), but he is unwilling to even attempt because he “fear[s] it is now too late to think of curing it” (99). He takes the opportunity of educating her away from her mother, believing Bell is “too unmanageable” and sends her away where all of her bad habits are confirmed. He thus gives up his control over his daughter’s education and thus damages her future prospects because of her bad education.

The portrayal of the Stewart family also shows that family dynamics play an important role in education. Mary has a very close relationship with her father, who calls her “a dear good lassie, and a comfort to his heart” (52). No similar words of approbation are ever spoken to Bell by her father. It is clear that she is jealous of Mary and she “thought that every praise bestowed on her sister, conveyed a reproach to her” (52). Instead of guiding his two children, Mr. Stewart pits them against each other which forces Bell to look elsewhere for the love and respect she desires. Instead of attempting to correct his daughter’s bad education, he ignores it and places the blame on both the boarding-school she attended and her time spent with relations. When he is displeased by Bell’s treatment of Mrs. Mason, he does not choose to correct her, but instead
leaves the task to Mary: “Tell your sister that I say so; and that if she does not chuse to treat Mrs Mason as my guest ought to be treated, she had better keep her room” (55). During a moment when he might have engaged his daughter in a conversation about the merits of Mrs. Mason and perhaps corrected some of her ideas, he instead sends her little sister to reprimand her. He gives the younger daughter a mother’s power in the house which essentially pushes Bell out of her proper place and encourages her to escape the home in whatever way possible. Before Mr. Stewart’s message is even delivered to Bell, however, Captain Mollins arrives to invite Bell to the Flinders’s for dinner and Bell gets her father’s permission to go “as she generally did” (56). Thus, her father’s strongly-worded message demanding her to change her behavior is never delivered and, despite her bad behavior and mistreatment of Mrs. Mason, she is rewarded by getting exactly what she desires. Mr. Stewart’s poor control of his home also appears when Mary tells her sister that their father “wishes us always to be dressed according to our station, and our fortune” (57, italics mine). Mr. Stewart does not teach his children the importance of dressing in a way that represents their social position nor does he enforce his rule. Instead, he simply “wishes” his daughters to dress and behave a certain way. While his desires are willingly obeyed by Mary, they are flippantly ignored by Bell who knows she can make her father acquiesce to her wishes whenever she wants. Thus, the father’s positive example cannot counteract the negative education Bell has already received, partly due to his own unwillingness and partly due to his choice to pass the educational authority to his youngest daughter who is unable to gain her sister’s respect. It is not until Mrs. Mason returns with her knowledge of Mr. Mollins’s youth and family that Bell finally recognizes another’s superior knowledge and accepts correction.

This motif of negative female education overpowering positive male education also appears in the home of the great in the poor education of Lord Lintop. After Betty Mason is
convicted of lying by the dowager countess and released from her position, Lord Longlands returns and decides to investigate the matter further. He questions both Betty and Jenny, the boy’s maid, regarding the incident and then calls upon his son. In this scene, Hamilton shows that children must be taught to speak the truth and demonstrates how Lord Longlands encourages his wayward son. He begins by reminding Lord Lintop of “the story he had told him of the little boy who always spoke the truth” (77). Lord Longlands uses this moment to teach his son a valuable lesson about truth by pointing to a specific tale the child knows and allowing the child to compare himself to the little boy in the story. He has prepared his son for this lesson by reading moral tales to the boy. Lord Longlands rewards his son when he finally tells the truth and makes the child observe the consequences of bad behavior by pointing out Jenny: “mark the consequences of being naughty. Look at that woman there . . . see how she is overwhelmed by shame and disgrace, for having wickedly persevered in telling a wicked lie, which she probably thought would never be detected. But liars never escape detection” (77-78). He further reinforces the message by forcing his son to apologize to Mrs. Mason in the presence of Jenny, his father, his grandmother, and the servants.

Although Lord Longlands shows superior morality and wisdom in this instance with his eldest son, his attempts at educating him do not counterbalance the boy’s extended time under the care of a maid who could only control him by bribing him with sweets or frightening him with tales of hobgoblins and spirits. Mrs. Mason believes that Lord Lintop was ruined by Jenny’s bad influence and asserts “that much of his oddity, and of his bad temper, of which the world talks so much, might all be traced to the bad management of Jenny Thomson” (71). The boy has a good father who demonstrates strong paternal authority and good educational practices, but he is unable to save the child from the bad influences of the maid who took care of him when he
was young. Hamilton implies that Jenny’s role as educator has a much greater influence on the child than the role of father. Jenny was given a role of authority that is akin to the relationship between mother and child and it carries more weight with Lord Lintop because he has lost his mother. Lord Lintop’s bad character is largely due to the fact that Jenny superintended the earliest years of his life, which are the most formidable years according to Hamilton’s educational theories. In her efforts to keep her place and insinuate herself into the graces of the lady of the house, Jenny lies about the child and even encourages him to lie to protect her. While the tale clearly shows the dangers of such a person’s interactions with a child, it also indicts the social structure that makes her feel she has no choice. Jenny tells Betty Mason:

I know more of the world than you do, Mrs. Wisdom, and can tell you, that you will not find many masters or mistresses that do not like better to be imposed upon than to know the truth, when it does not happen to be agreeable. How long think you I should keep my place, were I to tell all the truths about every thing that Lord Lintop does? (73)

The dowager countess confirms this when she believes Jenny’s lie and dismisses Mrs. Mason from her service. She is further enraged when Miss Osburne asks her to “take a little time for enquiry before you condemn” and shows no leniency when Miss Osburne is able to prove that at least part of Jenny’s story is false (74). Hamilton repeatedly acknowledges the dangers of servants having control over children’s education but also shows that much of the danger comes from the behavior the upper classes foster within their own homes and parental neglect in overseeing the educations of their children. Even Lord Longlands, though shown as a good father, does not give sufficient attention to his son and the woman in whose trust he placed the
boy. He regrets that Jenny was ever near his son: “Go, vile woman, -- had I known your character, I should sooner have seen him in his grave, than placed him under your care” (78). Hamilton hints that her character could have been ascertained with more attention from his father, and his bold statement that the boy would have been better off dead than under her care proves to be true in the tale. After Lord Longlands’ death, his eldest son throws off his stepmother and half-siblings and dismantles the cottages on the estate, which, according to Claire Grogan, “is reminiscent of bad feudalism” as he “breaks the social connection between rich and poor, labourer and landlord” (Grogan 135). In fact, nothing good comes from his line until this child is in his grave and Mr. Meriton succeeds to the inheritance. Thus, Lord Lintop’s early faulty education scars him for life as he becomes an uneducable, heartless tyrant as an adult.

Mrs. MacClarty is also portrayed as a bad mother who is ultimately to blame for the failures of her three younger children and her failure to accept Mrs. Mason’s educational offers, despite her husband’s belief that “[t]here’s a great spice o’ gude sense in what Mrs Mason has said” (Hamilton, Cottagers 134). When Mrs. Mason first arrives at her cousin’s house with the Stewarts, Mary sees Mrs. MacClarty working to prepare the tea and states “I think . . . you might make your daughters save you that trouble” (106). Mary sees a task that the young girls could easily be doing in order to help their mother and advises such. Mrs. MacClarty responds that “they have not been used to it; they have eneugh time for wark yet” (106). She refuses to make her children do any work that they don’t want to do, because she knows they will have to work the rest of their lives. Mrs. Mason also sees this danger and advises that “young people can never begin too soon” which comes from her own educational experiences both as a pupil and as an educator of children (107). Mrs. Mason repeatedly tries to show the family how their lives could be improved by changing small daily behaviors and enforcing discipline on the children. When
Mrs. MacClarty is sick with fever, Mrs. Mason takes over the management of the household and through her efforts, the MacClarty girls “were gradually brought to order, and finding they had no one to make excuses for their disobedience, quietly performed their allotted tasks” (156). With their mother out of the picture, the girls benefit from Mrs. Mason’s system and even “began to taste the pleasure of praise, and encouraged by approbation, endeavoured to deserve it” (156). Hamilton shows that despite their bad education, there is a chance for these girls to reform, but once their mother is well again, they return to their former habits. Mrs. Mason’s positive influence, even when backed by their father’s advice, is insufficient to counteract the education given them by their mother.

In Mr. MacClarty, Mrs. Mason found “much plain good sense, and a greater stock of information than she could have supposed within his reach” and sees that he is rational, intelligent, and pious (115). With such a man at the helm of the family, she feels confident of her eventual success in reforming the children. She seeks first to educate the father so that she will have his influence with the children. In order to help the farmer understand the importance of education, she appeals to what he best understands – farming. She asks him how he would root out briers and thorns that had taken over a field. Once she has him thinking upon this line, she asks:

And do you imagine . . . that the human soul requires less care in cultivating it than is necessary to your field? Is it merely by teaching them to say their questions, or even teaching them to read, that the briers and thorns of pride and self-will will be rooted up from your children’s minds? (125)
Mrs. Mason reasons with the farmer in a language he understands, employing a metaphor that speaks to what he deals with every day. She continues in this vein, explaining that a child must be raised in a home that disciplines bad behavior before it takes root and rewards good behavior so that it might grow as part of the child’s character. She calls this education “the preparation of the soil” and explains that this prepares a child to develop a moral character and eventually submit himself to God (126). While he does not immediately come to her way of thinking, after watching his eldest son run away and join the military and then be dragged off as a deserter, he finally sees that Mrs. Mason is right and his children are in great danger because of their lack of discipline and proper education. As he is dying, he calls his children to him and begs them to reform: “I have grievously wranged you, I maun confess; the thoughts of it is heavy on my heart. For though I weel knew the corruption that was in your natures, I did not teach you to subdue it. . . I cannot die in peace till I warn you of the consequences of continuing in a contentious and disobedient spirit” (148). He realizes his errors and tries to correct his children, but it is too late. His good example while living and his words of admonition while dying are not enough to counteract the pride and self-satisfaction of their mother and the lessons she has failed to give them. Her greater influence in the lives of her children leads to the transportation of the eldest son and eventually leads to the ruin of the three younger children despite the fact that they grew up with a good, pious, well-meaning father. Meg ends up pregnant by a workman who refuses to marry her. Leaving her child with her mother, she runs off to Edinburgh, “and was never heard of more” (215). Jean’s history is not revealed to the reader; however, the narrator advises that her “conduct was in some respects less culpable [than her sister’s]; but her notions of duty were not such as to afford much comfort to her mother’s heart” (215). The lives of the MacClarty girls
mirror that of Lord Lintop. All three are written out of the story as reprobates due to the bad educations they received from female figures of authority.

Despite the negative portrayal of Mrs. MacClarty, Hamilton shows that she still has important abilities to share with society if she can be convinced to teach them to her daughters and consent to be instructed by a woman with more experience in education and cleanliness. When Mrs. Mason first enters the home, she sees “a quantity of yarn hung up in bunches, affording proof of the goodwife’s industry” (108). In describing Mrs. MacClarty’s efforts in making cheese, the narrator points out that “all was done well and cleverly” (132). When Mrs. Mason takes over the work of the dairy while Mrs. MacClarty is ill, she still uses her cousin’s methods and recipes; she just performs the work in a more orderly and cleanly fashion. Even when Mrs. MacClarty and her daughters are kicked out of the house by Robert, they make a good salary by their abilities at “flowering muslin” (215). Hamilton shows that the MacClarty women have talents to offer society, but they are wasted due to their faulty educations and unwillingness to learn new ways. *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* thus validates women’s activities and importance in all levels of society and shows that their abilities need to be shared through educating one another. Hamilton does not portray education as simply the work or the prerogative of the upper classes, nor does she give the upper classes a greater claim to virtue, happiness, or education. Instead, she connects virtue and happiness directly with education and shows that they are available in every class in society. She shows that women in all levels of society have valuable contributions to make to their nation, whether it is Molly’s system of housekeeping, Miss Malden’s organization of an upper class household, or even Mrs. MacClarty’s abilities on a dairy farm. Each woman offers a unique and significant gift to her
society and through better educational opportunities and teaching one another, these gifts can be passed on to the next generation in society.

In the same way, Mrs. Mason eventually passes on her educational knowledge to the pupils at the Glenburnie school. She recognizes that “the female children of the poor had far less appearance of intelligence and sagacity than the males of the same age,” but Hamilton clearly shows that this difference is because “their education had been more neglected” (210). Mrs. Mason recognizes that the girls’ abilities have not been called out as they are regularly “without object or occupation” (210). She keeps the girls constantly busy during the day by “contriv[ing] varieties of occupation” and teaching them efficient ways of completing domestic duties. She even teaches them to use their reason by making “all the girls examine and sit in judgment on the work that was done . . . as a means of calling into action their activity and discernment” (210).

As Mrs. Mason improves the educations and the behavior of the girls in the school, reform begins to spread throughout Glenburnie as “[t]he girls exerted themselves . . . to effect a reformation within doors” (213). The children make such drastic improvements that when the Longlands family comes to visit, “the village presented such a picture of neatness and comfort, as excelled all that in the course of their travels they had seen” (213). Thus, Mrs. Mason’s efforts at self-education lead to outward reform as she eventually helps improve an entire community.

As Goodman notes:

Mrs Mason . . . illustrates the way in which national regeneration begins with women within the individual family; for even when reform has its origins in Mrs Mason’s exertions with the girls in the schoolroom, it is transmitted back into individual families and from there outwards to the rest of society. (285)
And, before Mrs. Mason retires from her important position of authority in the Glenburnie school, she makes sure she has trained up a replacement, just as Miss Malden trained her up to oversee the educations of her grandnieces and grandnephews. Once Mrs. Mason “perceiv[es] that [Mr. Morison’s] daughters were now qualified to succeed her in the charge of the school,” she finally retires to the cottage the Longlands family has prepared for her (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 215).

It is significant that Hamilton does not make her ideal preceptress, Mrs. Mason, a genius of any sort. Mrs. Mason is not a prodigy nor does she have the advantages of a superior formal education or a powerful social position. She is simply a servant girl who has taken advantage of her opportunities and learned as much as she can about the work she is employed to do. Through the portrayal of Mrs. Mason, Hamilton points out that this important role is available to all women and should not be reserved for certain classes or certain types of women. Mrs. Mason is not a literary genius; she does not write educational theory and has no political power or political connections. She is a simple woman for whom education is paramount and whose educational activities have completely revolutionized her life and the lives of those she touches.

While Hamilton clearly shows the importance of education to all levels in society, she does not offer a blanket educational program to improve all ranks in society. She clearly supports the educational system in Scotland, but feels that it should be more carefully superintended by a wise educationist and the landowners whose taxes support the parish schools. She shows that such improvements in education will benefit the individual, the community and, by implication, the nation, but she also shows that education must be earned and used appropriately. Mrs. Mason has educational opportunities throughout the tale, but Hamilton points out that all of these educations come at a cost. In order to learn from Mrs. Jackson and Molly, Mrs. Mason must
humbly submit to their rule. In order to learn from Miss Osburne, she must first earn the young lady’s respect and then sacrifice by getting up earlier in order to have time for the lessons. She takes a chore another maid does not like in order to learn from Miss Malden. The punishments that Mr. Morison and Mrs. Mason impose on their misbehaving pupils at the Glenburnie school also highlight that education must be valued and may come at a cost. The offending child “was obliged to sit apart from his companions . . . without being permitted, while in disgrace, to look upon a book” (210). Part of the punishment of a disobedient child is not only to remove him from his companions, but to take away his right to read. He is not allowed to “look upon a book” as education is considered a reward that must be earned. Even though these children have greater access to education because of Scotland’s national system, Mrs. Mason and Mr. Morison make sure they understand that education is a privilege that must be respected and treated as valuable.

In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Hamilton portrays a particularly feminine form of education that operates outside of the masculinist educational system and political agenda. Mrs. Mason’s education has been performed solely by women combined with her own efforts and she has become an expert on education and even considers herself as such, although she has had no formal training. Mrs. Mason offers her instruction and experience to men and women of all classes, and when once she has assisted in their education, they remain devoted to her and her instruction throughout their lives, as shown in the case of Mr. Mollins and the Meriton children. This professional female offers an education of the heart that is aimed not at pedantry or power but reform and moral improvement. This education is an outgrowth of the domestic role as Mrs. Mason becomes a mother-figure to generations of Scottish children whose improved characters can be directly traced back to her schoolroom.
CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGION, EDUCATION AND FEMININITY IN MARY BRUNTON’S DISCIPLINE

As the titles of her two novels attest, Mary Brunton believes Self Control (1812) and Discipline (1814) are of the utmost importance in a girl’s moral education. The heroines of both these novels learn self-control and self-discipline in order to overcome the trials they face. In this chapter, I focus on Brunton’s second novel, Discipline, which traces the history of Ellen Percy who must learn self-discipline and true Christianity through a violent reversion and a subsequent series of painful lessons. Through the portrayal of Ellen’s education, Brunton shows education as a personal and internal process, focusing primarily on religious and moral behavior. However, she shows that a rational education is necessary for any internal or religious education. Brunton’s novels are overtly didactic which has worked to keep her work out of the canon. As Lisa Wood has pointed out, “poststructuralist criticism devalorizes the didactic – which depends on the transmission of a clear and single message – through its emphasis on plurality of meaning” and further argues that “[by] devaluing overtly didactic elements in fiction, these critics effectively locate conservative writing beyond the limits of the acceptably ‘literary’” (18). Due to the moral agenda of her works, Brunton’s novels have thus been subject to this devaluation and critics have tended to ignore her literary contributions. Brunton willingly confesses the moral purposes of her novels and even defends the charge that Discipline is “too religious,” stating “[f]or the great purpose of the book is to procure admission for the religion of a sound mind and of the Bible, where it cannot find access in any other form” (qtd. in Vallone 93). Her goal for writing her novels is moral and religious improvement, but this should not negate the value of her works. Studies of her heroines offer new and complex views on female education, power and
subjectivity during the early nineteenth-century. Martha Musgrove has pointed out that some critics “have become alert to the proto-feminist energies of her novels,” which points to a growing interest in her work (219). Brunton’s novels offer opportunities for much more significant work because she imbeds such “proto-feminist energies” into the seemingly simple and straightforward Evangelical novel form. Despite the didacticism and the obvious moral purpose of her novel, Brunton’s portrayal of Ellen’s character, her education and spiritual growth, and her movements through city and country assert the power of the female individual and open a space to the female that is outside the domestic sphere. Out in the world, Ellen Percy must undergo an education that is not a gendered, feminine education but is instead a rational, philosophical search for truth, purpose and survival.

Ellen, the protagonist of *Discipline*, and often taken to be the model for Jane Austen’s *Emma*, is the beautiful, spoiled daughter of Mr. Percy, a man who has made his fortune in trade. Mr. Percy is the son of an aristocratic father who died penniless and left him, his siblings and his mother destitute. His widowed mother was ignored by his father’s aristocratic family and they were left to fend for themselves after his death. Mr. Percy and his family experienced poverty and he now harbors resentment toward the society that threw him out, desiring to use his great success to punish and humble the class in society the he feels has wronged him. As such, he uses the two women in his life, his wife Frances and his daughter Ellen, as pawns in his game of pride. He marries the beautiful Frances Warburton, who is much younger than he, as a trophy and a symbol of what he has risen to. He is described as “captivated by the beauty” of Frances when he sees her at a parish church, so he follows her home, determined to make her his wife (Brunton, *Discipline* 196). His attentions frighten Frances, who “shrunk from her new lover” as he is thirty years older than she, which is the “least point of their dissimilarity” (197). However,
Mr. Percy is now accustomed to getting what he wants by using his wealth and is “sensible of no disparity but such as a settlement might counterbalance” (197). He offers larger settlements, including an annuity for Mrs. Warburton, trying to purchase a beautiful wife for himself. Frances eventually acquiesces after her mother’s many hints that Mr. Percy’s money will give her brother Edmund the chance to attend university and prove his genius. Frances is thus effectively coerced into a loveless marriage with Mr. Percy in order to benefit her brother. She finally acquiesces to marry a man thirty years older than she, a man she does not love, in order to support her brother and appease her mother. Brunton shows the futility of such maneuverings as Frances’s brother is not strong enough for university studies and dies shortly after her marriage to Mr. Percy. She is thus thrown away for a brother who does not even live long enough to reap the benefits.

Devastated by the loss of her brother, Mrs. Percy transfers “widowed affections” to her only child, which shows the empty relationship between her and Mr. Percy (197). Ellen is thus born into a wealthy but loveless family and it is these two flawed beings who have control over her early education.

Ellen’s selfish character and behavior are linked to the bad education she received as a child and she even states that one “may trace my faults to certain accidents in my early education” (3). Many moralist and educational writers have argued that early education is paramount in raising a child. As Lisa Wood has pointed out, childhood education is a more prominent theme in the works of Evangelical writers who view humanity as being born into original sin which must be weeded out by careful education and discipline in childhood. Ellen states that she “furnished an instance at least, if not a proof, of the corruption of human kind; being proud, petulant and rebellious” (3). With this statement, Brunton engages in the educational debate, arguing against the Lockean view of the “blank slate” as she clearly believes
in original sin. However, she still argues that childhood is a very formative time that needs to be superintended wisely. If a child’s education is not properly superintended, the later corrective education may be a very painful process. Due to the failure of her family to properly educate Ellen when she is young, it takes great violence to correct her education later in life. Ellen is not a Romantic innocent, but a weak human who must be molded into a moral and useful adult through careful education. Ellen, however, does not receive this important education. Her mother is too weak to discipline her and “shrunk from bestowing even merited reproof” (3). In narrating her story, Ellen recognizes that her mother “exercised a control too gentle over a spirit which needed to be reined by a firmer hand than hers” (3). This criticism of her mother comes from an adult Ellen who has now experienced the love a mother has for her children and has likely had to rein in the spirit of a wayward child. She sees that a firm hand was required in order to properly control her. When Ellen’s mother does discipline her, she quickly retreats when her daughter cries and Ellen usually ends up with “all the privileges of the party offended” (3). Ellen is rewarded excessively for her saucy wit, as her mother encourages stories of her witticisms from the servants and reports them to Mr. Percy in order to keep him at home in the evenings and occasionally bring him a modicum of pleasure.

Ellen hints at the strained relationship between her parents as a defense for her mother’s behavior toward herself: “To own the truth, my mother lay under strong temptation to report my sallies, for my father always listened to them with symptoms of pleasure. They sometimes caused his countenance to relax into a smile” (4). He takes pleasure in her sarcastic, witty abuse of her mother and the servants as it points to not only a strong mind, but to excessive pride, attributes he also possesses. Ellen describes her father as a man of business who views his home as a refuge that should be a place of “domestic peace and relaxation” and blames the bad
behavior of his daughter on his wife who he claims “can refuse her nothing” (6, 7). Yet, much of the faults of his daughter’s temper lay in his own view and treatment of Ellen. Her wit is one of the few things he praises in Ellen, yet even in his pleasure, his words convey his disappointment in her: “‘[i]t is a confounded pity she is a girl. If she had been of the right sort, she might have got into Parliament, and made a figure with the best of them. But now what use is her sense of?’” (4). This statement describes how Mr. Percy views Ellen and also implies a criticism of the education available to her. Because she has intelligence, which all characters recognize in her, but is not a boy, she is insubstantial to her father and ineffectual in society. It is only when she displays this wit – when she satisfies his pride – that she receives affection from her father. He thus begins to teach her little games of pride and power by encouraging her usage of wit, without promoting any other intellectual exercise. Ellen’s education by her father suggests Brunton’s criticism of the typical education of women, since they are taught a system where they are rewarded for the attention they can gain through their ‘accomplishments.’ Women are taught to compete with one another and Ellen’s father teaches her to compete with her wit, her wealth and her beauty. She also learns to connect happiness with wealth from her father who laughs at his wife’s fear for Ellen’s future, stating there is “‘no fear of her happiness. Won’t she have two hundred thousand pounds, and never know the trouble of earning it, nor need to do one thing from morning to night but amuse herself?’” (4). In Mr. Percy’s estimation, money equals happiness, especially for a woman who can have no social significance or purpose outside of the marriage market and the home. Mrs. Percy could have argued with her husband or explained her fears to her daughter, but instead she “made no answer” and because she fails to do so on multiple occasions, “a most just and desirable connection was formed in [Ellen’s] mind between the ideas of amusement and happiness, of labour and misery” (4). Ellen sees amusement as
something that can be purchased and directly connects the commodity of amusement with happiness and links any form of labor or work with ideas of misery, unhappiness and inferiority.

Only once does Ellen describe her mother using a “tone of calm command” and actually refusing her request despite Ellen screaming with all of her might (7). Her mother finally tells her no because Ellen has been ill and she fears a night at the theatre will make her worse. However, her father is more interested in his own comfort than his daughter’s health and he allows Ellen to go, stating “‘[t]he child will do herself more harm by roaring there, than by going to fifty plays’” (7). Mr. Percy thus steps in and actively contradicts his wife for the sake of his own feelings and because he is “out of all patience” with the racket his daughter is making (7). His statement that she would be safer at a play than screaming at home proves wrong as she comes back with a severe fever which almost ends her life and eventually results in the death of her mother. Mrs. Percy does not contradict her husband and both she and Ellen suffer because of his folly and her weakness. The marital discord between her parents damages any attempts at discipline or control and eventually brings Mrs. Percy’s influence over Ellen’s life to an end. Brunton thus shows the contradiction between a woman’s domestic role and the feminine virtue of submission, a contradiction Mary Wollstonecraft strongly criticizes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft argues, “[t]o be a good mother—a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers” (233). Mrs. Percy knows that Ellen could be in danger, and is sadly proven right, but she has always been taught to submit to her husband and others in authority. She foolishly, and meekly, submits to her husband’s desire and this final act of submission to her husband eventually costs her life.
Mr. Percy’s affection for his daughter is primarily a product of pride as her conspicuous consumption, her romantic conquests, and her social coup d’état all reflect favorably on his economic and social situation and thus appease his immense pride. However, he has very little use for her until she is old enough to enter into society. After his wife’s death, Mr. Percy is unable to manage his unruly, “completely spoiled” daughter, so he sends her to a boarding school as “a summary cure for the evil, so far at least as it affected himself” (Brunton, Discipline 12). She is in his way and disturbs the comfort and peace of his home, so he chooses the easiest path for himself by sending her away until she can be of use to him. He shows no interest in what she is being educated, as long as that education is occurring at a fashionable place. She is insignificant in the household until she returns from the seminary as a beautiful young lady with the power to play a role in Mr. Percy’s game of revenge. He then sets her up as the head of his home and uses her beauty to draw in down-on-their-luck aristocrats who are willing to trade their titles for his money and then, after humiliating them to gratify his own sense of pride and justice, he rejects their proposals. He turns down countless unobjectionable suitors in his quest for supremacy and revenge. In doing so, he repeatedly turns away many opportunities to settle his daughter in safety and comfort. He fails to set aside a provision for his daughter in the event of his death and even kills himself knowing he is leaving behind a young woman who has never been taught to care for herself. He leaves her with nothing – not even his physical protection over her body. Ellen is thus abandoned by both parents who have failed to prepare her for a life outside of the privileged household in which she grew up.

While Ellen urges her readers not to blame her over-fond mother for her poor education, Brunton shows great irony in her portrayal of the Mrs. Percy Ellen knew and the Mrs. Percy that Miss Mortimer and others knew. When Miss Mortimer takes Ellen to visit Mrs. Wells, Ellen
learns that her mother saved the woman from begging on the street and made sure she and her
daughters were provided with “whatever was really needful” (26). She “gave pious counsels” to
Mrs. Wells’s two daughters and taught them both practical skills that enable them to be
independent, but her own daughter ends up in desperate poverty. She taught the eldest, Susan, to
make gowns, which allows her to runs her own business as a dressmaker and taught the younger
daughter to tambour “so that now they can earn their own bread” (26). Mrs. Percy gave of her
time and her money to help raise these two young women to be useful, independent and good.
The great irony in this scene is that Mrs. Percy has taught these young women everything they
need to escape poverty. She has taught them useful skills and qualities of hard work and moral
behavior, things that she fails to teach her daughter. When Ellen finds herself in the same
predicament as Mrs. Wells and her daughters, she does not have the education necessary to take
care of herself as she has almost no marketable skills in spite of her expensive London education.
While Mrs. Percy makes sure that Mrs. Wells and her family have “whatever was really
needful,” she does not ensure that her own daughter has what is truly needful for her life.
Brunton’s novel thus criticizes the wealthy Percy family for their failure to educate Ellen in
anything useful. She knows ranks and equipages, but has no useful knowledge and no mental
provision for her future. Her intellect has never been stimulated by intellectual exercise and she
instead uses her mental abilities for playing tricks on Miss Mortimer and planning new ways to
revenge herself upon Lady Maria de Burgh.

Interestingly, the bad education Ellen receives from her parents actually gives her the
ability to survive the tragedy she faces at the young age of seventeen. Ellen describes her mother
as a beautiful woman who has a “character of fragility which presages untimely decay, and that
air of melancholy which seems to welcome decline” (2). In recounting the history of her
friendship with Frances, Miss Mortimer claims that Frances’s mother had to take great pains “to arm, for the rude encounters of the world, a being to whom gentleness made them terrible” (194). Frances Percy is remembered by her daughter and closest friend as a weak, fragile, unhappy woman who was destined for early decay and death. She is so gentle that activity in the outside world is “terrible” for her. She represents the extreme of what Wollstonecraft criticizes in Rights of Woman; her feminine education has made her so meek, timid, weak and submissive that she can hardly function in society and is destined for an early grave. Mrs. Percy timidly gives in to the pleadings of her mother and marries Mr. Percy and meekly submits to the commands of her husband. She fails to stand up for her daughter when she fears for the girl’s health or happiness and is unable to even discipline a child of eight years old. She willfully ignores the flaws she recognizes in her daughter even though she knows they are likely to cause her harm in the future. Ellen records multiple times that her mother recognizes, “with a sigh,” that her daughter’s future might be in peril, yet she repeatedly fails to act upon these realizations (7). She voices her fears for Ellen’s happiness and even states that she believes her daughter’s disposition “will be Ellen’s great misfortune,” but does not work toward correcting this disposition (7). Instead of correcting the faults she sees in her daughter, she simply laments them. As she is dying, she puts her hands on her daughter’s head and instead of a blessing, praying that God will “be kinder than her earthly parents and show thyself a father though it be in chastising” (9). She knows that her daughter needs discipline, but she has been too weak to offer the chastisement that is necessary. She realizes that Mr. Percy is even more incapable than she of properly educating their daughter, so she instead asks that God be the girl’s father and that He give her the education that she and Mr. Percy failed to provide. She gives up the task that was appointed to her and dies very shortly after this solemn request. The greatest lesson she leaves for her daughter is written and
highlighted in her own Bible, but she has never taught her daughter to reverence the Bible. In fact, that Bible does not even appear to be in Ellen’s possession as Ellen first mentions it sitting on a nightstand at Miss Mortimer’s, which implies Mrs. Percy has left it in the care of Miss Mortimer, not Ellen.

In portraying Mrs. Percy’s failures to properly control her daughter, Brunton cleverly shows that Mrs. Percy’s failures as a mother may be Ellen’s greatest advantage in life. Mrs. Percy fails to control Ellen’s temper, but also fails to provide her with a restrictive, feminine, domestic education. She never teaches her daughter the typical feminine rules of decorum and behavior and never enforces submission, feminine duty, domesticity or feminine modesty upon her. She never reigns in Ellen’s spirit nor does she quash her daughter’s feelings of self-importance. What her mother does not teach her is to be a retiring, timid, melancholy woman like herself who is too gentle to handle “rude encounters of the world” (194). Instead, Ellen is a “dictatrix,” a “tyrant” and a “despot,” which are words that represent authority and strength and are not usually associated with a modest young woman (5). These descriptors show the self-assurance and individualism of young Ellen, which are important attributes she retains throughout the novel. She thus begins her life with a sense of her own power and further learns strength, pride and self-consequence from her father. She sees all these attributes in her successful father and learns to be more like him than her timid mother. What Ellen actually learns in the home of her father is a more modern view of the self as she does not experience the constraints of discipline or gender-based oppression that so many other women face. She instead absorbs his masculine feelings of pride, self-satisfaction, self-importance and rationality. It is this education that Ellen receives as a child and a young adult. Ellen does not learn discipline or submission until she educates herself as a young woman and even then, she only submits to God.
In her youth, Ellen grows up like her father – strong, proud and unemotional. Once these attributes are properly disciplined by an active Christian faith, her strength, pride and lack of sensibility make her a powerful agent in her own life, helping her succeed in even the darkest of situations. Ellen’s education thus shows Brunton’s views on the ideal education for women, which should focus on the development of the self not on accomplishments and feminine virtues.

Ellen first becomes aware of her false education at the age of seventeen, while she is sitting in Lady St. Edmunds’s carriage, waiting for her lover to take her away to Gretna Green. Up until this point, her education has been one that emphasized self-importance, pursuing pleasure and purchasing amusement. It is here that she begins to realize that her entire preparation for life has simply been the false education of wealth and vanity. Ellen learns of the horrible fall of her family from a letter sent to Lady St. Edmunds by Lord Frederick explaining why he has failed to meet them. She and her father are said to be “blown to the devil” (161). Lord Frederick describes his escape from marrying a destitute Ellen as “the luckiest chance upon earth” and notes “what a narrow escape I have had from blowing out my own brains” (161). This is how Ellen learns that her father has shot himself, although she does not yet believe it. She does, however, see the truth of Lord Frederick’s character and soon sees the true characters of all her “friends.” Ellen shows considerable spirit in this moment, refusing to give the letter back to Lady St. Edmunds: “‘No!’ said I, detaining with a disdainful smile the letter, which Lady St Edmunds reached her hand to receive, ‘No! this, I will keep, as a memorial of the disinterestedness of man, and the ‘passionate temperament’ of Lord Frederick de Burgh’” (161-162). For the first time, Ellen sees through the veil of finery that has covered her eyes. She sees that she has been tricked into eloping by the woman she considered her friend and guide and further realizes that the power she thought she had over Lord Frederick was not that of love or
even physical allurement. Lord Frederick never loved her, but instead loved her father’s money. She, however, refuses to sink into despair and even uses this moment to chastise the woman she believed to be her friend: “[t]his epistle . . . is a master-teacher. It shows me the sincerity of friends, as well as the tenderness of lovers. Where was your boasted friendship, Lady St Edmunds?” (162). Through this letter, she finally sees how she has been imposed on not only by her lover, but by the woman she believed to be her friend. She describes this letter as “master-teacher” as it finally teaches her that her views of society, her implicit trust in those she called her friends, and her proud view of her own self are based on a fictional world that her false education has helped create. Ellen is confronted by the truth of her situation and begins to see that what she believed was her own power was actually an authority that came from outside her body and is easily snatched away. She also states she “turned scornfully from the futile excuses and denials of my false counsellor” (162). This paragraph juxtaposes the “master-teacher” in the form of the letter with the “false counsellor,” pitting the written truth of Lord Frederick’s letter against the easy lies that Lady St. Edmunds speaks. Brunton thus shows the importance and power of the written word, which will continue to be of importance to Ellen in the form of the Biblical Word. The Bible will become her true “master-teacher.” The written letters from Lord Frederick and Juliet Arnold show her the truth as opposed to the “excuses and denials” of Lady St. Edmunds mouth and the broken “promise of a speedy return” that comes from Juliet’s lips shortly before she abandons Ellen (166). These letters tell Ellen that she is unloved and abandoned. They teach her that now that her wealth is gone, so too is her power and their pretended affection. She learns truth from the economic and social transactions that represent the male world – correspondence, bank accounts, papers and money, forms, bills and legal documents. These documents confirm her father’s bankruptcy and her destitution. All of the
spoken promises and words of devotion prove to be lies when put up against the black and white
written truth of the account book that represents her father’s bankruptcy.

When she arrives home, she asks for her father and the servant tells her “‘Mr Percy is – is
in the house, ma’am, but – ’” (163). His evasive answer fails to explain the reality of her
situation to her and she must learn the truth with her own eyes. Once again, the spoken word
represents falsehood and deceit. She turns to her father in her time of need, having been
abandoned by all of those people she had once called friends. She states “‘[y]et there is one heart
open to me. My father will love me still. My father will take me to his breast. And if I must hear
the worst, I will hear it from him who has never betrayed me, – who will never cast me off’”
(163). She seeks her father only to find the darkest truth of Lord Frederick’s letter confirmed in
the body of her father whose face is covered by a bloody cloth. She thus receives her most
horrifying lesson, written in blood on the body of her father. This final betrayal confirms how her
father has betrayed her throughout her life. He has used her as a pawn in his own games of pride
and revenge and turned down countless suitors who could have provided for his daughter and
saved her from this fate. He does betray her and cast her off. Even with his immense wealth, he
has failed to provide for his daughter. When he loses his money, which is everything to him, he
shoots himself, leaving his body so that she can actually see his final betrayal. She sees a lifeless,
blood-soaked body when she expects to be embraced by the body of a loving father. He leaves
behind an empty shell when his masculine body could have protected her from the danger her
beautiful, feminine body will be exposed to without masculine protection. She finally sees that
much of the power she thought was part of her character and attached to her beautiful body was
only an illusion created by the wealth of her father. She begins to recognize that her
disconnection from her father’s economic work ill-prepared her for the reversion of the wealth
his work had provided. Her power was a reflection of his economic power and she must now learn how to obtain power with her own body, without the signifiers of wealth and masculine power that were once written on it. She must now begin her real education.

Ellen traverses the city of London as an elite consumer and Edinburgh as a poor tradeswoman. In both spaces, she learns to use her assets to gain power. In London, her body and her connection to wealth give her power and privilege and she uses both in order to gain access to the highest social circles. After her wealth is gone, she realizes the danger of her beauty and must seek another asset in order to gain an economic foothold. Her beauty threatens to ruin her upon her arrival in Edinburgh as young Mr. Murray tries to hide her away in his house for his own sexual purposes. Mr. Murray’s actions not only endanger her but also make her realize that she will be unable to obtain a place as a governess in a home he frequents. Her body also costs her the appointment of governess in the Boswell household as Mr. Boswell comments on the “luxuriance and beauty” of her hair, which incenses his wife, who has Ellen committed to a madhouse while she is incoherent with fever (270). Ellen is only able to gain safety and economic success when she can sell her handmade trinkets through a proxy. She must hide her body in order to become successful in the economics of the city. She learns to devalue the external features of the body that had once been her highest value and instead learns to utilize the abilities of that body and her mind in order to gain a modicum of independence. While this independence is meager considering the situation she once enjoyed, it is a true independence. The beauty of her body as the heiress Miss Percy was a false value. She felt it gave her power, but its true power was actually directly connected to her father’s wealth which was written upon her body. Once that wealth is taken away, the value of her beautiful body disappears or at least drastically changes. Lord Frederick dismisses that beautiful body in one heartless sentence: “I
shall set about Darnel immediately – a confounded exchange, for the Percy was certainly the finest girl in London” (161). His use of the article “the” attaches his comments directly to her body, making her an object of his desire, not a thinking subject or an individual with intrinsic value. She is a body that he confirms to be “the finest” in London, but her fine body no longer has value as there is no economic power attached. As a tradeswoman in Edinburgh, she experiences true independence. The money she receives from the sale of her handicrafts has no connection to any other person and only a tenuous link to male economic power. She offers an item that comes from her own ingenuity which is purchased by an unseen person of quality. Thus, the beauty of her body and the false value system attached to it are not involved in the economic transaction.

Brunton ends the years of Ellen’s mis-education with brutal violence. She first is violently rejected by Lord Frederick, whose letter is delivered by a man who “was heard galloping up with such speed” that both women’s attentions are drawn to the noise. The pounding hooves represent the violent power of the horse which is being spurred on by his rider’s important task. When she is alarmed by Lady St. Edmunds’s reaction and hesitancy to share the contents, Ellen “snatched the letter from her hands” (160). The use of the word “snatched” betokens violence as Ellen uses force to obtain the letter and the information that it contains. The most obvious violence is her father’s suicide which leaves a scene that she still cannot describe in sharing her story many years after the event. After seeing his body, Ellen confines herself in her apartment because “[t]he remains of [her] unfortunate father still lay near” and she is “unable to overcome [her] horror of passing the chamber of death” (166). The violent scene that is frozen in her father’s office effectively traps her in the house and within the confines of her own room. In this situation, before her father’s body has even been removed from
the house, she is accosted in her own room by a man from the bank who “enter[s] her apartment with little ceremony” in order to take possession of valuable jewelry, which Ellen considers to be “a savage outrage” (167). His entrance also suggests violence as he enters her private space without her consent and takes items of value directly from her possession. In a period of only days, Ellen faces the violence of rejection, death and total economic loss. When she receives a response from Juliet Arnold denying her request for asylum, she “gazed wildly on the cruel billet, while, twisting it in the grasp of agony, [she] wrenched it to atoms; then, raising to heaven an eye of blasphemy, [she] dared to insult the Father of Mercies with a cry for vengeance” (169). This final violence is a reaction to the violence she has suffered and represents her desire to erase the truth of her situation. She tears up the evidence of her “great friend[’s]” betrayal because this letter completes her fall and confirms her absolute abandonment (17). Brunton uses these scenes to show that a bad education can be rectified, but may require extreme violence. Ellen’s re-education can only be completed by a violent total loss of everything she knows and all that she loves. It is only when she has lost everything that she is able to look to herself and become aware of who that self really is. After Ellen has lost her wealth, status, friends, and even her father, she is finally able to turn to her mother’s friend, Miss Mortimer, and receive the moral education that she disdained for so long. In the home of Miss Mortimer, she learns to transform her self-importance and pride into self-awareness and self-reliance. She recognizes that a proper education cannot be completed without a willingness to become self-aware and learns to define her value in terms of intrinsic qualities and her relationship with her Creator instead of the outward trappings of wealth.

Ellen begins her new education by opening her mother’s Bible which Miss Mortimer has left next to her bed. She finds a passage her mother marked in Isaiah which she remembers
having heard from her mother’s lips. In this verse, she reads that even though a mother may forget her child, God never will forget His children. Ellen has heard these words before, “[b]ut now their coincidence with the previous current of [her] thoughts seized at once [her] whole attention” (180). She suddenly feels that these words were written just for her and she sees that they are applicable to her current feelings:

I started as if some strange and new discovery had burst upon my understanding. Again I read the passage, and with a care which I had never before bestowed on any part of the book which contains it. ‘Is this,’ I enquired, ‘an expression of the divine concern in each individual of human kind? – No. It seems merely a national promise. Yet, my mother has regarded it in another light; else why has she marked it so carefully?’ (180-181)

Brunton portrays Ellen grappling with spiritual understanding. She has never acknowledged God and has not made religion an active part of her life, yet now that she has faced tragedy, she turns to the Bible in an attempt to understand what has happened to her. The verse she lights upon makes her question whether this God, whom she had earlier blasphemed against, cares about her as an individual. She immediately rejects this idea, but there is little conviction in her denial because her mother clearly regarded this passage as important enough to highlight. She states that she “debated this question with [her]self” and she turned “to the same passage again and again” in search of her answer (181). Her repeated returns to this passage and her internal debate show an intellectual and philosophical search for truth after seventeen years of easy, convenient lies. She returns to the scripture she has read and rereads it with care, trying to decipher its meaning. As she begins to understand the passage, she then questions whether she can believe
what the verse purports. She questions whether she is able to view God as a parent whose “love had adjusted every circumstance of a lot which I accounted so severe as mine” or whether “[a] man’s own actions often mould his destiny” (181). She questions God’s role in human life and the issue of man’s free will under God. She thus becomes a philosopher, trying to determine if God cares about the lives of individuals and what that might mean in her own life. She recognizes that acceptance of the view of God as her Father “was virtually to confess that [she] had need of correction” which is the first time she realizes that perhaps there are elements of herself that need to change (181). Her search for truth in the Bible is the awakening of her awareness of her own soul. She begins to realize that perhaps she needs to look within in order to understand the world around her.

Ellen awakens early the next morning and eagerly seeks the knowledge her mother’s Bible provides as “it offered the only present lights upon the questions” that she finds herself asking (181). Each day, she seeks new knowledge in the Bible and “could scarcely open the book without finding somewhat applicable to [her] own character or situation” (182). For the first time, Ellen recognizes education as an internal process meant to help form the inner person. In order to learn, one must seek not just knowledge or accomplishments, but one must also apply that knowledge to one’s own self. And, once again, Brunton shows that true education is not easy as Ellen acknowledges: “[t]he study, indeed, was often painful” (182). True learning is not easy because the pupil must apply truth to her own life. In Brunton’s world, education must involve a careful study of the self and a moral searching for truth. Interestingly, these first impressions of God are pursued by Ellen alone. Brunton thus shows that Ellen must begin by educating herself and must truly want to learn before a teacher is necessary. Then, in the agony of her questions about her relationship to the Creator and her ultimate fate, she finally “sought relief in the
converse of a person rich in the knowledge in which I was wanting” (183). It is only when Ellen is truly looking for answers that she seeks a teacher in Miss Mortimer. Brunton thus suggests that the first step toward educating another is teaching her the need for and value of education.

Miss Mortimer’s methods of education represent the ideal education for Brunton. She represents faith in action, showing Ellen how her beliefs spur her towards doing good for others. As she teaches Ellen, she remains gentle and patient, using “meek reason” to oppose Ellen’s doubts and answer her questions (183). Miss Mortimer does not want Ellen “to rely upon her authority” but instead “recommended to [Ellen] such books as she thought likely to secure [her] rational assent to the truth” (189). Just as the letters of her acquaintances and the account-books of her father showed her the truth of her situation, Miss Mortimer urges her to confirm truth through the Bible and other books. Brunton thus connects religious faith with rational inquiry. A person must exercise her own reasoning skills and rationally assent to her beliefs in order to have a true faith. Miss Mortimer never lectures her young friend, but instead encourages Ellen to use her own intellect to determine truth. She offers guidance and knowledge, but demands that Ellen come to her own conclusions through careful research, study, and introspection. As she had confessed earlier in the novel, she believes that if Ellen would exercise her own “unbiased judgment,” she would much earlier have recognized her danger and realized the truth regarding her acquaintances (110). Miss Mortimer includes Ellen in her own disciplined and regular pursuit of knowledge and, together, they extend their studies to include literature, history, travels, and criticism. Ellen spends hours in “devotion and serious study, reading, and often writing abstracts of what [she] read” (190). She tests her mind by disciplined study and even engages in the educational process by responding back to her readings in writing. Ellen’s time with Miss Mortimer is a period of self-reflection and enlightenment which she describes as “a new era of
[her] existence” (183). She turns her “newly acquired powers of sight towards [her] own character” and learns to look inward to discover and mold her true self (184). Through careful introspection, she recognizes her flaws and works toward weeding them out. Ainsley McIntosh views this focus on Ellen’s inner life as a highlight of Brunton’s achievement, describing *Discipline* as “an acute study in female subjectivity through its use of first-person narrative technique” (53). McIntosh views Ellen as a “modern creation, with her social status operating as one marker of her modernity” and agrees with Peter Garside in stating that “[i]n [Brunton’s] hands . . . the moral-evangelical mode offers ‘fresh possibilities for psychological analysis and moral discrimination’” (53). It is in Brunton’s portrayal of Ellen’s search for meaning, purpose and an understanding of the self that the reader finds a strikingly real and honest portrayal of the human soul searching for truth.

Brunton’s portrayal of Ellen’s education(s) offers a treatise on what she believes a woman’s education should entail. Ellen has already received the education of a lady, having spent seven years at a fashionable boarding-school. The one useful thing she learned in those years was the ability to create “ingenious trifles” which she eventually sells in order to support herself and Juliet Arnold. In Miss Mortimer’s home, Ellen states “[m]y education, if the word signify learning what is afterwards to be useful, was now properly beginning” (Brunton, *Discipline* 190). Ellen mocks what is regularly called education for women, stating that perhaps the word education does not apply to learning that may actually be useful to the pupil. She is clearly criticizing the boarding-school education she received, where she learned a greater degree of self-importance, stubbornness, and a passion to appear superior to the better-born Lady Maria de Burgh. Ellen points out that her expensive education taught her French and Italian, but she “remained in ignorance of the accurate science, or elegant literature to which they might have
introduced [her].” She and her fellow-pupils learned to paint landscapes but “gained not one idea from the art, except what was purely mechanical” (17). Her boarding-school education is mechanical and rote and she learns nothing that can rightly be called an education. In fulfillment of the school’s promise that “the utmost attention should be paid to the morals of the pupils,” the girls are forced to repeat the Catechism by rote once a week. Brunton juxtaposes this form of rote religious education with the philosophical education Ellen undergoes with Miss Mortimer, showing that it is only with a vigorous, rational education that a person actually gains a moral understanding. In the boarding-school, the girls learn nothing useful and are not encouraged to seek greater knowledge or understanding. Brunton’s portrayal of Ellen’s boarding-school education reflects what many writers and educationists criticized about women’s education.

Mary Wollstonecraft states that she “object[s] to many females being shut up together in nurseries, schools, or convents” and describes such schools as “the hot-beds of vice and folly, and the knowledge of human nature, supposed to be attained there, merely cunning selfishness” (Wollstonecraft 206, 242). Ellen learns such “cunning selfishness” from her boarding-school education and displays it in her social battle with Lady Maria both in the school and out in society.

Ellen also claims that at this school, “Miss Juliet Arnold . . . was educated to be married,” which basically means she is taught the arts of flirtation and affectation in order to catch a suitably wealthy husband (Brunton, Discipline 16). When Ellen meets Juliet again in Edinburgh, the reader learns what this type of education actually produces. After abandoning Ellen, Juliet proceeds to betray Lady Maria by eloping to Scotland with Her Ladyship’s intended, Lord Glendower. When they arrive in Scotland, Juliet realizes that he does not truly mean to marry her, so she “refused to see Glendower, unless he would at least persuade the people of the
lodging-house that [she] was his wife” and then “contrived to make him send [her] a note, addressed to Lady Glendower” which she carefully preserves as evidence of their union (308).

Her education to be married basically consisted of an education in deceit, flattery and cunning in order to get a husband in any way possible. She claims she “had heard something of the Scotch laws in regard to marriage” by which she is able to obtain evidence to prove her relationship with Lord Glendower (308). Her claim that she “had heard something” about marriage laws in Scotland implies that she has researched and educated herself in order to entrap Glendower and make sure that their affair, and her son, can thus be legitimized. The knowledge she attained about Scottish marriage laws also implies that she knew before her elopement that such measures might be necessary, so she comes to Scotland prepared to gain her point one way or another. Thus, Juliet’s education is successful – it enables her to entrap a wealthy man and, eventually, earns her son his patrimony. Brunton portrays the immense cost of this education as Juliet loses her health, her happiness, her respectability and falls into moral insensibility in her attempts to survive. Ellen and Juliet both have tragedies which force them into the world where they must fight to survive and Brunton shows, through Juliet, another possible outcome for a woman in such a position. She shows that Ellen’s situation is similarly destitute, but the major difference between them is that Ellen had someone who cared about her education and worked toward correcting it, while Juliet is completely cast off.

In Miss Mortimer’s home, Ellen engages in a far different education. She receives an education that is useful to her and speaks to her current situation. Under Miss Mortimer’s tutelage, she undertakes a process of psychological and philosophical searching that leads her to question her purpose and her existence. When Ellen first approaches the humble home that Miss Mortimer will be sharing with her, she views it as a “prison-house,” but the narrator points out
that she views the place negatively because she has “refuse[d] to contemplate the world with the eye of reason and of religion” (178-179). Brunton thus ties reason and religion together and Miss Mortimer later explains that “the exercise of your highest natural faculties upon your religion is calculated to fix it in your mind” (190). Education and religion are inextricable in Brunton’s world. Education must be moral and useful in order to be considered true education and faith should not simply be blind submission or thoughtless mimicry. Ellen’s intellect is finally challenged when she comes to a point where she must acknowledge God and determine her beliefs, which she can only do through intellectual study and the use of her reason. When Ellen is, for a short time, led astray by the fire and zeal of a dissenting preacher, Miss Mortimer simply asks her not to leave the established church until she has engaged in “diligent attention, humble self-examination, and earnest prayer for guidance” (201). She asks Ellen to carefully examine her mind and her motives before making the important decision to join a dissenting chapel and Ellen comes to acknowledge that “[r]easoning must convince the understanding” (200). Thus, faith is not something to be taught by rote, as it was in her boarding-school, nor should it be an impulsive response to enthusiastic emotion, but a disciplined education of the heart and mind through the workings of one’s reason and through intellectual inquiry. Faith is more than simply a condition of the heart. Instead, the novel implies it should involve both the mind and the heart and be supported by active study and research, devotion, and acts of charity.

Brunton also shows that education is necessary for an understanding of the self, as Ellen notes in her time with Miss Mortimer that “[b]y degrees, something of my real self was opened to my sight” (182). Ellen’s statement implies that the self cannot be understood without learning to examine one’s own heart and mind. Interestingly, this self is not gendered. The faults that Ellen analyzes and condemns through introspection are not failures to display modesty or other
typically feminine virtues. She does not dwell on her aborted elopement with a man her father
had refused nor does she even mention the compromising situation she was caught in at the
masquerade. Instead, Brunton shows that Ellen’s flaws are related to her failures to recognize a
Creator and sympathize with other human sufferers, not her failure to behave in properly
feminine ways. Ellen’s greatest pain comes from her knowledge of how her selfishness in a
position of privilege affected the lives of others: “How did I reproach myself, that, while
thousands of sensitive and accountable creatures were daily within the sphere of my influence,
that influence had served only to deepen, with additional shades, the blackness of human misery
and of human guilt” (185). She calls herself a “murderer” when she realizes that her desire for
some exotic plants for an entertainment had contributed to the illness of a gardener employed by
her father who “was dismissed to die, unheeded by a mistress equally selfish in the indulgence of
her sorrow as in the thoughtlessness of her prosperity” (187). She takes this guilt upon herself,
but the man’s suffering is also a direct result of her father’s misuse of his money. However, she
does not punish herself for the harm she feels she has contributed to. Instead, she determines to
act upon her feelings and make sure the family of the gardener has enough money to return to
Scotland after his death. In order to save this money for the gardener’s family, a newly widowed
woman and her children, she begins selling some trifles she had learned to make. She notes that
“[t]he little ingenious works which I had been taught at school, were, for the first time, employed
by me to a useful purpose” (188). In her devotion to this family, she not only puts her education
to use, but also learns that she can be a useful and active member of society.

Brunton creates a psychologically complex study of Ellen’s education by having the adult
Ellen Graham (née Percy), who is now a mother of five and the matriarch of a Scottish clan,
narrate the story of her educational progress. In using the first person narrative form, Ellen is
able to look back on her experiences and evaluate them, offering the audience her reading of her life. She takes a position of authority at the beginning of the novel, verifying the purpose and truth of her tale by positing it as her own. As an adult, she narrates the process of change that made her into the person she now is. In so doing, we are able not only to see what Ellen experienced, but also how she now views the important moments in her life. Ellen states that she writes the story of her own errors and eventual redemption so that “the perusal of it may be profitable to others” and because she wants “to warn others of the danger of their way” (1-2). Considering the didactic aim of the story, this early statement of her purpose could point to a cause and effect relationship between Ellen’s youthful errors and her subsequent struggles. However, a careful reading of the novel shows that many of Ellen’s early character traits are what enable her to survive the tragedy she faces. While Miss Mortimer is clearly an idyllic character, she is not an active participant in life. She remains in Ellen’s shadow both in her folly and in her later redemption. Her lack of the pride, confidence, and mental strength of Ellen makes it clear that she could not have succeeded on the streets of Edinburgh as Ellen does. Just as Mrs. Percy had given all her affection to her daughter after the death of her brother, Miss Mortimer “raised [her affections] to a better world, and recalled them to this fleeting scene no more” (197). After great personal loss, both Miss Mortimer and Mrs. Percy give up living, focusing all of their attention and excessive sensibility on a single being, waiting for and welcoming death when it comes.

Ellen, however, is made of stronger stuff. Ellen’s strength of character becomes more striking after the death of her father. Even in her search for spiritual truth after losing all that she had once loved, she does not sink under emotional distress but instead responds to it with fire and flair. She states “I was not . . . of a temper long to endure the sense of helpless misery”
She refuses to give up and instead proudly proclaims she will not “endure” her feelings of helplessness any longer. She determines to move ahead through her painful re-education. She refuses to allow anything to defeat her as her pride makes her believe herself superior to all circumstances. She thus quickly moves from the position of a victim, blaming others for the loss of her status and wealth, to a woman who must, and will, rely on herself to survive. She spends time recovering from her pain and educating herself for her future under Miss Mortimer’s roof, but then steps out as a conqueror and never again sinks into despair, even when falsely imprisoned in a madhouse and wandering with a dying Juliet on the dark streets of Edinburgh. She stops blaming others, which her father never managed to do, and chooses to focus on what she can control – her own heart and mind. She looks for the places where she has erred and then looks within herself for the power to move forward. It is in this new life that Ellen, as Martha Musgrove claims, “transition[s] from an object of exchange in the marriage market to a subject marked by self-respect and self-reliance” (236). She no longer allows herself to be controlled by others, but instead makes her own decisions and actively follows through with her determinations.

Mrs. Percy and Miss Mortimer, in contrast, are products of a weakening class of gentility, who are unable to thrive out in the world. They both suffer from excessive sensibility that ill-equiops them for the losses of loved ones, a loveless marriage, or dealing with the temper and exuberance of a spirited child. Thus, the new generation of women must learn from the faith, piety and charity of the older generation, but must also infuse the middle-class values of intellect, hard work, and strength. Ellen separates herself from the quiet sensibility of her mother and Miss Mortimer, stating, “for amidst all my follies, I had escaped that susceptibility which makes so many young women idle, and so many old ones ridiculous” (Brunton, *Discipline* 143-144). She
sees her lack of sensibility as a strength of her character as she does not have to fear that some debilitating emotion of love might conquer her will. She views sensibility as a dangerous “susceptibility” that ruins women. Ellen recognizes that sensibility and lost love left both her mother and Miss Mortimer with “widowed affections” and refuses to allow such emotional weakness to take away her power. Unlike her timid foremothers, Ellen is a strong, proud character who is notable for her activity. Accustomed to power, pride, and privilege, Ellen is a force to be reckoned with, even on the dark streets of Edinburgh.

Martha Musgrove argues that Ellen’s travels in the cities of London and Edinburgh create a different kind of femininity and highlight a character that is rational and intelligent over emotional or beautiful. Musgrove explains, “Brunton suggests that city living offers young women a fair exchange: a diminished sensibility is the price paid for the conditions that prompt their moral and spiritual growth” (234). The emotional, sentimental character cannot survive the challenges that occur at the street level of the city. However, I argue that much of Ellen’s strength of character is directly tied to the poor education she experienced as a child where she learned the importance of her own opinions and her subsequent re-education. While Ellen’s education at the boarding-school failed to provide her with any knowledge of use, her acquaintanceship with Lady Maria de Burgh helps confirm her ideas on the value of her individuality, regardless of her birth or social position. When Lady Maria insults her by questioning her father’s ancestry, Ellen responds with “more spirit than elegance, by giving her Ladyship a hearty box on the ear” (Brunton, Discipline 14). Ellen reacts violently to the insinuation that she is inferior to Lady Maria and spends the next years of her life trying to show herself superior. Ellen refuses to be defined by her birth, feeling her wealth entitles her to greater respect. However, when she loses that wealth, she still keeps her self-possession and finds new
ways to assert herself. While Ellen does view her pride as a moral failing, since her Christian faith requires humility and submission, her pride also provides her with a self-confidence that belies her lower birth and her poverty. Having been early taught her own self-importance, she refuses to accept others’ view of her as inferior based on her birth, class, gender or economic situation. When she loses the financial power that her father’s wealth represented, she must learn humility not through submission but through charity. She realizes the good she could have done as the wealthy heiress and regrets how her thoughtless actions hurt others. From these mistakes, she learns to use her abilities to help others. She also does not submit to those of higher station simply because of the superiority of their social situations. Instead, she respects only moral and intellectual superiority and pities those of inferior abilities or morals. She recognizes her external poverty, yet does not feel that poverty connects to her character or diminishes her value. Ellen, as narrator, repeatedly calls her pride and self-will her “besetting sins” (4). However, one is tempted to argue that Brunton, like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, believes there is proper and “improper pride” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 246). Ellen’s refusal to say goodbye to Miss Mortimer when she leaves the Percy household and her pursuit of Lord Frederick simply to provoke Lady Maria are clearly instances of spiteful, improper pride. However, Ellen’s pride is also shown as a very powerful element of self-consciousness and agency in other scenes in the novel. When Maitland, the man who torments her with his simultaneous affection and disdain, finally acknowledges that he does love her but will not offer marriage because of her flaws, she proudly declares “[e]nough of my disqualifications for an office which I really have no ambition to fill” (Brunton, *Discipline* 140). She denies his reading of their relationship and instead interposes her own. It is not that he will not marry her, but that she will not marry him. She thus takes the power from Maitland in this exchange and effectively refuses him. Her desire for power
in the relationship also points to why she forces him, through tricks and games, to acknowledge his feelings. She wants to bring him to the point of acknowledgement so that she has the power of refusal and thus takes control of the relationship out of his hands.

Her pride is also shown in a positive light in her various dealings with women in Edinburgh. After her discovery of how she was used by her “summer friends” in London, she never again allows others to define her (166). When she discovers that her employer, Mrs. Boswell, has poisoned her beloved dog Fido, she proudly tells the woman “‘[f]ind another instructor for your child . . . I will no longer tell her to despise treachery, and falsehood, and cruelty, lest I teach her to scorn her mother’” (277). She does not humbly submit to the abuse of the jealous Mrs. Boswell, but confronts her with her treachery and quits her position rather than continue to be subject to a woman who has both “defects of the head” and defects of the heart (269). She knows that leaving will present a financial hardship for her, but would rather struggle on the streets independently than remain dependent on a heartless and cruel woman. Despite her position as a paid governess in the house, Ellen refuses to be a victim of Mrs. Boswell’s wicked whims and accusations. When Mrs. Boswell sees Ellen come out of Mr. Boswell’s room after delivering the news of his daughter’s safety, she calmly replies to the woman’s accusations of inappropriate behavior with the simple truth. She does not fear for her reputation nor does she depend on Mr. Boswell to defend her. She states that she went “to tell him that his daughter is out of immediate danger” and then acknowledges she will immediately depart (284). Mrs. Boswell tries to brand her as an immoral woman who is after her husband, but Ellen refuses such labelling. Despite her efforts to accuse and abuse Ellen, she fails to affect Ellen’s view of herself or her proud spirit. Even though she has Ellen committed, it is actually Mrs. Boswell who must flee Edinburgh and the truth that Ellen represents.
In the same way, when Ellen brings the dying Juliet to the apartment she is renting, the landlady is incensed and exclaims “I never knew rightly what you were, till I saw the company you keep. A creature painted to the eyes” and demands that Ellen throw Juliet out of the apartment (309). Ellen again refuses this reading of herself and her old friend and states that she “shall receive or exclude whomsoever [she] please[s]” in her apartment (310). She disdains the woman’s view of Juliet and herself and her implication that they are prostitutes. Instead of fighting or arguing, she throws the money she owes the woman on the table and states “after what you have obliged me to hear, I will not put it in your power to insult me by farther suspicion” (310). She thus vindicates herself and then proudly exits the apartment with her friend, determined to stay on the street with Juliet rather than suffer someone to tell her with whom she can associate or make demeaning judgments regarding her situation.

The final step in Ellen’s education is her move from dependence upon other women to a trust in herself and the willingness to educate others. As the wealthy Miss Percy, she ignored the superior guidance of Miss Mortimer and was controlled by her jealous competition with Lady Maria de Burgh, the skillful maneuvers of the corrupt Juliet Arnold, and the flattering and deceitful condescension of Lady St Edmunds. When she is left destitute and alone, she becomes dependent on Miss Mortimer not only for shelter and finances, but also as the educator of her developing Christian faith. After Miss Mortimer’s death, she unwisely runs to Scotland, hoping to find in her patron Mrs. Murray “one whom I can love, and love safely . . . one endowed with somewhat of the spirit of her whom I have lost” (224). She feels she needs a mother-figure to guide her as she does not completely trust her own abilities and wisdom. The only person she ever loved “safely” was Miss Mortimer, a woman who never betrayed her and she desires to find that again. However, as the narrative shows, Ellen must now take on the role of educator and
guide to other women. Miss Mortimer’s last words to her are “Ellen your mind is entire” (209), which represents her passing of the torch to her young protégé and her encouragement that Ellen depend on her own self and her own intellect in all her future activities. In traversing the streets of Edinburgh, she soon gets an opportunity of assisting Cecil Graham, who is watching her possessions be auctioned off. Ellen buys Cecil’s burying linen back for her and then purchases some of the necessities for her new friend as well. In return, Cecil helps her gain employment and teaches her to speak Gaelic. Ellen then takes a position as a governess, where her moral and intellectual superiority threatens the balance of a very unhealthy family and she attempts not only to teach her young charge, Jessie, moral truth and discipline, but even tries to correct the girl’s mother. Her time in the household of the Boswells helps prepare her for the “education of a rational and accountable being” she will eventually undertake with each of her own children as she soon “become[s] extremely interested in the improvement of [her] young charge” (260). She watches the girl improve under her tutelage, but recognizes the difficulty in continuing to educate Jessie with the bad influence of Mrs. Boswell. This experience teaches Ellen the power a mother can have on her child’s educational process which will help her in educating her own children.

She is finally able to mimic and outpace her predecessor, Miss Mortimer, in her relationship with Juliet Arnold. Just as Miss Mortimer had continued to love and serve Ellen despite her lies and abuse of her friend, Ellen loved Juliet and had given her many gifts along with a home and access to societies she would never have had without Ellen’s influence and she willingly sacrifices for Juliet when they meet again in Edinburgh. However, unlike Ellen, Juliet never comes to an acceptance of the moral education Ellen offers and she is never able to acknowledge her need for Ellen’s lessons. Ellen meets Juliet in Edinburgh when the woman can
offer her absolutely nothing, but cares for her anyway. She sacrifices for her dying friend and Juliet’s young son, despite the fact that she has very little with which to support them and Juliet refuses to assist in anything that might provide them with money. She is in her worst situation when she meets Juliet and almost has to spend a night on the street with the dying woman and her baby. She gives up her own meager apartment to aid her friend and it is only through good luck and a long-distant good deed that she is able to gain a roof for them. Just as Miss Mortimer attempted to turn Ellen’s mind to eternal life when Ellen felt she was dying, Ellen tries to persuade Juliet to look to God for repentance, salvation, and comfort. She remains by her old friend’s side, using the last of her money to buy treats to tempt her unregulated appetites. This time of pure charity and forgiveness expands her heart to others and is the final preparation for the role she will soon fulfill as one of the mistresses of Glen Eredine.

Just before Juliet dies, Ellen meets Charlotte Graham and finally gains the true friendship of a like-minded woman. Their relationship is one of equals, not a mentor-tutor or other such relationship. These two women teach and counsel one another and then work together to help others. Charlotte teaches her about Highland life and the workings of a Scottish clan, while Ellen offers Charlotte a wider worldview and a palliation for her friend’s national prejudices. Even before her eventual marriage to Henry Graham, Ellen and Charlotte together are “not only joint housewives in the Castle, but schoolmistresses, chamber-council, physicians, apothecaries, and listeners-general to all the female inhabitants of Glen Eredine” (371). They use their own educational experiences to aid the inhabitants of their village.

While Ellen does have to develop a true Christian faith in order to achieve a happy marriage and become the mistress of Glen Eredine, it is significant that none of Maitland’s attempts to teach his future bride succeed. In fact, Ellen teaches him, throughout the first half of
the novel, that she will determine her own future and will not be forced or persuaded into a relationship with him. He has to accept her as she is which he refuses to do at the beginning of the novel. Interestingly, Ellen does not marry Maitland as he is either; she marries him as the Scottish Laird named Henry Graham. Ellen cannot love Maitland which suggests that she realizes he is not wholly truthful about himself and that he must change as well. She does not find herself capable of loving the man who continually attempts to correct her and acts as her tutor and monitor. She does not marry the man who feels himself her moral superior because she will not enter into a marital relationship on unequal footing. Instead, she chooses to love – and marry – Henry Graham, a man who shows respect for women and is capable of acknowledging a woman’s intellectual and moral accomplishments. She is only able to love Henry after she sees that he treats his sister as an equal and he acknowledges her own intellectual abilities. She marries Henry as an equal and they, along with Charlotte, “all superintended together” their large plantation (371). Ellen will not be the submissive, meek wife that her mother was, but will instead take an authoritative role with her husband and sister-in-law at the head of powerful Scottish clan. Thus Ellen’s education develops her from a selfish, self-absorbed middle-class woman to the matriarch of a Scottish clan who aids in the education and improvement of the entire community. She moves from a focus on only herself to focusing on her role as an equal member of a partnership that superintends and educates an entire village. In her new position, she can oversee the moral and intellectual educations of her five children and those of the many villagers under her care.
CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND DOMESTIC AUTHORITY IN MANSFIELD PARK

Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) has long provided a challenge to Austen fans and critics and it remains a bit of an enigma in Austen’s oeuvre due to its mousy, timid heroine and the unromantic marriage of Fanny Price as the second choice of Sir Thomas Bertram’s second son. In *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, Alan Richardson states “Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* . . . has been rightly called ‘as much a novel about education as any in the language,’” a statement with which most critics of the novel, in some measure, agree (7). Despite a general consensus that this novel is “about” education, critics are unable to determine what exactly this novel is saying about education. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler posits that the novel is a conservative, Tory fiction authorizing the paternal power of Sir Thomas and upholding the estate through careful discipline and moral perfection in the domestic sphere. Claudia Johnson, on the other hand, views *Mansfield Park* as “a bitter parody of conservative fiction,” arguing that the novel highlights Sir Thomas’s paternal failures in educating his daughters (96). Gary Kelly finds a middle point between these two groundbreaking critiques, stating, “Austen does distribute novelistic justice according to a character’s education, but all are fallible despite education” and points out that “the viciously educated Mary Crawford loves the virtuously educated Edmund Bertram and despite his education he is attracted to Mary rather than Fanny for most of the novel” (“Education” 259). I argue that Fanny’s moral centrality shows the importance of rational educations for women who, through improved moral educations and solid principles, can provide stability, rational educations and moral improvement to their families and societies. Austen shows that the ideal education for a woman is not one
based on feminine accomplishments aimed at marriageability, but a rational education aimed at inculcating solid principles and moral behavior. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny rises from her subservient position as a dependent relative to a role of moral power as the future Mrs. Bertram through her ability to recognize the moral failings of others and her attempts to educate the figures of power that inhabit her world. But, in portraying how the Bertram family ignores Fanny’s moral superiority, and how Fanny must overcome the parts of her education that enforce her inferiority, Austen also shows that the female role as domestic educator is a very precarious role that can only be beneficial when paternal authority legitimizes her domestic power. She thus both promotes and demystifies the idea of female moral power, showing that it is only through male prerogative and the development of a sense of self that resists inherent submission that such power can become a possibility. *Mansfield Park* argues for improved female education based on rational principles, but shows that such education will inevitably be of little social value until women have equal authority within the domestic sphere and a modicum of power and independence outside of it.

The first nine years of Fanny Price’s education occur in Portsmouth while she is under the care of her parents. Very little is said of the early years of Fanny’s life, but a later description of the Price family indicates that her time with her parents was a time of deprivation, hard work, little intellectual stimulation, and perhaps even abuse. When she returns to her paternal home after years away, Fanny hopes that she will find true affection in her parents and her siblings and the narrator states “[w]ould they but love her, she should be satisfied” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 343). However, as the subsequent pages show, she is very unsatisfied in Portsmouth because, with the exception of Susan and William, her family does not love her and cannot value her intellect or morals. Her father is an alcoholic who is unable to participate in an active profession.
When he comes home the day she returns, he kicks her and William’s luggage out of the way, curses and sits down to read his paper while Fanny remains “undistinguished” and “unthought of” by her father, just as she likely had been all the early years of her life (345). He is unable to recognize the value of his refined, educated daughter and fails to even acknowledge her existence until prompted to do so by William. He thus neglects the woman who offers better education and opportunities for his other children. On their way to Portsmouth, William had urged her to take an educative role in their childhood home as he recognizes her improvements while at Mansfield Park. He admits that “her being home for a while would be a great advantage to every body” and tells her “‘[y]ou will set things going in a better way, I am sure. You will tell my mother how it all ought to be, and you will be so useful to Susan, and you will teach Betsey, and make the boys love and mind you. How right and comfortable it will all be!’” (338). William clearly sees the flaws in his household and recognizes that Fanny’s education and experience could be very valuable to their family. He acknowledges that the “house is always in confusion” and sees in Fanny the ability to fix it (338). What he fails to acknowledge, however, is that she must first gain her family’s admission not only of her abilities but of their desire for improvement. William may have the power to tell his mother “how it all ought to be” but Mrs. Price never offers Fanny this opportunity. Mrs. Price “neither taught nor restrained her children” and is not inclined to allow Fanny to do what she has failed to do (355). In fact, Fanny’s own education had been very minimal during her early years under her mother’s care. When she first arrived at Mansfield Park, the narrator acknowledges that “Fanny could read, work, and write, but she had been taught nothing more” (15). In addition, Mrs. Price has no interest in the educations of her daughters because her heart is filled with love for her sons, who might amount to something in various professions. She has very little room for her daughters, loving only the
youngest, Betsey, whom she spoils excessively. Fanny thus despairs of being any use to her family in Portsmouth. The reader sees that Fanny’s childhood in the Price home began her education in her own unimportance and likely taught her much of her timidity as her parents primarily ignore her and her father’s loud, violent manners suggest that she might have been the brunt of some of his anger when living with him. Austen thus points to the importance of properly educating children. Fanny is able to improve herself and overcome much of what she learned in her parents’ home, but her timidity and feelings of insignificance remain part of her character throughout the novel.

Fanny’s education in her own unimportance continues when she arrives at Mansfield Park where Mrs. Norris constantly reminds her of her inferior position while her cousins, with the exception of Edmund, laugh at her looks, her behavior, and her ignorance. Her cousins are shocked at her inability to “put the map of Europe together” or “tell the principal rivers in Russia” and call her stupid and ignorant (15). She is little more than a novelty when she arrives and most of the family falls into the habit of ignoring her once that novelty wears off. When Maria and Julia report on their cousin’s lack of knowledge, Mrs. Norris simply confirms their superiority and agrees that Fanny is “very stupid indeed” (16). She continues to make sure Fanny is aware of her inferior position in the household, refusing to even allow her a fire in the schoolroom despite her poor health, making her work when she is ill, and forcing her to submit to everyone else in the household. Mrs. Norris regularly reminds her to remain below her cousins, telling her “not to be putting yourself forward, and talking and giving your opinion as if you were one of your cousins—as if you were dear Mrs. Rushworth or Julia” (199). Mrs. Norris never lets her forget that she is a dependent relation indebted for everything she has to the goodness and generosity of Sir Thomas Bertram and, she claims, herself.
Fanny receives her true education at the hands of her cousin Edmund, whose “attentions were . . . of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures” (18-19). He offers her the masculine intellectual education that she would not otherwise have received. He recognizes her mental abilities and encourages her use of them, which no one else in the household does: “He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself” (19). Austen points here to the importance of reading in education if “properly directed.” Edmund begins her education, but she continues to educate herself by reading throughout the novel:

Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but [Edmund] recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read and heightened its attraction by judicious praise.

(19)

It is in Fanny’s extensive reading that we see a major difference between Fanny’s education and that of the Bertram sisters. This description of Edmund’s direction of her education demonstrates the differences between the girls’ educations. Maria and Julia learn French, read history, and can spout useless facts. Even Mrs. Norris praises them for their “wonderful memories” for facts, but memorizing “the chronological order of the kings of England” does not represent an intellectual education according to Austen (16, 15). Fanny’s education has gone much deeper, encouraging her to engage her intellect and she even spends her leisure hours improving her mind through reading. Because of her close friendship with Edmund, who studied at Eton and Oxford, Fanny
receives a different education than the one carefully planned for Maria and Julia. By discussing books with Edmund and sharing in his intellectual and spiritual education, Fanny learns how to think, how to reason and how to study her own heart and mind.

As Barbara Horwitz argues, “[Austen] believes the goal of education for women to be identical to the goal of education for men: self-knowledge,” which Fanny exemplifies throughout the novel (135). It is only Fanny who is encouraged to pursue self-knowledge, not only through her studies with Edmund, but also due to the mistreatment she receives in the Bertram household. She must look within in order to find any personal value due to the constant reminders of her inferiority that she receives from Mrs. Norris and her cousins. She thus seeks an internal life that is separate from the external life of submission to the whims of others. In “The Ethics of Mansfield Park,” Allen Dunn argues:

This lack of social recognition insulates her against the vanity that blinds Julia and Maria and forces her to rely more upon her internalized set of standards than upon the judgments of those around her. She is paradoxically both the solicitous and cheerful servant, attentive to the needs and opinions of others, and someone whose principles grant her a high degree of autonomy by making her independent of their moral blindness and stupidity. . . . She is somehow able to judge other family members fairly and objectively and remain humbly subservient. (491)

She is able to access an internal significance that is separate from the roles she is given by Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas and the other Bertrams. She humbly submits to their commands, feeling it her duty to do so, but she generally does not allow them to impose upon her interiority. She continues to make accurate assessments of her own behavior and that of others. When she fears
her feelings for Edmund will affect her judgment, she decides that she must “endeavor to be rational, and deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford’s character and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an honest heart” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 239-240). She recognizes the importance of “be[ing] rational” and having a “sound intellect,” so that she might be able to judge the characters of others impartially. Fanny thus “deserves the right” to judge the actions and behavior of others as long as she is rational, honest and has a “sound intellect.” And Fanny’s judgments of others are impeccably accurate throughout the novel. Her ability to accurately assess herself and others is directly connected to how Fanny views her education. She views learning as a continual process of self-study and self-control, unlike her female cousin who responds to her aunt’s statement that “there is a great deal more for you to learn” with the response “[y]es, I know there is, till I am seventeen” (16). This unnamed cousin, likely Maria, believes that education ends when she reaches a certain age and is freed from the school-room. Education has no intrinsic value for the Bertram girls and they do not internalize anything they learn from their governess or anyone else. As Sir Thomas eventually comes to acknowledge about his daughters, “[s]omething had been wanting within . . . principle, active principle had been wanting” (422). Their education does not encourage the development of an internal value system or the habit of introspection and this leads both girls into selfish folly that eventually leads to ruin. It is only Fanny that develops “active principle” and an internal value system through her access to a rational, masculine education. As Claudia Johnson points out:

> All the worst crimes pursuant upon female immodesty—illicit sex and adultery—come to pass in *Mansfield Park*. But here such effects proceed from causes contrary to what conservative writers conceived. The only character in *Mansfield Park*
whose hands remain clean has to think for herself and to defy the figureheads of social and religious authority in order to remain guiltless. (105)

Fanny’s education gives her an internal strength and autonomy that allows her to defy those in authority over her when she knows herself to be morally correct. She cannot force her morality on others, but she can refuse to accept their misreadings of her and refuse to obey their commands when they go against her strong principles.

The differences in the educations of the girls in Mansfield Park offer a clear view of Austen’s ideas regarding women’s education. Shortly after Fanny’s arrival at Mansfield Park, one of the Miss Bertrams comments on Fanny’s unusual ideas about education, stating Fanny “does not want to learn either music or drawing” which is regarded by Mrs. Norris as a “great want of genius and emulation” (16). The Bertram sisters believe that such accomplishments make up a large part of a lady’s education and their aunt confirms their shallow beliefs. Fanny’s idea of education, however, is learning that might be useful in her station in life. Even at the age of nine, she recognizes that such accomplishments as music or drawing, which make up a lady’s education, are unnecessary and even useless for her. These types of accomplishments do not stretch her mind or give her insight into herself or her behavior. An education in accomplishments, however, is the only type of education Fanny ever turns down. With Edmund’s help, she becomes a voracious reader, quoting Cowper at one point and later becoming enthralled over a good reading of Shakespeare. Her education of the mind, an education that is highly masculine as administered by Edmund, is shown to be far superior to the education of accomplishments that the Bertram girls receive. In addition, Maria and Julia want to escape from the school-room, but Fanny regularly escapes to the old school-room “for walking about in, and thinking” (135). She spends so much time in the little room that Sir Thomas and the
rest of the family resign the little room completely to her use. The narrator describes the school-
room as the place where “Miss Lee had lived, and there they had read and written, and talked and 
laughed,” and the nostalgic description implies Fanny’s feelings of joy remembering her time in 
this room (135). She continues to return to the school-room which shows her desire to return to 
scenes of education and connects her early education with her desire for continual growth and 
improvement. She stores both her books and her “small treasures” in this little room, 
demonstrating that her books and her education are her treasures (236). Fanny lives within 
herself and devotes her time to reading and education and thus appropriates the school room as 
her own personal room for study and introspection. Maria and Julia show their disinterest in 
education by completely separating themselves from any connection with the schoolroom and 
Miss Lee, their governess. The room is no longer called the school-room as “the Miss Bertrams 
would not allow it to be called so any longer” (135). The narrator explains that the room has 
been called the East Room “ever since Maria Bertram was sixteen” and the room was completely 
abandoned by the Bertrams once the girls completed their formal education (136). Maria 
divorces herself from any connection to education at the age of sixteen, considering herself to be 
finished with a tedious task aimed only at children. Maria and Julia’s desire to erase any 
remembrance of the school-room, even to the point of changing its name, shows that their 
education has not been an internal process, but an external acquisition of knowledge and 
accomplishments. Maria and Julia do not value education and have no interest in continuing to 
 improve their minds. This destruction of the school room and, with it, any connection to 
education foreshadows their eventual falls due to the bad educations they received. Austen thus 
shows not only the importance of a better, more intellectual education for women but also points 
out the dangers in the current system of education for young ladies.
Fanny strives to always do what is right, despite her own personal feelings, and feels guilty when she fears she has done, or even felt, wrong. Maria and Julia’s education, however, only requires them to appear to be doing what is right. When Julia is kept away from Henry Crawford at Sotherton due to being caught in a conversation with Mrs. Rushworth and her aunt Norris, Julia remains with the older women despite her desire to escape. The narrator states that she remains because of “[t]he politeness which she had been brought up to practise as a duty” but the narrator points out “the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education” made her miserable while she performed her duty (81-82). She feels it her duty to appear polite, but cannot feel any sense of duty to actually show respect to the woman who is to be her sister’s mother-in-law or to her aunt. She does not remain with them out of feelings of respect but out of a distorted idea of duty, which is the result of the simplistic education she has received. The Bertram girls have only been taught how to appear good – they consider politeness a “duty” – yet they feel no sense of duty to their aunt Norris, their parents or even one another. Maria, in fact, does not even feel a sense of duty to remain faithful to her husband. Austen thus shows the distinction between “seeming” and “being” in women’s educational programs, which Wollstonecraft criticizes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft states, “I am afraid that morality is very insidiously undermined, in the female world, by the attention being turned to the shew instead of the substance. A simple thing is thus made strangely complicated; nay, sometimes virtue and its shadow are set at variance” (214). Both Austen and Wollstonecraft thus criticize the typical education provided to women because it focuses on the outward appearance of virtue without providing the education that would allow women to rationally accept and internalize such virtues.
Maria and Julia are highly culpable for their actions later in the novel but Austen directly connects their failures to the “mismanagement” of their educations which points to a much larger, systemic problem. Sir Thomas acknowledges that he is to blame for his daughters’ failed educations, but Austen shows that his failure goes much deeper than simply failing to recognize their bad dispositions. As Sir Thomas comes to realize, women’s educational systems do not teach “active principle” and pupils of such educations are left with “[s]omething . . . wanting within” (422). However, it is not just Sir Thomas’s plan of education that was wrong, but his entire view of what his daughters are and what their purpose should be is suspect. Sir Thomas’s egotistical, chauvinistic household forces his daughters and his niece into attitudes of submission in ways that forbid them from showing their true characters. Sir Thomas does not realize that the sickly Fanny sits in her schoolroom without a fire until after he is reminded of her existence by the offer of marriage from the eligible Henry Crawford, which is more than eight years after her arrival at Mansfield Park. He does not acknowledge his daughters as individuals until after they have made the errors that are to mark them for life. To Sir Thomas and, by implication, society in general, women do not exist until a masculine presence brings them into notice. They are simply objects that relate to masculine power or desire. This failure to acknowledge the individual characters and needs of the women under his care not only keeps him from recognizing the true dispositions of his daughters and Mrs. Norris, but also keeps him from recognizing Fanny’s superior moral value until it is too late for her to help save his family from disaster.

Before determining to bring Fanny to his home, Sir Thomas discusses his concerns on how to properly educate the girl with Mrs. Norris. His greatest fear, aside from the possibility of one of his sons falling in love with their cousin, is “how to preserve in the minds of my
daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram,” an undertaking which he gives over almost wholly to Mrs. Norris (8, italics in original). This statement is the only one Sir Thomas makes on the educations of his daughters until they are much older and have already proven their educations to have been faulty. He shows no interest in their intellectual or moral educations and instead focuses on making sure that their education fits them to be conscious of “what they are” which has nothing to do with their characters and everything to do with their roles as Sir Thomas Bertram’s daughters. “What they are” is simply a reflection of their social standing with relation to Sir Thomas. He takes no notice of his daughters or his niece until they are brought to his attention by some relation to masculine power.

Sir Thomas first acknowledges Maria as an individual capable of independent feeling and thought when she is preparing for her marriage to Mr. Rushworth at the age of twenty-one or twenty-two. The novel never shows him engaging in conversation with either of his daughters until this conversation regarding Maria’s marriage. He doubts her affection for Mr. Rushworth and admits to himself, after observing them together, that “[s]he could not, did not like him,” so he resolves to speak with her and give her the chance to break off the engagement (180). In his unbiased observations, he easily discerns not only that Maria does not love Mr. Rushworth, but that Rushworth is an ignorant, selfish, and thoughtless man. Maria, however, denies his reading of her feelings and he is “too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others” because he is fully aware of the benefits of the match to himself and to his estate (180-181). He rationalizes to himself that Maria’s “feelings probably were not acute; he had never supposed them to be so” and willingly allows the marriage to occur
(181). He not only knows that he is compromising his daughter’s happiness but this statement clearly shows that he has never understood her temper or disposition. He indicates he “had never supposed” she had strong feelings, which anyone else could have disproven after an hour’s acquaintance. He willingly allows himself to be duped by Maria. He had, only pages before, acknowledged that his children were, with the exception of Edmund, “of unsteady characters” (169). He may not truly know his children, but he knows enough to doubt their characters. His accurate description of his children’s characters, however, does not push him to stop the marriage or question Maria further. He does not know his daughter and is willing to accept her words at face-value, unwilling to believe her capable of deceiving him or herself. Sir Thomas is later forced to acknowledge “[t]he high spirit and strong passions of Mrs. Rushworth especially, were made known to him only in their sad result” as he is unable to prevail upon her to leave Mr. Crawford because she hopes he will eventually marry her (423). As Johnson points out, Sir Thomas’s treatment of his children is as much to blame as their mismanaged educations. She argues “Sir Thomas’s gravity operates only as an external check, not as an internal inhibition, upon the behavior of his children. He quiets but he does not quell lawlessness; his children tremble at the detection, rather than the commission, of wrongs” (Johnson 97). He terrifies his children into submission, but never takes time to learn their dispositions. Considering his grave demeanor that strikes fear into all his children and absolutely terrifies Fanny, this conference between Sir Thomas and Maria becomes very problematic. While he tries to determine Maria’s feelings and give her an escape from Mr. Rushworth, she likely feels the danger of this seemingly innocuous conversation. He gives her the appearance of choice, but nothing in Sir Thomas’s behavior suggests that he would sacrifice his feelings for another. No one in the novel has actively gone against Sir Thomas, and his controlling behavior actually works to push Maria
into the marriage as the narrator acknowledges “she was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 182). Even while he appears to be offering her a freedom, she feels only restraint and control. His tyranny encourages, perhaps even forces, her into her disastrous marriage.

Austen also points to Sir Thomas’s paternal failure in showing that he is obliged to go to Antigua during the “most interesting time” of his daughters’ lives, effectively leaving his daughters unsupervised and unguided (28). Sir Thomas’s plantations in Antigua experience some sort of unnamed financial problems and he is compelled to travel to Antigua to handle them. By spreading his financial interests so far from home, he neglects his family in order to focus on the larger social apparatus of the estate. His estate is more important to him than the individuals in his family. The novel also suggests that his need to handle the issues in Antigua personally stems from the large loss of fortune the estate has suffered due to his eldest son’s profligate behavior and gambling debts. He must make sure that his financial interests in Antigua are not compromised due to the large financial loss he has suffered at home. He takes his eldest son with him in hopes that he will be able to improve Tom’s behavior “by detaching him from some bad connections at home” (28). He recognizes that Tom’s education is lacking and attempts to improve him by removing him from his normal scenes of dissipation and separating him from his bad companions. However, a year in Antigua under the watchful eye of his father does not appear to make any change in Tom’s disposition which shows that Sir Thomas is inept at educating his son as well as his daughters. The necessity for this trip shows that many of the problems the family faces are a direct result not simply of the poor education of the Bertram daughters, but of the bad education and profligacy of the eldest son. Tom’s debts cost Edmund
the more profitable living and force Sir Thomas away from home when his supervision of his daughters is most necessary. Austen thus points to Antigua as a major cause of the disaster that eventually falls upon the Bertram household. Austen shows that his owning property in Antigua is very dangerous to the morals and behavior of his family at home. And, a large part of the property he owns in Antigua is the bodies of slaves. Austen thus subtly connects the engagement in slavery with a moral decline of the English family. Sir Thomas attempts to separate his wayward son from bad companions and dissipation, but instead introduces him to the dark truth tied to his own existence and prosperity. In attempting to teach his son moral behavior, he shows Tom his own complicity in the declining morals of the nation. The chattel slavery Tom witnesses in Antigua likely makes many of his own misdeeds seem trifling in comparison. In fact, when Tom returns from Antigua, he actively invites folly into Mansfield Park in the form of Mr. Yates and the play-acting that causes such scandal in the house (109). In defending his decision to put on the private theatrical to his brother, he telling states “I have no fears, and no scruples,” which suggests he understands his own lack of solid morals (113). He has no fear of his father and lacks strong scruples due to his realization of what Sir Thomas’s wealth is built upon.

While Austen does not directly discuss slavery, the slave trade, or the Mansfield decision, her portrayal of the Antigua trip occurring at the same time as all of the most dangerous situations the Bertram children face suggests an indictment of colonialism and, by implication, slavery. Such an indictment also suggests a more progressive reason for Fanny’s relationship with Edmund Bertram. Austen, notably, did not allow Fanny to marry an eldest son and thus possess Mansfield Park. However, in marrying her enlightened heroine to a second son who will be entering the church, Austen connects Fanny to a moral and spiritual profession and separates her from dependence on the slave trade. They will still be part of the Bertram family and thus
connected to the colonial project, but the money that Edmund and Fanny live on will be filtered through the church and the intellectual labors of Edmund. They will thus earn their living honestly by a profession as opposed to living opulently on the profits that come directly from the plantation and slave labor as does Sir Thomas and, one day, Tom.

When Tom brings Mr. Yates and the play-acting into the house, he creates a permissive atmosphere that encourages improper intimacy between not only Maria and Henry but Edmund and Mary as well, and introduces Julia to the man with whom she eventually elopes. Thus, directly after the trip to Antigua which is meant to improve his morals, Tom actively engages in and encourages morally suspect behavior which eventually leads to corruption within the family. Austen also subtly criticizes primogeniture as a morally debilitating social construct. Tom’s is the education that claims most of Sir Thomas’s attention and even his personal intervention. Had Tom been properly educated and controlled, his father may have had the leisure to focus on the other children at such an important time in their lives and he may never have had to leave England. Sir Thomas’s interests are primarily focused on the continuation of his line and his estate which makes his other children of only peripheral importance to him. Thus, it is only when Maria runs off with Henry and when Julia elopes with Mr. Yates that they obtain their father’s concentrated attention which is regularly focused on his estate and his namesake. Sir Thomas also fails to provide an appropriate guide and protector while he is away from his family for two years. He knows that Lady Bertram has never interested herself in her children and is far too indolent to be of any use while he is away. However, he feels safe leaving the family because “in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention, and in Edmund’s judgment, he had sufficient confidence to make him go without fears for their conduct” (28). Despite living in close communication with Mrs. Norris for his entire married life, Sir Thomas is oblivious to her true character and the
danger she represents for his daughters. Mrs. Norris is indeed very watchful, but she has no judgment in regards to the behavior of the Bertram children. Edmund has good judgment, but he has no real power in the Bertram household as he must not only submit to Mrs. Norris and his mother, but he must also submit to his elder brother’s authority in the house. When Edmund tries to convince his brother of the impropriety of the play, Tom effectively shuts him down stating “[m]anage your own concerns, Edmund, and I’ll take care of the rest of the family” (114). Tom reminds Edmund that he is a younger brother and that the family is under his rule in his father’s absence. In addition, Edmund’s judgment is compromised by his infatuation for Mary Crawford. Sir Thomas thus leaves his family in the hands of the conniving Mrs. Norris and his young son who has had very little experience in the world and no real concern for his sisters.

Throughout the novel, Edmund shows little interest in his sisters’ dispositions and very little love for them, likely because they have never offered him the place of superiority that Fanny does. When trying to get Fanny to forget about the impropriety of the play, he claims “we were all wrong together,” but then states “I am shocked whenever I think that Maria could be capable of [being involved in the play]” (318). He thus rationalizes Henry’s and his own behavior in the play, but calls specific attention to Maria’s involvement. He makes no mention of Mary’s role nor does he dare place blame on his elder brother. Instead, he focuses on Maria’s role in the crime and states that once she became involved “we must not be surprised at the rest” (318). Edmund thus believes Maria is more to blame for the impropriety of the play than any other character. In addition, after Maria and Julia’s falls, Edmund is quick to throw them off, calling Fanny “my only sister” (405). Fanny has behaved in the proper manner, so she is elevated to a “sister” while his real sisters are completely abandoned. He never again speaks of either Maria or Julia, even after Julia and her husband return contritely to the family asking for
forgiveness. In fact, when he arrives at Portsmouth to pick up Fanny and Susan, Edmund has no thoughts for his sisters, his mother, or any of the other sufferers. He instead tries to turn all pity and attention to himself by stating “Fanny, think of me!” (407). Edmund does not acknowledge his own complicity in his sisters’ behavior nor does he consider what they might be suffering. He even brushes off any pain Fanny may have regarding Henry Crawford in the depth of his self-pity. She is expected only to acknowledge his grief at the loss of the woman he loved and his sisters are to be wholly forgotten. Like Sir Thomas’s behavior, Edmund’s behavior also shows that it is only as objects of male desire or as products of exchange that women gain any sort of recognition from the masculine power in the home.

Just as Maria only becomes significant in the family due to her (inappropriate) relationships with men, Fanny only gains a superior education because she becomes an object of interest to Edmund. He feels sympathy for her, perhaps even attraction, when he sees her crying on the stairs only a week after her arrival at Mansfield Park. He tries to comfort her and then befriends her, becoming her only ally and friend in the home. She, in effect, becomes his personal charity case. His kind treatment of Fanny allows him to prove his good nature and share his superior knowledge. This charitable behavior does highlight Edmund’s kind nature, but it also shows that Fanny, as well as her cousins, is completely limited in choice of education by who chooses to educate her. At Portsmouth, Fanny only learns to “read, work, and write” and with Miss Lee she learns some French, some history and likely a smattering of other superficial knowledge (15). With Edmund, she learns what he chooses to teach her and eventually begins to “[think] like him,” but her continuous studies also allow her to develop her mind and beliefs independent of him (58). He is a serious, high-minded young man who is studying for a religious occupation and passes on his knowledge and beliefs to the young girl who dotes on him and
worships every word he says. It does not appear that he ever offers similar instruction or support to his sisters, likely because they would never have given him the satisfaction of his superiority that Fanny willingly offers in their time together. Raised as equals, at least, in terms of blood, Maria and Julia do not submit to his moral or sexual superiority. As a younger son, his status in the house is not significantly higher than his sisters’ positions and he only gains the appearance of superiority through his moral purity and judgment. Thus, in becoming a teacher to Fanny, as Patrick Fessenbecker points out, Edmund gains a position of dominance that is fulfilling for him, but reinforces her feelings of inferiority through this relationship. In order for Fanny to ever have true autonomy, she must break away from his moral and intellectual control and claim her own moral authority.

While the beginning of the novel does point to Edmund as a mentor figure to Fanny, as the story progresses, the mental and moral superiority move to Fanny and she slowly comes to accept this role. Her first feelings of doubt regarding Edmund’s judgment occur when he believes she will be moving in with Mrs. Norris after the death of Mr. Norris. He is certain such a change will be beneficial to her, but she responds “I cannot see things as you do; but I ought to believe you to be right rather than myself” (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 23). She still defers to Edmund’s judgment, but acknowledges that she “cannot see things as [Edmund does]” with regard to Mrs. Norris. While he is correct in seeing that perhaps a different situation would be beneficial to her, he is clearly wrong in his reading of Mrs. Norris. He believes, despite years of contrary evidence, that Mrs. Norris wants Fanny to live with her and will interest herself in her niece’s future. Fanny, however, knows that her aunt has no feelings for her and would only make her more miserable if they lived together. She has long seen the flaws in her aunt’s character and recognizes that a change in situation would not affect a change in Mrs. Norris’s heart. Fanny is
proven right as Mrs. Norris refuses to take her niece to live with her, although she is happy to live with the fallen Maria at the end of the novel.

Fanny’s sight becomes considerably more independent from Edmund’s, and more correct than his, with the entrance of the Crawfords. As Edmund becomes infatuated with Mary Crawford, he comes to Fanny to seek her opinion of Mary or, more often, to rationalize some impropriety he has detected in Mary’s behavior. He sees that much of what Mary Crawford says and does is “not quite right,” yet he continues to be drawn into a relationship with her (56). He first acknowledges that her behavior “did not suit his sense of propriety” when he hears her talk disparagingly of her uncle and the narrator indicates “he was silenced, till induced by further smiles and liveliness, to put the matter by for the present” (51). He realizes that she should not discuss her uncle’s impropriety in public, but is unable to continue to show his displeasure due to her charm and flattery. Later in the same conversation, he “again felt grave” by her flippant language regarding her uncle’s profession (54). He recognizes that she behaves improperly, but does not guard himself in this knowledge. Mary Crawford has clearly had an education in accomplishments and is well aware how to use her abilities to entice Edmund and make him ignore the flaws he sees. Just as Maria convinces Mr. Rushworth to marry her despite her continual mistreatment of him, Mary Crawford almost convinces Edmund to marry her. Edmund comes to Fanny to discuss Mary’s flaws and find confirmation of his views, but soon begins justifying Mary’s behavior claiming “I do not censure her opinions, but there certainly is impropriety in making them public” (57, italics in original). He supports Mary’s belief in her aunt’s innocence, but condemns her manner of speaking of it. He continues to discuss Mary until he has convinced himself that she is what a woman should be: “She is perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. . . I am glad you saw it all as I did” (58). While Fanny
agrees that Mary should not have spoken negatively of her uncle, she does not agree with the rest of Edmund’s justifications. She calls Mary “ungrateful,” which Edmund vehemently denies and argues against. Despite Edmund’s proclamation, Fanny does not “[see] it all” as Edmund does, but instead recognizes that Mary is manipulative and false. He wants Fanny to see Miss Crawford as he does because he respects her moral judgment and believes her to be unbiased. He states that he is “glad” Fanny sees Miss Crawford as he did, effectively ignoring their differences of opinion and allowing himself to believe that Fanny agrees with everything he stated. He recognizes that Mary has dangerous flaws but tries to justify them and feels that his justifications must be truth if Fanny, his totem of correct behavior, agrees with him. The narrator states that Edmund, “[h]aving formed [Fanny’s] mind and gained her affections . . . had a good chance of her thinking like him” but points out that “there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow” (58). Edmund feels that since he “formed her mind,” he still has the right to dictate to that mind what to think. He refuses to acknowledge that her intellect is independent of his and that she sees and judges more clearly than he. He assumes that any “dissimilarity” between their opinions can be ignored as an example of Fanny’s inferior reasoning. He ignores any contrarieties in her answers and chooses to hear only what pleases him. In stating that his “admiration” for Mary “might lead him where Fanny could not follow,” the narrator implies that his admiration of Mary is likely to lead him away from strict moral judgment where Fanny will refuse to follow. From this point on, Edmund’s moral compass begins to falter and it is Fanny who sees the true characters of the Crawfords and the dangerous relationships that begin at Mansfield Park.
As Edmund becomes more attracted to Mary Crawford, his judgment becomes more clouded and he chooses to see not only Mary, but her brother Henry, as he wants them to be, not as they actually are. As Fanny watches the progress of the play rehearsals, she sees more of Henry Crawford’s behavior to disgust her. Unlike the others in the group, she does not let his talents affect her opinion of him: “Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all... [s]he did not like him as a man, but she must admit him to be the best actor” (148). She acknowledges that he is a good actor but, unlike Maria, Julia and even Edmund, his talents on the stage do not blind her to his true character. She recognizes the distinction between acting and being, which keeps her from being drawn in by Henry when he turns his attentions to her. Edmund, however, does not see Henry’s pursuit of Maria nor does he see the relationship between them growing because he is too busy struggling with his own moral dilemma. The narrator indicates that “Edmund, between his theatrical and real part, between Miss Crawford’s claims and his own conduct, between love and consistency, was equally unobservant” of the impropriety of Maria and Henry’s behavior and Julia’s jealous misery (146). While Edmund is busy balancing between “his theatrical and real part,” Maria is entangling herself in a relationship that leads to her downfall and threatens the stability of the whole family. Austen points out that Edmund is fighting between what he knows to be true and what he suspects to be false. He is unable to separate the Mary that exists before him and the image that she wants him to see and he eventually has to admit to Fanny “I had never understood her before, and that, as far as related to mind, it had been the creature of my own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that I had been too apt to dwell on for many months past” (418). He seems to know that Mary could never be a clergyman’s wife, but he is enjoying the fictionality of their relationship too much to give it up. By allowing his morals to be compromised first by entering into the play and then by feeding his
feelings for Mary, he gives up his role as moral guide and is completely “unobservant” of what is going on around him. His attraction to Mary Crawford leads him astray and causes his judgment to fail the family. He fails to see that Maria and Henry are engaged in a dangerous flirtation, even though not only Fanny, but also Julia and even Mr. Rushworth see the true situation. Edmund is so caught up in the acting of the Crawfords that he fails to see the danger in his own home. And, when those dangers become realities, he refuses to acknowledge his own culpability.

Throughout the novel, Austen shows that Fanny’s moral superiority has very little value in a home where she is not valued as an individual. Her position as not only a female, but as a dependent relation, makes her moral and mental acuities obsolete until someone with power chooses to listen to her. Even Edmund, distracted by his desire for Mary Crawford, cannot heed her warnings and distrusts her reading of Henry. She is frightened by Sir Thomas and feels obligated not to expose her cousins, so she fails to tell him the true reason she will not marry Henry Crawford. By taking her into their home, but ignoring her moral perfections, the Bertrams fail to accept her as the domestic correctress the home needs. When she first arrives at Mansfield Park, Fanny remembers that she “had always been important as play-fellow, instructress, and nurse” to her brothers and sisters at her home in Portsmouth (12). In the home of her uncle, she no longer has the role of eldest daughter who at least commands a modicum of respect from her younger siblings. Instead, she is considered as stupid and ignorant by her older female cousins, an interloper by her Aunt Norris and is primarily ignored by Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas. However, her early role as “instructress” to her brothers and sisters is a role that forms who she is as a character. She wishes to share her knowledge and moral values with others, but most of the characters ignore her admonitions. She tries to be useful at Mansfield Park, but no one there considers her morality of any use and she thus has no influence as a moral paragon. Austen thus
points to another problem in women’s educations. Women may be raised to be the educators of their children and the moral guides of their families, but their subservient positions greatly limit this domestic power. She thus shows women’s domestic power as an illusion because the moral superiority of the woman is ineffectual without the sanction and support of masculine authority.

Fanny attempts to be the “instructress” to Maria, Julia and even Edmund with regard to their relationships with the Crawfords, but they all ignore her admonitions. When the young people take an outing to Sotherton, Fanny tries to warn Maria about her moral danger with Henry Crawford. She has been watching the flirtation between Henry and Maria since the Crawfords first came to Mansfield Park. While she is sitting in the woods at Sotherton, waiting for Edmund and Mary to return, Henry and Maria decide to wander off together past the closed gate without Mr. Rushworth, whom they have sent back to the house in search of his key. Fanny makes an attempt to stop Maria: “feeling all this to be wrong, [Fanny] could not help making an effort to prevent it” (90). She cannot publicly address what she sees as an impropriety in her cousin’s behavior, so she instead states “[y]ou will hurt yourself . . . you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes—you will tear your gown—you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go” (90). She tries to stop her cousin, giving her an abundance of plausible excuses for backing out with dignity. Maria either fails to understand Fanny’s true meaning or chooses not to listen to Fanny’s wise admonition. Before Fanny can even finish her plea, “[h]er cousin was safe on the other side” and Maria responds with a flippant denial of any danger (90).

Fanny attempts to draw Maria’s attention to her moral duty, warning her not to take this dangerous step with Henry Crawford, but her words fall on deaf ears. Maria has never been wont to listen to her cousin and does not choose to begin now. In the same way, Fanny sees Julia’s misery during the play and “pitied much of this in Julia; but there was no outward fellowship
between them. Julia made no communication, and Fanny took no liberties. They were two
solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny’s consciousness” (146). She clearly sees that
Henry Crawford has been playing Maria and Julia off against one another and she agrees with
Julia’s reading that Henry has chosen her sister. Fanny understands Julia’s feelings, since she is
watching Edmund behave the same way with Mary, and could perhaps be a friend and advisor to
Julia. Fanny, however, has been firmly taught not to take “liberties” with her cousins and Julia
makes no attempt to communicate with Fanny. Again, Fanny could have been a useful guide to
her troubled cousin, but Julia refuses to lower herself to Fanny’s position and instead chooses to
sit in morose silence, hoping for “some punishment to Maria for conduct so shameful towards
herself, as well as towards Mr. Rushworth” (146).

Just as Maria and Julia ignore Fanny and her admonitions, Edmund too fails to
acknowledge the moral value and correct judgment that Fanny offers. Edmund has been blind to
the improprieties of his sisters’ and the Crawfords’ behavior and remains unaware of his own
blindness. He continues to see Fanny as his pupil, the young cousin he helped to educate, instead
of recognizing her as a moral force in her own right. After Maria’s marriage, Fanny describes
Mr. Crawford’s behavior to Edmund, citing his character as her reason for refusing to marry him:

I must say, cousin, that I cannot approve his character. I have not thought well of
him from the time of the play. I then saw him behaving, as it appeared to me, so
very improperly and unfeelingly, I may speak of it now because it is all over—so
improperly by poor Mr. Rushworth, not seeming to care how he exposed or hurt
him, and paying attentions to my cousin Maria, which—in short, at the time of the
play, I received an impression which will never be got over. (317)
Fanny gives a very accurate description of Henry’s behavior towards Maria. She sees that he was trifling with Maria, in front of her intended, with no care for whom he might be hurting. She recognizes that he used Julia in order to gain the affections of Maria with no serious intentions toward either sister. Fanny has refrained from confessing what she saw, but now feels that she can talk about it “because it is all over” (317). However, it is not all over, and she gives Edmund valuable insight into Henry Crawford’s true character and the danger he represents. She offers Edmund the evidence he needs to prevent Henry’s future involvement with their family, but Edmund refuses to believe Fanny because he would then have to believe his own fears about Mary’s character. He not only denies that Henry’s character is badly flawed, but even refuses to accept this as a reason for Fanny not to marry him. Instead, he responds to Fanny after “scarcely hearing her to the end” and begs her not to judge Henry, himself or anyone else “by what we appeared at that period of general folly,” even though he judges Maria only moments later (318). He ignores her viewpoint and instead chooses to write off all her observations of Henry by lumping the players as “all wrong together” (318). He tells her not to judge by what “we appeared” at the time of the play, arguing that those appearances were not true indicators of the characters of the performers and even implying that she may have misjudged those appearances. What he fails to acknowledge here is that Fanny was not wrong in her behavior during the play and she was in a position to see what occurred and judge the incidents appropriately. Fanny was not blinded by devotion or fooled by a lively, interesting character; she has regularly judged correctly, regardless of appearances. Fanny watched as a bystander and even tells Edmund “perhaps I saw more than you did,” urging him to realize that her reading is accurate because of her situation as a spectator (318). Edmund, however, reminds her of her place by rejecting her reading; he is the teacher and thus it is his reading that is to be trusted. His advice, again, is
tainted not only by his masculine superiority, but his sexual desire for Mary Crawford. If Fanny agrees to marry Henry, his chances at gaining Mary’s consent are considerably higher as he will be doubly supported by her brother and Fanny. Just like his father, he is willing to trade Fanny off in order to improve his own prospects. In addition, if Henry takes responsibility for Fanny, Edmund is no longer obligated to play the role of protector which might interfere with his conjugal relationship.

After her determined refusal of Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas sends her back to Portsmouth, hoping that “a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state” and convince her to accept Henry’s offer of marriage (335). Fanny’s return to Portsmouth does not change her mind about Henry Crawford, but it does allow her to actively engage in educating another, giving her an opportunity to share her moral and intellectual knowledge. In her sister Susan, she finds her first willing pupil and watches the young girl improve under her tutelage. She recognizes in Susan “the natural light of the mind which could so early distinguish justly” and begins “to entertain the hope of being useful to a mind so much in need of help, and so much deserving it” (362). She finds in Susan an apt pupil who looks up to her and listens to her advice. For the first time, Fanny sees that her intellectual abilities are of use to others. She has always believed that her purpose at Mansfield Park was to be a useful servant to any Bertram who needed her. She now sees that her moral and intellectual abilities are of value to others rather than simply to herself. In Portsmouth, where she was once the “instructress” of her brothers and sisters, she takes on “an office of authority” by beginning Susan’s education (12, 361). She gains further autonomy by becoming “a subscriber” to a circulating library and she is “amazed at being any thing in propria persona, amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chuser of books! And to be having any one’s improvement
in view in her choice! But so it was” (363). For the first time, Fanny steps out of her role as submissive watcher and takes on a role of authority – that of teacher. This educational role is one that she does not relinquish throughout the rest of the novel. She finally recognizes that, despite the fact that she has been consistently ignored at Mansfield Park, she has always had the capacity to be more than simply a useful servant and could even have prevented some of the tragedies that befall the family if they had accepted her in the role of moral guide.

Throughout the novel, Fanny continually has wise advice for Edmund, but her advice usually remains in her own consciousness. In watching the relationship between Edmund and Mary grow, she recognizes that “he was deceived in [Mary]; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer” (239). She sees that he is drawn in by Mary but does not attempt to share her observations with him after their first conversation regarding her because she knows he will twist her words and ignore her meanings. When he does come to her before her ball, doubting Mary’s affections, she is unwilling to tell what she knows to be true about Mary, stating instead “I am not qualified for an adviser. Do not ask advice of me. I am not competent” (244). She is, however, very competent and appears to know that her advice would be correct in this situation, but she is unwilling to share it. She simply states that whatever Mary’s flaws are, they are “[t]he effect of education” and allows Edmund to lay all blame for his current misery on “that uncle and aunt” who he believes “have injured the finest mind” (243-244). Instead of correcting his opinions, she refuses to offer her own reading of Mary, afraid of offending Edmund and losing the relationship she has with him. She realizes that much of their closeness depends on her submission to him and her implicit agreement in his ideas and feelings. In the household of Sir Thomas, she has been taught to submit to those in higher social situations, despite her moral superiority, so she continues to
behave this way with Edmund. She does not even respond when Edmund tells her that she “can bear [him] witness . . . that [he has] never been blinded” by Mary Crawford (244). She has just acknowledged that he is deceived, but refuses to contradict him when he claims to not have been blinded by Mary.

In Portsmouth, Fanny realizes her own moral authority as she sees how her lessons have helped to improve her sister. This self-recognition makes her more aware of Edmund’s flaws and her criticism of him becomes stronger. She receives a letter from him discussing his confused feelings regarding Miss Crawford that “almost vexed [Fanny] into displeasure, and anger, against Edmund” (386). For the first time, her emotions regarding Edmund move away from sympathy and love for him to righteous anger against him. She blames Edmund for allowing himself to be deceived and for continuing to seesaw back and forth regarding whether or not to propose to Mary Crawford. Since his indecision has gone on so long, she knows he has already chosen to ignore his scruples and marry her if he can. She even commands him: “‘Oh! write, write. Finish it at once. Let there be an end of this suspense. Fix, commit, condemn yourself’” (387). She recognizes that he has made his decision and that he is simply prolonging the suspense for all involved. She is also angry that he has involved her in his affair and even misread Mary’s affection for herself. She provides strong commentary regarding the false statements in his letter: “‘So very fond of me’, ’tis nonsense all. [Mary] loves nobody but herself and her brother. ‘Her friends leading her astray for years!’ She is quite as likely to have led them astray” (386). She knows Mary does not care for her and likely does not really love Edmund. She doubts that Mary’s flaws can simply be blamed on her education at the hands of others and thinks that since she is leading Edmund astray, she has likely led others before him. She also acknowledges “Edmund, you do not know me” (386-387, italics in original). She recognizes that her dearest
friend and cousin not only misreads Mary, but misreads her as well. He views her simply as a timid, shy woman who is afraid to marry Henry Crawford because she fears change and the necessity of leaving Mansfield Park. He portrays her as a woman who does not know her own heart and mind and implies that she needs permission and guidance in order to love a man. He believes she is to be won by appropriate maneuvering, telling her that he will assist Henry’s suit and that “[b]etween us, I think we should have won you. My theoretical and his practical knowledge together could not have failed” (316). He is certain that she will give in to Henry Crawford and will thus be separated from him forever if Mary Crawford will not marry him.

Fanny realizes that Edmund views women in relation to himself and his own feelings and has not seen her or Mary for who they truly are. He has repeatedly connected Mary and Fanny, viewing them as two like-minded women, claiming “there is so much general resemblance in true generosity and natural delicacy” between them (239). However, the narrator has already pointed out their large dissimilarity: “[A value for Edmund] was the only point of resemblance between [Fanny] and the lady who sat by her; in every thing but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny’s delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling” (73). In connecting these two women, the two women he considers his, Edmund has made Mary into something she is not by adding characteristics that only exist in Fanny. He has also diminished the value of Fanny’s moral and mental superiority by equating them with Mary Crawford, insulting his cousin and belittling her proven character.

After her return from Portsmouth, once Edmund has been permanently separated from Mary, Fanny refuses to let him again rationalize away her flaws as he so often has. When he explains their final interview, Fanny states that Mary is “[c]ruel . . . quite cruel! At such a moment to give way to gaiety and to speak with lightness, and to you! – Absolute cruelty!”
(416). She will not let him gloss over any of the flaws in Mary’s character. Edmund claims to be done talking about Miss Crawford, but then begins the topic again, propounding on her good qualities and again blaming others for her flaws, stating “how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier” (419). Fanny, however, is done talking of Mary Crawford, afraid that he will again talk away all of her flaws, and the narrator states she “felt more than justified in adding to his knowledge of [Mary’s] real character, by some hint of what his brother’s state of health might be supposed to have in her wish for a complete reconciliation” (419). Here, Austen does not quote Fanny’s own words, allowing the reader to imagine how Fanny has conveyed this unwelcome knowledge to Edmund. Fanny finally forces him to acknowledge the truth of Mary’s character and his flawed reading of her. Having humbly submitted to his opinions, however flawed, throughout the novel, she feels “justified” in pointing out that Mary hoped for Tom’s death and renewed her pursuit of Edmund because she thought she may now have a chance at becoming the wife of a baronet. He can no longer rationalize her behavior and must thus submit to Fanny’s wisdom and superior insight. In order to finally gain a happy marriage to Fanny, he must submit to be corrected by her. He must recognize her superiority and see that “[h]er mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half concealment, no self deception, on the present, no reliance on future improvement” (430). The narrator acknowledges that “[s]he was of course only too good for him” (430). Edmund finally allows himself to be instructed by her moral superiority and gives her the place she has long deserved. He even “learn[s] to prefer [her] soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones” like those of Mary Crawford (429). He learns to appreciate the superior qualities of Fanny Price even if they are not joined with a lively wit and striking beauty.
Fanny’s education is clearly the ideal education in the novel. She is portrayed as the passive, modest, selfless heroine throughout the novel, silently remaining in the background while providing accurate moral judgments of the people and scenes that surround her. However, despite Fanny’s superior morals and her perfect judgment, Austen shows that she cannot become the true heroine until she accepts her role of educator for others. It is not until she recognizes her own value, claims it at Portsmouth and takes Susan under her wing that she is able to gain the ascendancy in the home that she has long deserved. It is only when she returns to Mansfield Park after being fully vindicated in the eyes of Sir Thomas in her refusal to marry Henry Crawford and when she forces Edmund to see the truth that she comes into her proper role. However, Austen also shows that the falls of Julia and particularly Maria are necessary in order for Fanny’s moral superiority to be fully acknowledged, which in turn gives her the right to marry Edmund. In portraying Maria’s absolute dereliction and Mary’s response to it, Austen shows that Fanny’s moral superiority would have remained completely unacknowledged by Sir Thomas and underappreciated by Edmund had not a devastating reversal occurred. As Richardson points out, “her textbook passivity entails that she can triumph only by virtue of other characters’ mistakes. The reader’s frustration with Fanny attests to the novel’s distance from the domestic ideology it superficially endorses” (Literature 197). Fanny must learn to use her intellect and judgment to help the family, yet her role as a dependent relation would never have allowed her the authority she needed without a dramatic change in the Bertram family’s structure. Had the intrigue never been detected, Fanny’s correct judgment would never have been acknowledged. Austen shows that such moral goodness and perspicuity is not always valued in and of itself; it is often only acknowledged in its oppositional relation to truly bad behavior. Thus, Austen also questions the conservative ideal through her portrayal of Fanny. As many critics have pointed out, Fanny is an
image of perfection that is almost too good and thus turns off readers of the novel. She is too passive, too perfect, too prudish. Austen’s portrayal of Fanny becomes even more troubled as, at the end of the novel, she is the only positively portrayed female character, with the possible exception of her little sister Susan. The ideal woman is too much for any woman to live up to and the ones that do are too painful to enjoy. Even Edmund, the cousin who has always cared for her and recognized her good attributes, only turns to her after his hopes for Mary Crawford are bitterly crushed. However, at the end of the novel, Fanny takes over the role of oldest Bertram daughter, bringing her sister Susan to take over the role of younger Bertram sister. Thus Fanny brings the sister she has begun educating into the house to reflect and extend her moral authority in Mansfield Park as she spreads it farther to Thornton Lacey and the parsonage as Mrs. Edmund Bertram. Fanny may never be a “Miss Bertram,” but she does become Mrs. Bertram due to her moral and intellectual superiority.
CONCLUSION
EDUCATION, NATIONALISM, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

The preceding chapters discussed five women’s novels which promote better educations for woman and point to the importance of women in teaching environments. The female characters in these works bring to focus a growing space for women in public educational environments both as students and educators. Only three decades after *Mansfield Park* was published, Queen’s College London became the first institute of higher learning for women, suggesting a connection between the portrayals of women educators in romantic-period fiction and the subsequent opening of higher educational institutes for women. In her article, “The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870,” Christina De Bellaigue studies the lives of eighty-three schoolmistresses in the period between 1780 and 1860, which coincides with the publication dates of the novels discussed here. She discusses how the documentary evidence of the lives of this small collection of schoolmistresses shows not only a growing professionalization of the woman teacher, but also shows how these teachers themselves actively sought pedagogical training and considered their roles as teachers as callings, vocations, and even professions. She reports that of the eighty-three women she studied, “six are known to have become teachers from a sense of vocation, and five more declined offers of marriage, usually expressing their commitment to their work as one reason for their refusal” (De Bellaigue 966). Women teachers were beginning to see their occupations as important aspects of selfhood and to fight for recognition of the importance of their roles as educators. Similarly, male educators were pushing for the recognition of teaching as a profession and, in 1861, “the census enumerators moved teaching from the category of ‘learned occupations’ to that of ‘professions’”
While this distinction of professionalization first only applied to male teachers, the timing of this ruling does suggest that the development of teaching as a profession was closely aligned to women’s movements aimed at gaining access to higher education for women. As De Bellaigue points out, organizations for schoolmistresses and governesses played an important role in the professionalization of teaching while at the same time helping found institutes of higher education for women like Queen’s College, North London Collegiate School, and Cheltenham Ladies’ College. Following the lead of these women’s institutions, London University became the first university to admit women for its degrees in 1878 and Manchester followed suit in 1897. Oxford allowed women to read for its degrees in 1920 and Cambridge finally opened to women in 1947.

The five women authors I discuss, among others, were thus on the forefront of a growing trend toward professionalizing teaching, encouraging pedagogical training for teachers, and obtaining greater educational opportunities for women. This move toward professionalization, a move strongly connected with the rise of the middle class during the Victorian period, is foreshadowed in the female educators portrayed in these novels, especially Ellen Percy, Adeline Mowbray, and Mrs. Mason. Each of these characters moves from a more private and domestic educational position to a public teaching position. Ellen Percy, after undergoing her own painful education and spending a short time as a governess, becomes the co-educator of a Highland clan along with her sister-in-law, Charlotte Graham. Together, they are responsible for the public education of all the female villagers belonging to the Glen Eredine. Adeline Mowbray, after the death of Glenmurray, opens a small village school which allows her to support herself financially through teaching and helps her re-establish a sense of purpose in her life. Her experiences as a teacher also allow her to publish educational works for children which points to an additional
educational profession that is opening to women. The most obvious precursor of the professionalization of the female teacher is shown in the story of Mrs. Mason. She moves from the position of a house servant to a governess and then eventually becomes the matron and pedagogical expert of a village school. She not only models new pedagogical theories at the Glenburnie school, but she also establishes a training program that helps prepare her female students for teaching positions themselves and even teaches her pedagogical ideas to young Mary Stewart who is herself seeking better ways to educate her brothers. These women educators thus foreshadow the coming changes for women in education.

Each of these women authors also entered into the political debate that embroiled Britain after the French Revolution, positing narratives that promoted greater opportunities for women while also upholding values of faith, family and loyalty. I have argued that these writers entered the revolutionary debate in innovative and powerful ways in order to recuperate some of the proto-feminist ideals championed by Mary Wollstonecraft. My goal has been to re-evaluate and recuperate these authors by showing how they entered into the revolutionary discourse at a time when such entry was difficult and dangerous, especially for women writers. However, these authors’ reformist narratives encouraging greater educational opportunities for women are not necessarily feminist or radical texts. While foregrounding women as educators, these texts also show disenfranchised classes as needing the education that will be administered by the white female who is affiliated with patriarchal power. Wittingly or not, there are moments in each of these texts that can be read as reinforcing the dominant ideology of the time, and the contemporary popularity and success of these works suggest that any revolutionary or reformist discourse was hidden well enough to appease the reactionary populace who consumed these texts.
In *Modes of Discipline*, Lisa Wood discusses women writers in this same period, focusing also on works that have generally been considered conservative texts. While she does not argue against pigeonholing certain works and authors as conservative, she does argue that anti-revolutionary writers, including Elizabeth Hamilton and Mary Brunton, “engaged critically with contemporary conservative theories in order to produce a gendered politics, a feminine (but nonfeminist) discursive space within the broader field of post-Revolutionary conservativism” (Wood 23). I have shown the value of these texts as cleverly forwarding reformist ideals while utilizing and, in some cases, even endorsing patriarchal, ethnocentric politics. Wood also extends this argument to a number of other conspicuously conservative women authors of the period, such as Hannah More.

My review of these five novels has focused on the foregrounding in each novel of a female educator, a woman who seeks out educational opportunities and provides instruction to those who surround her. Yet, in each work, one must acknowledge that the foregrounded woman is a product of her own class position and consciousness, as is her author. While each work offers progressive views on education, each work may also reflect and even reinforce negative aspects of its own cultural position while attempting to criticize other aspects. My study looks primarily at the positive aspects of education and how greater educational opportunities for women provided avenues for self-sufficiency, self-expression, and public engagement, but education can also be a tool used by those in power that works to control desires and force assimilation. Each of these five authors, while writing from a disadvantaged gender position, is also writing as a member of a privileged Anglo-European social class, which affects the way her work portrays the purpose of education.
In *The Grammar of Empire*, Janet Sorensen discusses how education in the Highlands was used to assimilate and control a Scottish population thought to be dangerous to British empirical power. She shows how the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) set up educational programs in order “to introduce among the Highlanders a knowledge of the English language, to fit them for understanding and being understood by the rest of the world” (Sorensen 40). This goal thus shows a desire to weed out “Scottishness” in order to replace it with “Englishness.” The attempt to replace the Gaelic language with English reflects the desire to use education in order to control “otherness” within the British nation. She shows how educational reform in the Highlands was problematic as it was administered by southern forces of power who wished to erase differences between England and Scotland.

Sorensen also discusses how literary works played a role in determining the ideal image of England and “Englishness.” Reviewing Austen’s works, Sorensen states:

> Interested in the experiences of a gentry located in the lush green Home Counties and offering only fleeting impressions of spaces beyond fashionable watering holes and country residences, let alone the country of England, Jane Austen’s novels have come to signal to generations of critics and readers the Englishness of England. (197)

She further claims, “[i]f one strand of Austen criticism (and adaptations) has come to understand the experience of a particular class – if itself a gradated and heterogeneous one – as metonymically representative of English experience in general, that move has been predicated, in part, on the belief in an ideal, transcendent “proper” English” (198). She shows how literary
representations and their use of language come to represent an idea of nation and nationality that is anathema to the true relationship of nations and peoples within the British Empire.

With Britain at war, many authors were compelled to a nationalist agenda, fighting to cement the ties between Scotland, Ireland and England and fighting to keep out the foreign ideas and philosophies they felt would ruin Britain. The authors I discuss represent a diverse and complicated relationship to England and colonial power. Each of these authors is invested in a Britain that is united in opposition to France and Napoleon, but loyal support of the British nation is increasingly complicated by the author’s own nationality and the position of her nation within the empire. In supporting “Englishness” as opposed to continental or colonial “otherness,” these authors risk marginalizing the Scottish, Irish and colonial subjects they present and represent.

These complicated national identities can be read especially in the works of Brunton, Edgeworth, and Hamilton. The educations offered and supported by the women in these novels are often in opposition to male-centered educational systems, but they do not necessarily question the nationalistic beliefs that are inherent in their language and educational ideals. In some ways, the educations they offer can be read as English educations that come from a place of nationalist power. In fact, Wood is unable to identify either Brunton or Hamilton’s works as products of a non-English author. Discussing these two authors, Wood states “[i]t is difficult to characterize the productions of these writers as Scottish, or English, or Irish, though their nationality helped, in some cases, to determine the setting and form of their novels” (26). Wood is unable to see any specifically national aspects in these works which suggests a fractured authorial position with regard to national identity. She implies that Brunton and Hamilton, both of whom claim Scotland as home, are essentially English writers. This statement suggests that
their portrayals of Scotland are filtered through the lens of an ideal “Englishness,” which affects the types of educations they propose for the lower class members of their own nation(s).

Mary Brunton spent her entire life in Scotland and was the wife of a minister in the Church of Scotland. She is thus a Scottish citizen exploring issues of education and gender from a position that is non-English. Yet, in *Discipline*, Henry Maitland/Graham’s mother is an Englishwoman who marries a “Highland rebel,” yet she forces her son to take her English family name of Maitland and complete his studies in England (Brunton 347). In fact, Henry’s sister reports that “[her] mother would never even allow us to address our letters to Henry under his real name” (370). Henry repeats the anglicizing process by marrying the English Ellen and placing her at the head of a Scottish Highland clan where she will continue her educational work. She and Henry Graham will thus bring English educations and English ideas of progress into the Scottish Highlands which may be seen as an attempt to civilize and control a disenfranchised group of people. Yet, Brunton also faithfully describes the picturesque beauty of Scotland and portrays Henry Graham as both a modern and a romantic hero who uses his knowledge and experiences to improve the lives of his family and community in an attempt to preserve and portray the Highlands as they are.

Elizabeth Hamilton was born in Ireland, but was sent to live with her aunt in Scotland after the death of her father when she was six years old. She spent most of her childhood in Scotland before moving to London for a time to live with her brother and sister. She moved back to Edinburgh in 1804 and spent the rest of her life there. That same year, she received a Royal Pension from George III. She thus has an unusual connection to patriarchal power since she lives on this pension. Her national relationship is also complicated by having been born in Ireland, having lived in England a time, but considering Scotland her home. Elizabeth Hamilton’s
Cottagers of Glenburnie is a reformist work that shows the importance of the woman educator, but it may also be read as participating in the Anglo-British project of assimilating the Scottish Highlanders through educational practices. In *Cottagers*, a lowland Scottish woman who has been raised and educated in the homes of the dominant class takes over control of a Scottish village and “modernizes” it to English standards, which includes extensive cleaning, retraining, and the founding of a new village school that she helps superintend. As Janet Sorensen points out, “[u]ndoubtedly, English instruction, tied to a Whig and Protestant worldview, helped ‘foster a British, rather than a local or even Scottish loyalty’” (32). By bringing the lowland Scot, Mrs. Mason, into Glenburnie, Hamilton suggests there is a need for an educational force that comes from outside the village to faithfully teach the Scottish Highlanders the ways of the more civilized south. As Sorensen argues, the goal of such educational programs in the Highlands was “jump-starting this ‘retrograde’ population out of an anachronistic barbaric stage” (39). However, as I discussed in my chapter on *Cottagers*, even the stubborn MacClarty women, who eventually come to a disastrous end to show the dangers of not accepting education, are praised by the author for their skills in the dairy, in weaving, and in flowering muslin, and Hamilton has been praised for her skillful and authentic rendering of dialect throughout the work.

Maria Edgeworth was born in England, but spent most of her life on her family’s estate in Edgeworthstown, Ireland. She has been considered a regional writer and has received praise for her portrayals of Irish village life. In *Belinda*, the heroine turns down the West Indian gambler, Mr. Vincent, in favor of the proper English gentleman represented by Clarence Hervey. Mr. Vincent’s gambling is shown as a fatal flaw while Mr. Hervey is redeemable despite his scandalous relationships with both Lady Delacour and Virginia St. Pierre. The reader is left to question whether Mr. Vincent is rejected because he is a slave owner or whether it is due to the
fact that he is patently un-English and has been corrupted by living in the dangerous moral climate of the West Indies.

Similarly, in Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*, Mr. Berrendale is seduced from his wife, his daughter and England by the temptations of a Jamaican heiress. He throws off his legal wife and his legitimate daughter for the pleasure of his Jamaican mistress. While this seems a blatant portrayal of the immorality of the peoples that inhabit the British colonies, the novel also portrays the plight of the ex-slave Savanna and her family with great sympathy. Adeline spends her last coins saving the father of the family from debtor’s prison. The man’s wife, Savanna, and son, called Tawny Boy, pledge themselves to Adeline for life. Savanna remains with Adeline throughout the novel, boldly standing up for her against Mr. Berrendale’s abuse. She is Adeline’s only friend through many of her trials and she becomes an important member of the sisterhood that will raise and educate Adeline’s daughter after her death. However, despite this positive portrayal of Savanna, Opie easily writes out the character of Savanna’s son by sending him to a lady who “was desirous of bringing him up to be the play-fellow and future attendant on her son” (Opie 191). Savanna’s roles in relation to Adeline and little Editha are thus shown to be more important than her role as mother to her own son.

Each of these authors wrote in support of better educations for women in hopes of saving this important Wollstonecraftian ideal from being crushed by the reactionary forces that ruled Britain after the French Revolution. While each of these authors offers a reformist argument in favor of limited women’s rights, each work is a product of a distinct social situation, a specific ideological standpoint, and a complex political climate. I read these women’s novels as progressive works that argue for and point toward greater educational rights for women, but this perspective does not signify that their works were not also complicit in patriarchal discourse on
other topics. I have also attempted to draw attention to a few writers who made a large impact on their contemporary societies, but have often been dismissed from literary studies. The works of Mary Brunton and Amelia Opie offer new and interesting avenues for studying the lives and beliefs of British women during the long eighteenth century that have only begun to be considered by scholars. While each work must be read as a product of its own cultural position, I have shown that all five of these women shared an intense interest in women’s education and used their works to further educational opportunities for women throughout Great Britain.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Michelle Brandeberry was born in Lewiston, Idaho on July 5, 1981. She graduated from the University of Montana in May 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and a minor in German. She received her Master of Arts at Florida State University in April 2006 and her PhD at Florida State in April 2015. She taught undergraduate writing and literature courses at FSU for seven years. Her research interests include Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Literature, Women Writers, and the History of the Novel. She currently lives in Montana, where she spends her free time reading, writing, playing with her nieces and nephews, and walking her dogs in the beautiful outdoors.