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Maria Edgeworth and the Trope of Domestic Reading

by

Heather MacFadyen

Submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
August 1992

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Abstract

During the period in which Maria Edgeworth wrote novels, novel-reading was a disreputable activity, and it was generally thought that women in particular enjoyed an illicit sexual excitement through their novel-reading. This widespread view among reviewers, parents, clergymen, and so forth generated a trope of female reading, which represented women's responses to literature as forms of gluttony, intoxication, or sexual arousal. Confronted with this cluster of troubling associations, Edgeworth constructed an alternate and opposing trope of domestic reading. She displaced the erotic associations of women and reading by situating reading within the domestic sphere. The resulting trope of domestic reading became the foundation of her presentation of the proper lady and the proper gentleman, of the domestic circle, which balances reason and emotion, and, ultimately, of rationally ordered civil society.

Chapter One outlines the trope of female reading and its relationship to domestic ideology. Chapter Two establishes the parameters of domestic reading by examining Edgeworth's earliest published work, Letters for Literary Ladies. The domestic readers of this early work regulate their own passions and the passions of others, and they are thus able to draw men away from the disruptive competition of the public sphere into a domestic literary salon. Chapter Three examines Edgeworth's construction of a trope of fashionable reading in her account of the

transformation of Belinda's Lady Delacour into a domestic woman. While the female reader indulges in solitary excess, the fashionable reader indulges in highly public and highly theatrical demonstrations of her literary skill.

Chapters Four and Five turn to the problems that men who are unable to read domestically pose to civil society. Chapter Four traces the reformation of the hero of "Forester," who refuses to abide by the conventions of gentlemanly behaviour. Forester's ungentlemanliness is encouraged by his reading of Robinson Crusoe, and his reformation is marked by his adoption of a more suitable model for the man in civil society, Franklin's Autobiography. Chapter Five examines Ormond, where the hero's reading of Tom Jones leads to sexual transgression and where his reformation is initiated by the reading of Sir Charles Grandison. Through his association with an exemplary domestic family, Ormond learns to conform to the Grandisonian model, and he adopts the patterns of rational masculinity informing Edgeworth's concept of the landowner.

Chapter Six turns to Edgeworth's last novel, Helen, in which the power of domestic reading is both reasserted and questioned. Although the heroine is able to use her skills as a domestic reader to distinguish between the merits of two suitors, domestic reading fails when she becomes associated with a transgressive female writing. While Edgeworth's earlier novels suggest that the threat to domestic order resides in female reading, Helen suggests that female writing (an active, illicit, and ultimately

public articulation of sexual desire) is a far more pressing threat to the individual and to society.

Miss Edgeworth is at Abbotsford, and has been for some time; a little, dark, bearded, sharp, withered, active, laughing, talking, impudent, fearless, outspoken, honest, whiggish, unchristian, good-tempered, kindly ultra-Irish body. I like her one day, and damn her to perdition the next.

John Gibson Lockhart

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Anna Hoffman Dickie's and Kelly Hoffman Dickie's intense delight in the world reminded me of what is easily forgotten in the process of writing a dissertation. Over one long winter, Erin Armstrong participated in many conversations about the writing of theses, and from her I learned much about friendship. Douglas McLeod's quiet but persistent belief in my work has been its foundation.

Bibliographic Note

There is no modern critical edition of Maria Edgeworth's works. During her lifetime various collected editions, none of them complete, appeared under different publishers' imprints.

According to the standard bibliography, Bertha C. Slade's Maria Edgeworth, 1767-1849: A Bibliographical Tribute (1937).

Edgeworth carefully corrected and revised her work for the 1832 Baldwin and Craddock edition. Given the difficulty of access to this edition, and the absence of a consensus within the scholarly community about standard editions, I have used a collected edition that reproduces the 1893 Routledge edition: the 10 volume AMS Tales and Novels (New York: AMS P, 1967). All references to the novels are to this edition, and citations by page and chapter are included parenthetically in the text. The AMS edition excludes Edgeworth's juvenile works, fugitive pieces, biographical writings, some drama, and, most important, the pedagogical work, and the work for children. When referring to any of these works, I cite either facsimile editions or the earliest edition I have been able to obtain.

Chapter One

From "Dram" to "Cordial":

Maria Edgeworth and the Trope of Female Reading

You desire me to read Julia de Roubigni if I should meet with it. I won't promise you that I will for though I am as fond of Novels as you can be I am afraid they act on the constitution of the mind as Drams do on the body.¹

Written when she was fifteen, this letter reveals a Maria Edgeworth anxious to distance herself from novel-reading. Her adolescent letters to Fanny Robinson, whom she met while attending a London boarding school, frequently comment on the new program of non-fiction reading that Edgeworth undertook when she joined her father, her second stepmother, and her siblings in Ireland. When Richard Lovell Edgeworth began to supervise his daughter's education, he offered her the same sort of reading that their collaborative pedagogical works were later to recommend to the young man studying to be a lawyer or landowner: William Blackstone, James Burghe, Jean de Lolme, and Adam Smith.² Instead of the intoxicating "drams" offered by novels,

¹ Maria Edgeworth, "To Fanny Robinson," 15 September 1783, qtd. in Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon 1972) 73. For an account of Edgeworth's friendship and correspondence with Fanny Robinson Hoare, see Butler 73-75, 107-08, 150-54.

² See, for example, Professional Education (London: Johnson, 1809) 258, 262, ch. 5; 314-5, 319, ch. 6; 401-2, ch. 7.

Edgeworth read (and urged Robinson to read) the sterner stuff of political, legal, and historical disquisitions.³

In representing her novel-reading as a form of intoxication, Edgeworth was drawing upon what Robert Uphaus calls the "consensus view of female reading" of the period.⁴ Basic to this view was the convention that certain types of women's reading were acts of the body, not the mind, and this convention, in turn, reflected the conviction that the novel was an agent of illicit sexual excitement and corruption. The trope produced by this widespread view presented women's responses to literature as forms of gluttony, intoxication, or sexual arousal. What is most striking in Maria Edgeworth's handling of the moral problem that the trope of female reading presented to the woman reader and the woman writer is her transformation of the inimical association of reading and appetite. She does not abandon the notion of a physical response to reading that lies at the heart of the trope of female reading. Instead, she transforms it: the dram that arouses becomes the cordial that heals.

During one of the many periods in which Edgeworth's weak eyes would not permit her to read for herself, she informed a younger brother that their sister Charlotte Edgeworth "cordials me twice a day with 'Cecilia,' which she reads charmingly, and which entertains me as much at the third reading as it did at the

³ For a general account of Edgeworth's reading, see Butler 66-67, 149-51, 219-20.

⁴ Robert Uphaus, "Jane Austen and Female Reading," Studies in the Novel 19 (1987): 336.

first."⁵ This sense of reading as a soothing cordial persisted. Fifteen years later, Edgeworth invoked the same healing effect of reading upon the body when writing to her cousin Sophy Ruxton: "It is a great advantage to young people not to swallow down entertaining books too early, for then nothing is left for the solace of illness."⁶ Suggestively, her own writings were routinely characterized by her reviewers in medical metaphors. Francis Jeffrey, for example, in his review of the first series of Tales of Fashionable Life (1809), employed the medicinal metaphor when he encouraged Edgeworth to write for the lower rather than the higher classes, for "fashionable patients will do less credit to her prescriptions than the more numerous classes to whom they might have been directed."⁷

In her own life, Edgeworth further legitimized her appetite for reading by deliberately positioning it within a clearly defined domestic context.⁸ After the "whirling vortex" of a

⁵ Maria Edgeworth, "To C. Sneyd Edgeworth," 4 May 1805, The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth, ed. Augustus J. C. Hare, 2 vols. (1894; Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1971) 1: 150.

⁶ Maria Edgeworth, "To Sophy Ruxton," 1 January 1820, A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth with a Selection from Her Letters, ed. Frances Edgeworth, 3 vols. (London: Master, 1867) 2: 45.

⁷ Francis Jeffrey, Rev. of Tales of Fashionable Life, vols. 1-3. Edinburgh Review 14 (1809): 377. Jeffrey uses a similar formulation in his review of Leonora, Edinburgh Review 8 (1806): 206-13. See also his review of Tales of Fashionable Life, vols. 4-6, British Review 4 (Oct. 1812): 64-90.

⁸ Edgeworth used a similar strategy to transform her writing into a family activity. For an account of the contributions of various family members to Edgeworth's literary activities, see Butler's Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography. Mitzi Myers explores the ways in which Edgeworth's writing is

London visit in 1813, for instance, she reported her delight in returning to her "natural friends" and "dear home," where she can satisfy her "famishing appetite for reading" and begin again her "literary work."⁹ No longer a sign of solitary and illegitimate pleasure, reading is here transformed into a sign of domestic sociability and stability. The shift in Edgeworth's attitude to reading in her letters is emblematic of a shift enacted in her fiction.

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In her fiction, Edgeworth responds to the trope of female reading, and constructs a new trope, the trope of domestic reading. Edgeworth's trope of domestic reading participates in the establishment of what Nancy Armstrong and others have recently been defining as the power of domestic discourse in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. Armstrong's Desire and Domestic Fiction (1987) is the most prominent of recent reconsiderations of the domestic novel, a genre most

tangled with her efforts to manage the filial tensions produced by a sequence of stepmothers. See Mitzi Myers, "The Dilemma of Gender as Double-Voiced Narrative: or, Maria Edgeworth Mothers the Bildungsroman," The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues P, 1988) 67-96; and "Romancing the Moral Tale: Maria Edgeworth and the Problematics of Pedagogy," Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England, ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1991) 96-128.

⁹ Maria Edgeworth, "To Margaret Ruxton," 26 July 1813, The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth, 1: 229.

commonly associated with women writers and women readers. Armstrong argues that when the domestic novel divorced "the language of sexual relations from the language of politics," it introduced "a new form of political power," which Armstrong, following Michel Foucault, calls the "power of domestic surveillance."¹¹ This form of power was articulated through the development of a new gender ideal: the domestic woman. In contrast to the earlier notion of sexuality "that understood desirability in terms of a woman's claims to fortune and family name," Armstrong contends that domestic ideology understood desirability in terms of the psychological and intellectual qualities that made a woman a good household manager (Armstrong 8). The domestic woman's personal and cultural authority thus rested in her ability to control her own desires and those of her household. The shift of female desirability away from women's bodies to their minds was accompanied by a parallel shift in pedagogical theories and methods, as the middle classes developed new forms of inculcating domestic forms of gender and subjectivity. Armstrong cites the Edgeworths' Practical Education (1798) and its refusal of a politically or religiously based curriculum as an exemplary form of domestic pedagogy.¹² This is the only substantial reference to Edgeworth's work in

¹¹ Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 3, 19. Further references will be incorporated parenthetically within the text.

¹² Armstrong misnames Richard Lovell Edgeworth as Robert, and misdates Practical Education, placing it in 1801.

Desire and Domestic Fiction. Since Edgeworth's novels are closely based upon the pedagogical works, determinedly inculcate domestic values, and struggle with political questions despite their domestic emphasis, they would seem to provide a useful test case for Armstrong's model. She chooses, however, to illustrate her thesis by drawing upon the work of Edgeworth's contemporary, Jane Austen.

Armstrong's privileging of Austen is standard in feminist literary histories of the period. Indeed, Edgeworth usually appears in such histories as Austen's adjunct. In their germinal The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar briefly discuss Edgeworth as a prolegomena to their discussion of Austen's juvenilia, but their account devotes most of its energies to a fervent condemnation of Richard Lovell Edgeworth.¹² In The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (1984),

¹² Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 146-54. Gilbert and Gubar are not alone in their concentration upon Richard Lovell Edgeworth; the dynamics of Edgeworth's relationship with her father have been the subject of critical dissension for many years, and the father has repeatedly been cast as the despoiler of his daughter's works. The earliest instances in which perceived flaws of Edgeworth's works are attributed to her father's meddling occur in the reviews of Patronage (1814). See, for example, Sydney Smith, Rev. of Patronage, Edinburgh Review 22 (Jan. 1814): 416-34. By contrast, Marilyn Butler's biography presents a uniformly positive interpretation of the father's influence upon the daughter.

For a consideration of the implications of feminist literary criticism's concentration upon paternal influence, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace "Reading the Father Metaphorically," Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy, eds. Patricia Yeager and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989) 296-311.

Mary Poovey notes that Edgeworth was far more popular and successful than Austen but does not examine her work, even though it has much to say about the development of the notion of the proper lady.¹³ Similarly, Edgeworth is mentioned only in passing in Ann Jones's Ideas and Innovations (1986), although her works both sold very well and frequently introduced generic innovation.¹⁴ Jane Spencer's The Rise of the Woman Novelist (1986) offers a brief comment on Belinda, while Dale Spender's Mothers of the Novel (1986) provides an enthusiastic but essentially biographical discussion of Edgeworth.¹⁵

Edgeworth's marginal status within feminist literary criticism is curious, for as Marilyn Butler's definitive biography points out, not only were her novels the first to be "regularly and intelligently reviewed," but they also "influenced the consensus of opinion over a decade or more about what the novel could and should attempt to do."¹⁶ Further, while Edgeworth herself insisted that she was simply a domestic woman, she was also a professional writer, earning over £11,000 with her

¹³ Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Style as Ideology in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 210-11.

¹⁴ Ann H. Jones, Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age (New York: AMS P, 1986).

¹⁵ Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); and Dale Spender, Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen (London: Pandora, 1986).

¹⁶ Butler 339.

writing.¹⁷ Finally, Edgeworth's reception has always been entangled with gender questions. She has been persistently praised for the "masculinity" of her work. Sydney Smith, for example, praised her "manly understanding" in an 1814 review, and more than a century and a half later, Alexander Welsh commended her as the "most masculine English woman novelist."¹⁸ On the other hand, whenever Richard Lovell Edgeworth's influence is condemned, it is his daughter's "femininity" that he has threatened with.¹⁹ The confusion that surrounds the gender status of Edgeworth's work is perhaps best exemplified by Francis Jeffrey, who first cites her femininity as a guarantee of the accuracy of her portraits of fashionable life, then, several years later, condemns that femininity as the source of the inadequacy of her portraits of passion, and masculine passion in particular.²⁰

The uneasiness of Edgeworth's gender status, however, has

¹⁷ Edgeworth kept accurate accounts of her income from writing, and a summary of her accounts is included in an appendix to Marilyn Butler's biography. See Butler 492.

¹⁸ Sydney Smith, Rev. of Patronage, Edinburgh Review 22 (Jan. 1814): 417. Alexander Welsh, "Maria Edgeworth and More Dickens," Rev. of Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography, by Marilyn Butler; Charles Dickens A Radical Moralist, by Joseph Gold, and Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, by James R. Kincaid Yale Review 62 (1973): 282.

¹⁹ See Lord Evans, "Maria Edgeworth: A Bicentenary Lecture," Essays by Divers Hands ns 35 (1969): 40-54; and Mark Hawthorne, Doubt and Dogma in Maria Edgeworth (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1967).

²⁰ See Francis Jeffrey, Rev. of Tales of Fashionable Life, vols. 4-6 Edinburgh Review 20 (July 1812): 106; and Rev. of Harrington and Ormond, Edinburgh Review 28 (Aug. 1817): 395.

not attracted much contemporary feminist interest. While there has been a renewal of interest in the works of Burney and Austen, Edgeworth's work has not yet benefited from sustained and wide-spread re-examination. Those feminist critics who do explore Edgeworth's work tend to ground their discussions in the problems posed by her family situation. Recent work by critics such as Mitzi Myers and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, for instance, brings psychoanalytical models to bear upon Edgeworth's biography and work. Myers adapts the work of Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow to argue that Edgeworth's struggles to construct relationships with a series of maternal figures led to the development of new literary forms.¹¹ Kowaleski-Wallace, on the other hand, uses a psychoanalytical model derived from Jacques Lacan to argue that Edgeworth's identification with her father (and with a masculine literary tradition) constituted a form of seduction that led in turn to hostile representations of the maternal body, even as Edgeworth celebrated the maternal in her domestic novels.¹² When they invoke the presence of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Kowaleski-Wallace and Myers address a legitimate problem, since

¹¹ See Mitzi Myers, "The Dilemmas of Gender as Double-Voiced Narrative: or, Maria Edgeworth mothers the *Bildungsroman*," The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues P, 1988) 67-96; and "Daddy's Girl as Motherless Child: Maria Edgeworth and Maternal Romance; An Essay in Reassessment," Living By The Pen: Early British Women Writers, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Teachers College P, 1992) 137-59.

¹² Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991).

Edgeworth persistently denied her own literary authority by attributing her success and her happiness to her father. But to focus primarily on Edgeworth's relationship to her father is, in a sense, to repeat her refusal to claim her own share of literary authority. This thesis, as a result, sets the father aside, and concentrates on one aspect of Edgeworth's participation in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates about the relationship of gender and literature. In particular, I focus upon Edgeworth's reaction to the well-established trope of female reading, and her construction of an alternate way of understanding reading, a trope of domestic reading. The second half of this chapter will outline the trope of female reading and its relationship to domestic ideology and feminine propriety. But first a word about gender terms.

The trope of "female reading" in the early nineteenth century characterized women's responses to literature as primarily physical and typically, though not exclusively, sexual. I have retained the period's use of the term "female" when I refer to this concept of women's responsiveness and the term "female reading" itself derives from the period.²³ The term "feminine" I have reserved to describe those aspects of gender identity that were viewed as distinct from physical expression. Thus the female reader is characterized by a sexual response to

²³ My use of the term "female reading" should not, however, be read as a rejection of the more common distinction in feminist studies between sex and gender; both female and domestic reading are socially constructed and historically specific expressions of gender.

literature, and the domestic reader is characterized by an intellectual response. I have chosen to use the term "domestic reading" instead of the term "feminine reading" because Edgeworth's formulation of the trope emphasizes the necessity of incorporating men into domestic circles as much as it regulates women's reading. I therefore use the terms "male" and "masculine" in much the same way that I use the terms "female" and "feminine," using male to refer to men's physical responses, and masculine to refer to intellectual responses.

Maria Edgeworth's interest in the trope of female reading is evident in her first published work, Letters for Literary Ladies (1795). The fundamental consistency of Edgeworth's thinking over the course of her writing career becomes apparent when one begins with this work rather than with the more commonly cited point of literary origin, Castle Rackrent (1800). In two of the pieces that make up Letters for Literary Ladies, Edgeworth establishes her trope of domestic reading, and while she elaborates upon the trope, and in her final novel questions its efficacy, the fundamental elements remain unchanged. Chapter Two, therefore, examines Edgeworth's initial articulation of the power of the domestic reader to regulate her own passions and the passions of others. The domestic readers of Letters for Literary Ladies draw men away from the disruptive competition of the public sphere into a domestic literary salon, thereby encouraging social order.

Chapter Three turns to one of Edgeworth's best known domestic novels, Belinda (1801), to explore the problem posed by

public women. In her characterization of Lady Delacour, the novel's most memorable figure, Edgeworth constructs a trope of fashionable reading that is distinguished from female reading by its association with publicity. While the female reader is typically represented as indulging in secret sexual pleasures, the fashionable reader indulges in highly public and highly theatrical demonstrations of her literary skill. The cure of Lady Delacour's apparent breast cancer is effected as much by a change in her reading practices as it is by a change in her medical treatments. Instrumental in Lady Delacour's cure is her friendship with Belinda Portman, an exemplary domestic reader, who gradually restores domestic order to the Delacour household.

The fourth and fifth chapters explore Edgeworth's presentation of male characters who manifest disordered reading practices. Chapter Four concentrates upon "Forester," a novella included in Moral Tales (1801). The eponymous hero of this tale refuses to abide by the conventions of gentlemanly behaviour, and as a result, he is a threat to civil society. Forester's reformation is accomplished, much like Lady Delacour's, through an alteration in his reading habits. As he passes through the various strata of Edinburgh society, Forester learns to give up his favourite text, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719), for a model better suited to civil society, Franklin's Autobiography (1793), and ultimately he learns to accept the need for social hierarchies and for gentlemanly behaviour.

The fifth chapter examines one of Edgeworth's Irish tales,

Ormond (1817), whose publication marked the beginning of a hiatus in her novel-writing career. While Ormond relies on a similar pattern to that used in "Forester," Harry Ormond's disordered reading is manifested in a transgression of specifically sexual mores rather than in the more general rejection of gentlemanliness that characterizes Forester's disordered reading. Ormond's untutored but enthusiastic reading of Fielding's Tom Jones (1749) leads him into a course of debauchery that threatens to destroy important bonds between men. His debauchery is ultimately stayed by his reading of a corrective text, Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison (1754), and by his association with an exemplary domestic family, Lady Annaly, her son Sir Herbert and her daughter Florence. As Ormond learns to conform to the Grandisonian model, he adopts the patterns of rational masculinity demanded by his status as an Edgeworthian landowner.

Chapter Six turns to Maria Edgeworth's last novel, Helen (1834), in which she both reasserts the power of domestic reading and questions its efficacy. Although ostensibly a courtship novel, the text is dominated by the relationships of three women (the orphaned Helen Stanley, her newly married friend Cecilia Clarendon, and Lady Davenant, Cecilia's mother and Helen's friend) and by their relationships to feminine propriety, to domestic reading, and to writing. The first two volumes of the novel rehearse the familiar trope of domestic reading, as Helen learns to distinguish between her two suitors by attending to their responses to literature. Domestic reading, however, fails

Helen once she is confronted with the conjunction of female writing and lies. Once she has reluctantly and falsely claimed as her own a series of love letters written by Cecilia, Helen's position within a domestic sphere is compromised, and she is restored to her exemplary status only by the melodramatic death of Lady Davenant. The domestic reading that was once a source of social and individual order for Edgeworth cannot withstand a woman's articulation of non-domestic desires. Her earlier novels suggest that the threat to domestic order resides in female reading--the passive response to sexual stimulation provided by improper texts--and that this type of transgression can be easily controlled by domestic reading. But her last novel suggests that female writing--an active, illicit, and ultimately public articulation of sexual desire--is a far more pressing threat and that such transgression of feminine propriety cannot be easily contained by domestic reading.

ii

The woman reader plays a paradoxically central and marginal role in the history of the novel. Her centrality is evident in the frequency with which literary historians cite the increasing numbers of women readers as a causal factor in the emergence of the novel and its movement into cultural and literary prominence. In his landmark account, The Rise of the Novel (1957), Ian Watt, for example, suggests that middle-class women's increased leisure

and their exclusion from the serious pursuits of business, estate management, and the study of the classics led to a demand for suitable, or rather "light reading" material.²⁴ The leisured woman's "omnivorous reading," he suggests, spurred the production of novels (Watt 48). Watt's woman reader, however, is rapidly transformed into the female reader; not only is she interested in trivial things ("light reading") and incapable of governing or moderating her appetite ("omnivorous"), but her desires also pollute the genre. The woman reader may be crucial to the emergence of the new genre, but she is also responsible for its inadequacies: "the dominance of women readers in the public for the novel is connected with the characteristic kind of weakness and unreality to which the form is liable--its tendency to restrict the field on which its psychological and intellectual discriminations operate to a small and arbitrary selection of human situations" (Watt 340).

The metamorphosis of the woman reader into the female reader in Watt's account is by no means unusual; the same metamorphosis takes places in a wide variety of literary and social histories. The female reader appears in the nooks and crannies of Richard D. Altick's The English Common Reader (1957). Altick's female readers, relieved of work by their husbands' prosperity, "were

²⁴ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 171. Further references will be included parenthetically in the text.

forced to fight ennui with books." Female reading also plays a crucial role in Lawrence Stone's The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (1977), where the desires of the female reader quickened the development of Stone's affective individualism: "Among the upper classes, the demand for romantic love and sexual fulfilment was stimulated--especially among women--by the reading of romances and love stories." She also appears in Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilization (1961), maddened by her reading of sentimental fictions." As J. Paul Hunter has recently noted, literary and social historians have shown a lamentable lack of critical rigour by conflating the woman reader with her ideologically-laden representation, the female reader."

In recent years, however, works such as Cathy N. Davidson's Revolution and the Word (1986), Nancy Armstrong's Desire and Domestic Fiction (1987), Kathryn Shevelow's Women and Print Culture (1989), and Ina Ferris's The Achievement of Literary Authority (1991) have begun to outline the various functions of

" Richard D. Altick's, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957) 45.

" Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (1977; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 247.

" Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (1961; New York: Vintage, 1973) 219-220.

" J. Paul Hunter, Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction (New York: Norton, 1991) ch. 3.

the trope of female reading.¹⁷ Nevertheless, there is as yet no sustained history of the trope, and in the absence of such a history, any statement about the trope's development and its function in different discourses is inevitably somewhat speculative. The task of describing the parameters of the trope of female reading is further complicated by its ubiquity, for female reading appears in many in discourses and is not confined to a single historical period. Female reading is censured in novels, plays, poetry, reviews, sermons, essays, caricatures, memoirs, conduct manuals.¹⁸ Although most common in the denunciations of novels, female reading is also invoked to condemn class mobility, various methods of education, radical political thought, unruly children, educated women, uppity servants, and so on. The trope is thus generally used to condemn institutions, activities, and persons perceived as threats to established forms of cultural and political authority.

The primary function of the trope of female reading, however, is the disciplining of women's responses to the written word. According to the trope, novel-reading is an agent of

¹⁷ Cathy N. Davidson, Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986); Kathyryn Shevelov, Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical (London: Routledge, 1989); Ina Ferris, The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991).

¹⁸ For a useful summary of the opposition to the novel see John Tinnon Taylor, Early Opposition to the English Novel: Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830. (New York: King's Crown P, 1943). Chapter 3 provides a helpful survey of the negative association of women and the novel.

illicit sexual arousal. Bourgeois social order, Mary Poovey reminds us, depends upon the legitimate transmission of property, and this legitimacy is threatened by any irregular female sexual activity.³¹ As a result, much of the literature of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries addresses itself to the regulation of female sexual appetite and to the creation of the appetite-denying modesty and decorum of the proper lady.³² The proper lady is one to whom neither sexual desire nor any other form of appetite can be directly ascribed. The novel-reading woman, however, poses an acute problem to this model of feminine propriety, for the novel enables its reader to participate vicariously in the desires of its characters. Indeed the trope of female reading insists that reading is an act of the body, and that the female reader's pleasure is essentially sexual in nature. This sexual pleasure is, of course, a profound violation of the code of feminine propriety, and thus the female reader comes to stand as a figure of pollution within the domestic sphere.³³ Female reading transforms the proper lady into a harlot.

That the plots of novels generally depend upon the operation of sexual desire does not escape the notice of those who oppose

³¹ For a summary of the relation of property to feminine propriety, see Poovey 5-15.

³² On the paradoxical nature of modesty, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

³³ For an account of domestic ideology's treatment of the reading as an agent of pollution, see Armstrong 98-102.

female reading and seek to strengthen the bulwarks of feminine propriety. In An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797), Thomas Gisborne, for example, points out that novels commonly "turn on the vicissitudes and effects of a passion the most powerful of all those which agitate the human heart."¹⁴ He also warns that novel-reading creates "a susceptibility of impression and premature warmth of tender emotions" that inevitably "betray young women into a sudden attachment to persons unworthy of their affections, and thus to hurry them into marriages terminating in unhappiness" (Gisborne 217). Clara Reeve makes a similar point in The Progress of Romance (1785), asserting that parents must exercise control over their daughters' reading. While there are many novels worth reading, Reeve insists that a novel such as The New Heloise (1761) must not be read, for its representation of illicit love "awakens and nourishes those passions, which it is the exercise of Reason, and of Religion also, to regulate, and to keep within their true limits." Since novels offer a premature sexual knowledge that

¹⁴ Thomas Gisborne, An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (New York: Garland, 1974) 213. All further references will be included parenthetically in the text. For an account of Gisborne's influence on Jane Austen's use of the trope of female reading, see Uphaus, "Jane Austen and Female Reading." For an account of Edgeworth's meetings with Thomas Gisborne, see Maria Edgeworth, "To Charlotte Sneyd," 19 April 1813, Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813-1844, ed. Christina Colvin, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 24; Maria Edgeworth "To Sophy Ruxton," 17 December 1818, Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813-1844, 149.

¹⁵ Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance, Through Times, Countries, and Manners; with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of it on them Respectively; in a Course of Evening Conversations,

threatens the very purity upon which a proper young woman's desirability rests, her parents (and especially her mother) are enjoined to supervise her reading. In Practical Education, for example, Maria Edgeworth argues that a mother must guarantee that neither the physical nor psychological chastity of her daughter has been breached. The Edgeworthian mother is "answerable to her daughter's husband for the books her daughter reads as well as for the company she keeps."²⁰

The danger posed by reading to women's propriety is increased by the enervating propensity of the novel. As a woman's appetite for novel-reading becomes "more urgent," it proportionally "grows less nice and select in its fare," and the palate is vitiated and dulled (Gisborne 216-17). The sexual corruption of female reading is amplified by the novel's ability to inspire false tastes and ambitions, even as it exhausts the reader's desires. Female reading ruins a woman's palate; her taste is "vitiating" by the "high seasoning" of novels and the "common food" of her daily life comes to seem insipid (Practical Education 1: 297; ch. 10). As a result, the female reader seeks out "splendid acts of generosity" and the "exaggerated expressions of tenderness" that can be found only in fictions instead of restricting herself to "the exercise of quiet domestic

2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1970) 2: 17.

²⁰ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2 vols. (1798; New York: Garland, 1974) 2: 550; ch. 20. All further references will be included parenthetically in the text.

virtues" (Practical Education 1: 297; ch. 10). In this way, female reading not only taints the proper woman with sexual desire but also disturbs the proper distribution of pleasure within domestic space. Women who are "amused" by the "reveries," "stale tales," and "meretricious scenes" of "stupid novelists," Mary Wollstonecraft argues, are easily drawn away from their "daily duties."¹⁷ Edgeworth concurs. By cultivating the heart "prematurely," female reading "lowers the tone of the mind," and "induces indifference for those common pleasures and occupations which, however trivial in themselves, constitute by far the greatest portion of our daily happiness" (Practical Education 1: 333; ch. 12). While the female reader may begin by neglecting minor household duties, she ultimately refuses to be contained within the domestic spaces that define proper femininity. Female reading thus contaminates both the purity of a woman's body and the domestic space that ought to define her identity.

Although Maria Edgeworth, like her peers, draws on the trope of female reading in her attempts to define domestic femininity, she moves beyond it to explore the possibilities of alternate models for women's reading. She was not alone in her efforts. Robert Uphaus notes that Jane Austen also attempted to "reshape the prior convention of female reading," most notably in

¹⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 306; ch.13.

Northanger Abbey (1818)."³¹ Other writers like Mary Brunton and Amelia Opie also addressed the problem of women's reading. Mitzi Myers points out that the interest of Georgian women writers in juvenile fiction was a response to the trope of female reading.³² As Myers notes, Edgeworth and her peers did not seek to eliminate fiction; instead they strove to direct the desires solicited by fiction into appropriately domestic contexts. By representing female reading in the domestic novel, Edgeworth was able both to satirize such improper reading, and, more important, to juxtapose female reading against a corrective model: domestic reading.

Edgeworth displaces the troubling erotic association of women and reading by situating reading within the domestic sphere in both her own life and in the lives of her characters. In Edgeworth's hands, reading becomes a way of fashioning a domestic circle capable of accommodating both women and men within the framework of a literary culture that balances reason and emotion. While female reading leads women out of the domestic sphere and into corrupt relations with men, domestic reading encourages rational self-control in both women and men. Domestic readers are well-ordered individuals, capable of controlling their passions, and yet still able to respond emotionally to what they read. Successful Edgeworthian courtships frequently feature a

³¹ Uphaus 335.

³² Mitzi Myers, "'A Taste for Truth and Realities': Early Advice to Mothers on Books for Girls," Children's Literature Association Quarterly 12 (1987): 119-20.

scene in which the proper woman and the proper man are able to recognize legitimate, that is domestic, desire in each other's responses to textual situations. Such moments of shared reading become in turn a means of expressing sexual attraction and desire without directly invoking the troubling energies of the body. In its ability to discipline potentially disruptive passions and energies, domestic reading also enables the orderly conduct of civil society.

Edgeworth first develops her trope of domestic reading in Letters for Literary Ladies by contrasting opposing views of women's reading. In "The Letters of Julia and Caroline," the histories of two women demonstrate the dangers of female reading and the principles of domestic reading; and in "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend, Upon the Birth of a Daughter: with the Answer," a new father succinctly refutes his friend's fears about the consequence of educating women.

Chapter Two

Literary Ladies: Creating the Domestic Salon

When readers mark the beginning of Maria Edgeworth's literary career, they generally overlook her first published work, Letters for Literary Ladies (1795), in favour of the much better known Castle Rackrent (1800). Few critics have examined Edgeworth's first publication in any detail, and if they do, they generally dismiss Letters for Literary Ladies as an immature, a juvenile, or a minor work.¹ There is no doubt that Letters for Literary Ladies is an apprentice piece, but it a useful one, for it broaches many of the problems and situations that recur in Edgeworth's later work. Most of the questions she returns to over and over again in her later exploration of women's lives are first articulated in Letters for Literary Ladies. In particular, Edgeworth introduces what will be a continuing preoccupation of her work: the moral problem posed by women's reading, and the importance of literary education to the construction of the domestic circle.

Letters for Literary Ladies is too fractured to rest easily under any single generic label. Its multiple affinities suggest overlapping genres: epistolary fiction, sentimental fiction, satirical periodical essay, feminist polemic. The text consists

¹ Marilyn Butler suggests, for example, that Letters for Literary Ladies is "immature" and of "uneven quality and disparate nature." See Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 172.

of three pieces, all of which deal with women's association with language. Edgeworth initially thought of "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend, Upon the Birth of a Daughter: with the Answer," "The Letters of Julia and Caroline," and "The Noble Science of Self-Justification" as two separate works: the first containing the "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend" and "The Letters of Julia and Caroline," and the second "The Noble Science of Self-Justification." In the Preface to the second edition, she indicates that their combination into one piece was the work of her publisher, Joseph Johnson, and that the title Letters for Literary Ladies is applicable only to the two first works: "The author, however, has thought it better to continue the former name, than to hazard the imputation of publishing an old work under a new title." Edgeworth's discrimination is just, for the third piece satirizes women's modes of conducting arguments with their husbands, while the first two deal primarily with women's association with print culture, and as a result, are the focus of my discussion.³

In "The Letters of Julia and Caroline," Edgeworth presents a portrait of the female reader in the character Julia, whose adherence to female reading precipitates her estrangement from her husband and children, her exile, and her death. In contrast,

Preface to Letters for Literary Ladies, qtd. in Bertha C. Slade, Maria Edgeworth, 1767-1849: A Bibliographical Tribute (Toronto: Macmillan, 1937) 14.

At the suggestion of one of her aunts, Edgeworth reworked the material in "The Noble Science of Self-Justification" into The Modern Griselda (1805).

Caroline, her confidante and advisor, leads a calm, happy, and exemplary domestic life. In "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend, Upon the Birth of a Daughter: with the Answer," the misogynistic friend warns the new father about the dangers inherent in educating women. The new father, however, retutes his friend, arguing that the education of women will neither harm them nor harm their eventual husbands. Instead education, and a well-conducted literary education in particular, will guarantee that women are exemplary members of the domestic circle. Moreover, the father argues that women's literary educations will improve the lives of their fathers, brothers, and husbands.

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"The Letters of Julia and Caroline" (1795) is Edgeworth's first and abbreviated attempt at an epistolary novel, and like many of Edgeworth's later works, it juxtaposes the lives of two characters in similar circumstances in order to examine the causes and the consequences of a series of choices.⁴ Julia and Caroline are highly condensed versions of the contrasting pairs of women that appear in most of Edgeworth's work: a philosophical

⁴ Generally speaking, Edgeworth constructs the choice so that her characters, whether female or male, must enact a Herculean choice between vice and virtue, pleasure and pain, idleness and industry, comedy and tragedy. Katrin R. Burlin discusses Edgeworth's use of this eighteenth-century topos in "'At the Crossroads': Sister Authors and the Sister Arts," Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio UP, 1986) 60-84.

figure (who remains more or less constant) and a sentimental or witty figure (who appears in a range of manifestations and differing degrees of viciousness). In her characterization of Julia, Edgeworth explores the inappropriate and unfortunate choices incited by female reading. In Caroline, on the other hand, she constructs a domestic reader whose happiness is the result of her rejection of female reading and her adherence to a domestic life.

As a domestic woman, Caroline repeatedly warns Julia of the errors into which female reading draws her. Julia, however, fails to heed such advice. Flushed with sentimental enthusiasm, she marries an inappropriate husband, separates from him, takes a lover, goes into exile, and dies shortly after her return to England. While the letters succinctly delineate Julia's deterioration, they contain only a few significant details about Caroline's life. Caroline defines herself as daughter, sister, and wife--a quintessentially domestic woman who is remarkable only in her defence of reason as the guiding principle of a woman's life. These two characteristics--a sturdy domesticity and a rigorous rationality--enable Caroline to supervise her childhood friend's erratic emotions. Over the course of seven letters, Caroline tries to persuade Julia to define herself as a domestic woman. Only the first letter is written by Julia, and it clearly establishes her credentials as a female reader. In the next five letters Caroline attempts to draw Julia into a domestic circle. These letters, however, reveal that Julia's

female reading has made her unfit for inclusion within such a circle, and the final letter (addressed to Julia's estranged husband) contains Caroline's account of her death.

Edgeworth addresses the problem of emotional and sexual responsiveness that lies at the heart of the trope of female reading in Julia's refusal to accept that emotions, like life itself, have limits and boundaries. Julia's reluctance to limit and regulate her emotions is established in the first letter of the novella. At this point, Julia is young and unmarried, and she writes to Caroline in response to a recently received letter in which, apparently, Caroline has cautioned her friend about her tendency to indulge her emotions. Caroline urges Julia to reflect upon her feelings in order to understand and to control them; Julia's reply makes it clear that Caroline's advice is both dearly needed and unlikely to be followed. Offering Caroline a series of mocking exclamations--"Reflect upon my own feelings! Analyze my notions of happiness! explain to you my system!"-- Julia insists that emotions by definition cannot be analyzed (463; Letter 1). She believes that the "subtle essence" that makes up emotions "would escape in the process" of reflection, analysis, and explanation (463; Letter 1). Julia thus refuses the rationality fundamental to domestic ideology, which requires the proper woman to dissociate herself from the flux of her emotions in order to govern the appetites and desires that otherwise might threaten to consume her.

Abandoning reason, Julia chooses instead to champion feeling

as the basis of a woman's life. If her assertion that a "woman's part in life is to please" echoes a central tenet of domestic ideology, Julia's reading of sentimental "romance and poetry" has led her mistakenly to interpret this principle as an exemption from rational self-control (464; Letter 1). For Julia, a woman's power lies in her capacity to respond emotionally; Caroline's rationality is unlikely to win a husband. As a female reader, Julia exaggerates a capacity that ought to be strictly regulated. She repudiates the concepts of moderation and control that are the foundation of feminine propriety, and chooses instead emotional extremes: "great pleasure, and great pain--great virtues, and great defects--ardent hope, and severe disappointment--ecstasy, and despair" (464; Letter 1). Baffled by female reading, Julia substitutes intense but ultimately vitiating emotions for the reason that ought to guard her responses.

Caroline as a proper reader urges Julia to change her reading habits and to moderate her feelings. In particular, she deplores the "waste" of "sympathy on fiction which reality so much better deserves" (464; Letter 1). For Caroline sympathy must be associated "with the active desire to relieve" suffering; when reduced to a literary response, it is merely a form of self display (469; Letter 2). She argues that the sympathy elicited by repetitive female reading is an act of self indulgence, a "passive sensation," a "useless weakness," a "luxury of woe" (469-70; Letter 2). Invoking a motif of the trope of female

reading, Caroline maintains that repeated arousal will blunt the sensibility Julia prizes. She warns Julia that the habitual and repetitious use of fiction to solicit sympathy "absolutely destroys" the capacity to respond (470; Letter 2). Caroline reinforces this point by drawing on Julia's experience as a reader. She reminds her that even a particularly compelling fiction palls with rereading. At the "the third or fourth reading" even Julia would say, "It is very pathetic, but I have read it before--I liked it better the first time; that is to say it *did* touch me once--I know it *ought* to touch me now, but it *does not*" (470; Letter 2). Julia must relinquish her female reading because it will dull the responsiveness she ought properly to bring to a domestic circle.

Julia, however, rejects Caroline's interpretation of the consequence of her reading practices and refuses to believe that the repeated arousal of emotions weakens them. Since she assumes that imagined and real distress stimulate identical forms of sympathy, she asserts that sympathy, like other "faculties of the soul," can be "improved" and "refined by exercise" (464; Letter 1). Thus her "precious propensity" to respond fervently to fiction should be cherished and encouraged (464; Letter 1). As a female reader, Julia presumes the emotions are as repeatable as the fictions that solicit them. Just as one delightful novel can be replaced by another equally delightful novel, so one intense emotion will be replaced another. Julia's reading of sentimental literature has convinced her that unfettered and limitless

feeling is both possible and desirable.

Julia's unsuitability for domestic life is betrayed by the series of metaphors she uses to justify her indulgence of her emotions and to fend off Caroline's disapproval. Julia asserts that her responsiveness can no more be controlled and contained than the ocean's tide. While the "frigid moralist" might dare to "say to the tide of passions, So far shalt thou go, and no farther," the command is both futile and presumptuous. "Shall man presume to circumscribe that which Providence has left unbounded?" (464; Letter 1). What Julia refuses to see, and what Caroline insists on, is that feelings ebb as well as flow. Julia's rejection of the possibility that emotions abate is evident in another of her metaphors. When Caroline suggests that Julia's sentimental enthusiasm is based on illusion, Julia embraces the possibility of illusion, for, unlike the crass pleasures of everyday life, the pleasures of illusion are never-ending. Julia will eagerly pursue an unending series of illusions and emotions: "When one illusion vanishes, another shall appear, and, still leading me forward towards an horizon that retreats as I advance, the happy prospect of futurity shall vanish only with my existence" (463; Letter 1). The ever-moving tides are replaced by the ever-retreating horizon. Although Julia asserts that she is willing to exchange an early death for a short life of passion, she overlooks the possibility that emotions may be exhausted before death's final truncation of human pleasure.

Caroline rejects Julia's assertion of the infinite renewability of human emotions. She acknowledges the importance of emotions, but she also insists that emotion be limited and enclosed within a domestic space. Indiscriminate and unbounded emotion is chaotic and destructive. As a result, Caroline constantly draws distinct lines and boundaries between alternatives. Indeed, her letters to Julia repeatedly assert that it is necessary to discriminate carefully between ideas and actions that are superficially similar. Since the word "art," for example, can mean both "artifice" and "all the improvements of science," one must clarify which sense is meant in order to avoid "a strange confusion in all reasoning" (466; Letter 2). As Julia's story unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that her female reading practices, with their illusory encouragement of human limitlessness, have crippled her capacity to make such distinctions. Caroline's subsequent letters perform the acts of bisection and limitation that Julia resists. In each of the letters that follow the opening pair, Caroline addresses a particular problem in Julia's relationship to that critical issue for feminine propriety: marriage. In the third letter, Caroline evaluates the claims of competing suitors; in the fourth, she evaluates alternative methods of dealing with the failure of a marriage; in the fifth and sixth, she animadverts on the irreparable folly of taking a lover. However, Julia's unremitting adherence to sentimental enthusiasm thwarts Caroline's attempts to reform her false notions of feminine

success.

Caroline writes the third letter in response to Julia's first marital dilemma: which suitor should she accept, Mr. Percy, Caroline's brother, or Lord V---, a man of rank and fashion? Caroline uneasily complies with Julia's request for advice "upon a subject which ought to depend so much upon your own taste and feelings" (470; Letter 3). She reminds Julia that in order to distinguish between her two suitors, she must begin by analyzing her own character: since she has persistently refused to do so, Caroline once again obliges. Given that Julia cannot "adopt the tastes of another," it is imperative that she choose to "live with one whose tastes are similar" to her own (471; Letter 3). Julia must, therefore, consider which man can provide the pleasures necessary to her happiness.

A marriage to Lord V---, Caroline remarks, would satisfy Julia's desire for "magnificence," but the fashionable life would limit her existence in many ways, placing numerous restraints upon her time and her choice of friends. The emotions she treasures would dissipate into ennui and trivial rivalries with other women. More important, if Julia believes that her "love of poetry, and of all the refinements of literary and romantic pursuits" is essential to her happiness, then she must reject the proposal of Lord V--- (471; Letter 3). Caroline warns that as Lady V---, Julia will be unable to cultivate either "the pleasures of the heart" or the pleasures of "the imagination" (Letter 3; 473). Feminine literary pleasure can survive only if

sheltered and enabled by the "friendship and confidence" of a husband (Letter 3; 473).

If, however, Julia chooses to marry Caroline's masculine counterpart, the pleasures of literature and the heart will be available to her. In a domestic life, Julia would never be bored, would find congenial friends, and would be close to her children. Moreover, by marrying a domestic rather than a fashionable man, Julia would acquire "perpetual motives to cultivate every talent" and would be encouraged to develop her literary talents (473; Letter 3). Caroline makes her case for the superiority of the domestic choice in some detail, but its main interest lies in the way in which her argument points to the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the domestic woman and literary practices: the pleasure a woman derives from the cultivation of her imagination or her heart grows only when that pleasure is confined. Uncontained by the limits established by domesticity, literary and emotional pleasures will simply be dissipated. Julia, however, is unable to grasp this paradox. She rejects Caroline's analysis and Caroline's brother, and she marries Lord V---.

After the passage of five years, all the ills Caroline had predicted have come to pass, and Julia realizes that she has chosen the wrong husband. In the fourth letter, Caroline rejects Julia's solution to her failed marriage: a formal separation. Instead Caroline recommends that she embark on the domestic life she has hitherto rejected. She reminds Julia that the

imagination "has a contracting, as well as an expansive faculty," and she urges Julia to "retire to the bosom of your own family" (475, 477; Letter 4). Such a move would allow Julia not only to "enjoy the pleasures of domestic life," but also to reform her jaded and worldly husband (477; Letter 4). On the other hand, if Julia chooses to separate from her husband, she must also abandon her desire to be at the centre of a literary coterie, in which she could enjoy the "conversation and talents" of others and in which her own talents could be elicited and judged (477; Letter 4). To establish such a coterie, Caroline points out, a woman must have the "power to confer favours," and such power is available only to a woman who has "a home to receive, a character and consequence in life to invite and attach friends" (477-78; Letter 4). Edgeworth thus makes feminine literary accomplishment and pleasure the exclusive property of the domestic woman. As a separated woman, Julia will be excluded from the literary scenes she desires so strongly. By rejecting the "repellant [sic] and the attractive power of a mistress of a family," Julia will have no choice but to begin a course of futile dissipation, reduced to finding pleasure in the "delirium, caused by public admiration" (476; Letter 4). Such a woman must become a "wanderer" (476; Letter 4).

As the text draws to a close, Julia separates from her husband. But before she becomes a wanderer and is exiled to France with her lover, Caroline attempts yet again to draw her into a domestic circle. Caroline's fifth letter warns Julia of a

particularly deleterious change in her ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Julia's capacity to locate crucial boundaries has never been strong, but she has now lost any vestige of such a capacity. Caroline notes that Julia's reasoning powers have been "declining" and those of her "imagination rapidly increasing; the boundaries of right and wrong," she comments, seem "to be no longer marked" in Julia's mind (480; Letter 5). Caroline comes to these conclusions during a conversation she and Julia have one summer during which Julia speaks about the "striking difference between the conduct and the understanding of the great Lord Bacon" (480; Letter 5). The degeneration of Julia's literary and moral judgement is betrayed by her assertion that Bacon's errors were trivial. She dismisses the notion of moral fault by claiming that "to an enlarged mind, accustomed to consider the universe as one vast whole, the conduct of that little animated atom, that inconsiderable part *self*, must be too insignificant to fix or merit attention" (480; Letter 5). By extension, the details of Julia's conduct are also "insignificant." Julia's attempted exculpation of Bacon's errors and of her own incipient errors is consistent with her previous assertion of the limitlessness of emotions. Caroline again objects to Julia's expansionist rhetoric. The virtuous or proper individual, whether woman or man, must scrupulously attend to and regulate the individual part. Caroline speculates that some "wayward power" has "taken possession" of Julia's understanding, throwing "every thing into confusion" (479; Letter 5). Some

"secret cause" must lie behind Julia's folly (479; Letter 5). Julia's subsequent adultery suggests that this "wayward power" is sexual appetite, which has been fostered by female reading instead of governed by domestic reading. No longer able to distinguish between proper and improper behaviour, Julia drifts into adultery.

Caroline has endeavoured to draw Julia into a domestic circle by reasserting the importance of careful discrimination of boundaries and limitations, but she is unable to prevent Julia's final transgression. At that moment of transgression, Caroline ceases her efforts to reclaim Julia, telling her: "I would have gone, I went, to the brink of the precipice to save you; with all my force I held you back; but in vain" (481; Letter 6). Caroline's domestic identity as "a sister, a wife, a mother" forbids her to remain Julia's friend and confidante (481; Letter 6). Caroline's final letter to Julia thus enforces the boundaries Julia would leap over, and, in effect, textually enacts Julia's geographical banishment from England.⁵

Narrative structure reinforces the normative power of Caroline's advocacy of domesticity and proper reading. Most

⁵ Throughout Edgeworth's work, subversive female characters are tamed by their willing subordination of their energies to their domestic circumstances. This can be seen most clearly in the case of Lady Delacour of Belinda (1801), but it is also manifested in the fates of Lady Geraldine of Ennui (1809) and Rosamond Percy of Patronage (1814). At the same time, a parallel series of subversive females refuses the necessary subordination, and they are vigorously excluded from the domestic and comic conclusions of their novels. See, for example, Harriot Freke of Belinda and Maria Hauton of Patronage.

obvious is the use of Caroline as the primary narrator of Julia's downfall. While the didactic purpose of the novella depends on the juxtaposition of the principles espoused by Julia and Caroline, the letters in which the alternate systems are set forth are not juxtaposed. Apart from the first letter, we encounter Julia only through Caroline's letters. This narrative choice limits the potentially subversive force of Julia's voice, and Edgeworth further augments the power of Caroline's voice by embedding fragments of Julia's letters in those of Caroline. Caroline's letters absorb Julia's texts, as her words are dispersed and controlled by Caroline's acts of quotation and analysis.⁹ Edgeworth's most effective strategy of containment, in fact, is the substitution of partial quotation for full recording of Julia's opinions. Julia's errant point of view is only temporarily articulated in Caroline's acts of quotation, for Caroline does not simply quote Julia's words. She scrutinizes her use of language as closely as she scrutinizes her actions. Caroline reflects upon, analyzes, and explains the errors of Julia's literary habits to Julia and to the reader, using those rational techniques she has vainly encouraged Julia to apply to her own desires. For both Julia and the reader, Caroline becomes a model of domestic reading. Through her, Edgeworth attempts to train her own reader, to forestall the possibility of any indulgence in a female reading of Julia. In a final

⁹ On the absorption of Julia's words, see Catherine Gallagher, "Fictional Women and Real Estate in Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent," Nineteenth-Century Contexts 12 (1988): 13-14.

encouragement of domestic reading, Edgeworth closes her account of Julia's life with a scene that draws on the conventions of sentiment most conducive to female reading. Julia, who used to thrill to the pitiful tableaux of sentimental fiction, has now herself become an element in such a tableau. Abandoned by her lover, she has made her way back to England, where she writes a letter to Caroline, begging for a final consolatory interview before she dies. Caroline agrees, and she finds that her prognosis has been confirmed: the female reader's seemingly infinite and unbounded emotions are now exhausted. A despondent Julia, now in a "state of torpor," has "sunk into insensibility" (483; Letter 7). Her previously overflowing, unrestrained, and unmoderated feelings are now "immediately checked" when they start to rise (483; Letter 7). She weeps only at the shock of an unexpected reunion with her young daughter, otherwise she resists all tears of self-pity. Indeed, Julia now seems to think "that she had lost all right to sympathy, and received even the common offices of humanity with surprise" (483; Letter 7).

Julia's redemption, insofar as an adulterous woman might be redeemed in a nineteenth-century narrative, is signalled by her dying acceptance of the domestic model. In her final note to Caroline she writes: "Tell me, is my father living--do you know any thing of my children?--I dare not ask for my husband" (482-83; Letter 7). Julia has come to understand that her proper self-definition must be domestic. Her conversion is confirmed by her insistence that Caroline use her story as a cautionary tale.

in the subsequent education of the next Julia, her daughter: "'My dearest friend!' said she, putting her child's hand into mine, 'when I am gone, be a mother to this child--let her know my whole history, let nothing be concealed from her. Poor girl! you will live to blush at your mother's name'" (485; Letter 7). Julia's life is thus translated into a text for a domestic reader's exegesis. It will form the basis of the next Julia's domestic reading. Julia's daughter, supervised by Caroline, will not become a female reader.

But where does Caroline acquire her reading skills? Why is she able to eschew the pleasures of female reading? How does the domestic sphere create the proper reader? In "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend, Upon the Birth of a Daughter: with the Answer," the companion piece of "The Letters of Julia and Carcline," Edgeworth argues that a certain kind of literary education will ensure that women remain within the domestic sphere, and, as important, will draw men into the domestic sphere. She, in effect, reverses Mandeville's notorious dictum that private vices make public virtues, arguing that the inculcation of private virtues will lead to public benefits. The participation of both women and men in the private sphere will guarantee domestic happiness and political calm.

In the first letter, Edgeworth depicts the opposition to women's literary activity in a way that simultaneously airs the concerns of its opponents and suggests the limitations of their arguments. In the second letter, she constructs a model that allows for women's literary endeavours without dramatically altering the existing social structure." The friend writes to the new father less to congratulate him on the birth of his daughter than to warn him about the folly of educating her according to new-fangled notions of female education. Both men are convinced that feminine propriety is crucial to the good order of society. Since "much in society depends upon the honour of women," the friend writes, individuals, as well as states, must "guard their virtue" and "preserve inviolate the purity of their manners" (431). The father concurs: a woman's manners are "indispensably connected with the largest interests of society" (447).

The men, however, disagree about the means of preserving female integrity. The friend argues that tradition, the reliance upon habit and custom, is the most efficacious method.

The first letter of "A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend" is written in the voice of a character who is generally assumed to represent the opinions of Thomas Day, while that of his respondent was modelled on Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In 1783, when Edgeworth was preparing a translation of Madame de Genlis' Adèle and Théodore for publication, Day wrote to her father expressing his intense disapproval of women's writing. The correspondence is no longer extant, and in A Memoir of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Edgeworth states that she read the letters only once and that her father destroyed them along with most of his correspondence before he died. See A Memoir of Richard Lovell Edgeworth Begun By Himself and Finished by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth, 2 vols. (1820; Shannon, Ireland: Irish UP, 1968) 2: 343.

Tradition, for the friend, is "the ivy which clings to the walls, and braces the loose stones" of female character together (431). Deploying the same metaphor, the father replies that "ivy, in some situations, tends to pull down the walls to which it clings" (448). Habit, he insists, must be "confirmed by reason" (447). The strongest security for "the prudential reserve of the sex" is their rational conviction of "the utility of forms apparently trifling" (447). Such conviction, he maintains, is "far superior to the automatic habits of those who submit to the conventions of the world without consideration or conviction" (447).

In conjunction with his rejection of reason as the basis of female education and manners, the friend rehearses a series of standard objections to women's education. All are grounded in the fear that women's education will unsettle the division of public and private spheres that is central to the maintenance of men's social power. Women's education will not only lead to neglect in the domestic sphere, but it will ultimately destabilize and corrupt the public sphere. Women's literary interests, the friend complains, abstract them from domestic duties whether they be readers enthralled by fictions or scholars engrossed in their studies. A Desdemona weeping over tales instead of "ordering dinner, or paying the butcher's bill" would make a bad housekeeper and a bad companion (437). Trifling as it may seem, such negligence is a sign of a deeper failure of social knowledge.

The friend reminds his correspondent that women "will never

learn from the Muses" the "knowledge of the world which keeps people in their proper places" (437). Indeed, he believes that literary women are contemptuous of the common customs and manners upon which social order depends. Uneducated women "listen with deference to the maxims, and attend with anxiety to the opinions of those, from whom they expect their reward and their daily amusements" (434). Literary women lack such a sense of dependence on "company and public places," and they resent their necessary social and domestic "subjection": "perceiving their own superiority, they despise, and even set at defiance, the opinions of their acquaintances of inferior abilities" (434-35). The inevitable consequence of women's literary activities, therefore, is arrogance: within their domestic circles, literary ladies "will show in their manners and conversation that contempt of inferior minds, and that neglect of common forms and customs" (434). But the friend reserves his strongest expression of shock and outrage for those women who mock or deny their fathers and husbands: "Upon such occasions," he reports, he feels "sensations which few ladies can easily believe they excite" (437).

The friend specifically locates the disruptiveness of the literary woman in her craving for "inebriating admiration" (434). She can satisfy this compulsion only by displaying her talents in public. A taste for literature may add to the happiness of life for women as well as men, he notes, but women are rarely satisfied by the "silent happiness" literature provides (433-34). Instead, they seek opportunities for display, and their desire

for "public applause" betrays them into frequent "miserable ostentation of their learning" (434). This learning always falls short of the masculine norm, and it produces deformity and distortion. The literary woman emerges from his letter as a sport, a monster. He sees her as anxious to exhibit her "mental deformities," and she disgusts him: "humanity makes us refrain from expressing disgust at the awkward shame" of the physically monstrous, he writes, but the "intemperate vanity" of women who are continually "exhibiting" their "mental deformities" inevitably provokes "ridicule and indignation" (428). The self-indulgence and theatrical pleasure of literary women are compounded by the nature of the literary productions they consume and create. Women's success in literary productions, the friend insists, is simply an unfortunate example of "the art of imposing upon the understanding by means of the imagination" (429). Since literary ladies use their skills simply to dazzle and to confound the reason, their literary accomplishments must be read, not as signs of skill, but as signs of dissipation and irrationality. Women's "love of romance, poetry, and all the lighter parts of literature" is simply a form of dissipation (428). By placing women's literary taste under the signs of dissipation and irrationality, then, the friend both articulates and dismisses the threat posed by women's literary accomplishment to the public sphere.

For the friend, the exclusive access of men to the literary public sphere is critical to the social order and to the

intellectual life of the nation. He maintains that the admission of women will frustrate the possibility of knowledge. The friend presumes that useful knowledge is produced by the circulation of men through the various institutions of the public sphere."

Women, he notes, are "excluded, if not by law, at least by custom" from the public sites of literary discussion: "academies, colleges, public libraries, private associations of literary men" (429). By contrast, men "mix with the world without restraint, we converse freely with all classes of people, with men of wit, of science, of learning, with the artist, the mechanic, the labourer; every scene of life is open to our view; every assistance that foreign or domestic ingenuity can invent, to encourage literary studies, is ours almost exclusively" (428-29). This ability to circulate freely within the public sphere and to draw on a "various experience of life and manners" gives men the intellectual "vigour and efficiency" necessary to the production of genuine knowledge or useful literature (429). Lacking similar access, women are by definition excluded from the production of such discourses. Furthermore, women inhibit the pursuit of truth that is the goal of masculine conversation. When a woman enters into conversation with men, the friend reports, "our politeness, delicacy, habits towards the sex, forbid us to argue or to converse with them as we do with one another" (429). To speak

* For an account of the liberal public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. Thomas Berger and Frederick Lawrence (1962; Cambridge: MIT P, 1989).

without this intellect-inhibiting decorum is possible only in an exclusively masculine society, and is indeed a sign of masculinity.

Edgeworth assuages the friend's fear of literary ladies by having the father argue that rational and domestic education will regulate women's otherwise disturbing literary ambitions. In setting up his argument, the father makes the point that print culture has made the absolute separation of public and private untenable. More precisely, it has brought women into the public realm of enlightened discourse, and it is no longer in the power of fathers "to retard or to accelerate the intellectual progress" of their daughters (458). The "art of printing has totally changed" the "situation" of women, he claims, and it is now "absolutely out of our power to drive the fair sex back to their former state of darkness" (458). Fathers must therefore content themselves with inducing their daughters "to read with judgment" (458). What this requires is not condemnation of female errors but analysis of their causes; from such analysis one might fashion an appropriate education. He contends that a rational education will produce women "who have cultivated their understandings not for the purpose of parade, but with the desire to make themselves useful and agreeable" (441). These true literary ladies will be pre-eminently domestic women, able to regulate both their bodily and discursive desires.

A proper education will eliminate one of the friend's most persistent fears: the theatricality of women and their pursuit of

public applause. Only an ill-educated woman, the father insists, would be drawn to the transient pleasures of self-display. He argues that as more women are educated, the tendency to indulge in self-display will disappear, for the girl who is rationally educated will not be attracted to display and coquetry: it "is scarcely to be supposed, that a girl of good understanding would deliberately imitate the faults and follies which she hears ridiculed during her childhood, by those whom she esteems" (443). Furthermore, as learned women become increasingly common, they will be less likely to seek and to garner applause for their talent. The father illustrates this point by reminding his correspondent that at one time the ability to write might have earned a woman praise or envy, but it no longer excites either. A woman may now possess "a considerable stock of information" and not be "gazed upon as a miracle" (443).

The father, however, acknowledges the legitimacy of his friend's uneasiness about women's tendency to allow imagination to overwhelm reason. Drawing on the standard trope of female reading he suggests that "many of the errors into which women of literature have fallen" have arisen from "an improper choice of books": "Those who read chiefly works of imagination, receive from them false ideas of life and of the human heart" (449). He, too, dreads that his daughter might acquire "preposterous notions of love, of happiness, from the furtive perusal of vulgar novels" (458). He will therefore keep such works from his daughter as if they were "deadly poison" (449). Instead of providing seductive

novels, he will "turn her attention to science," and this corrective reading will "give her early that taste for truth and utility, which, when once implanted, can scarcely be eradicated" (449).

The daughter's taste for the true and the useful will, her father contends, be reinforced by her domestic situation. While the father will not dramatically censor her reading, he will ensure that the conclusions she draws from her reading are interrogated or are compared to the better, broader base of her male relatives' knowledge. The daughter may read widely, but her father will "correct her judgment" by giving her access to the "conversation of persons of sense and experience," so that she "may take a full view" of both women's and men's "interests" (458). From "the unprejudiced testimony of a father or a brother," the literary lady will "learn much of what is essential" to her happiness (458-59). Masculine supervision will control and complement the responsiveness of the young woman reader. Far from disrupting the domestic circle, then, a literary education will confirm a woman's place within it. To work such an effect, the education must be both rationally based and general in character. A woman should not be encouraged to develop specific skills as a musician, painter, botanist, mathematician, chemist and so on. Instead, her education should form her general capacities: "the habit of industry and attention, the love of knowledge, and the power of reasoning: these will enable her to attend to excellence in any pursuit to

which she may direct her talents" (445). The direction of her talents is to be left to others. Since a woman's happiness is dependent upon her ability "to conform her taste" to that of the man she will eventually marry, the father recommends that she should "cultivate the general powers of the mind, rather than any particular faculty" (445).

Arguments that women should receive a non-specialized form of education in order to suit them to be willing pupils and audiences of the central male authority in the household appear frequently in Edgeworth's writing. The domestic woman's generalized literary education displaces her erotic appeal from her body to her mind. Her desirability rests in her "love of knowledge," "habits of industry," and "power of reasoning" and not in her body, her fortune, or her rank (445). The attractiveness of the literary lady will be derived not from the visible body, but from her intellectual ability to respond to the masculine mind."

Edgeworth promotes the movement of men away from the public sphere by emphasizing the need for fathers and brothers to supervise the domestic woman's literary studies. The errors of female reading and female display can be prevented most effectively by men's movement away from the public world of the coffeehouse--the site of genuine literary or intellectual accomplishment for the friend--into the private realm of the

" Nancy Armstrong makes a similar point in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 103-8.

domestic circle. To encourage this shift, Edgeworth points out that while women may lack access to the public realm, the very gender constraints within which they must shape their lives produce literary skills that surpass those of their brothers. For example, women's lack of access to their brothers' classically based education is an advantage, for they are not compelled to waste intellectual energy on mastering Latin and Greek. Although they may lose the pleasure of reading the original, this loss is "more than overbalanced" by the avoidance of the "misapplication" of time, labour, and ability (451). As well, the restricted range of activities makes women better readers, because they "taste the pleasures of reading, and the best authors in the English language" at just the age when young men "begin to be ashamed of alluding to literature amongst their companions" (451).

Most important, women's literary endeavours are not constrained by either material need or personal ambition: "neither the necessity of earning their bread, nor the ambition to shine in public affairs, hurry or prejudice their minds: in domestic life they have leisure to be wise" (452). Edgeworth thus increases the desirability of domestic literary activity by placing the domestic sphere outside the contamination of money or fame. In Edgeworth's hands, it becomes the ideal site of non-competitive literary activity. The father counters his friend's idealization of masculine participation in the public sphere by pointing out that public life is marked by a competitive money-

earning that interferes with the cultivation of the understanding. Indeed, he argues, "general literature must be neglected by those who are occupied in earning bread or amassing riches for their family:--men of genius are often heard to complain, that in the pursuit of a profession, they are obliged to contract their inquiries and concentrate their powers" (452). The narrow cultivation of "particular talents or powers of the mind" causes the other faculties "to lose all strength and vigour for want of exercise" (452). Ultimately, then, domestic women will transform the public realm: not through their own entrance but by promoting the exit of men.

In this way Edgeworth compensates for the restriction of women to the domestic sphere by increasing its value. She turns the private domestic circle into a literary salon, but one clearly differentiated from its French counterpart by its privacy and by its morality. Her domestic salon will enliven and embellish life "with all the wit and vivacity and politeness for which French women were once admired, without admitting any of their vices or follies" (461). The value of this salon lies in its power to draw men into the domestic circle. Instead of appointing "some place of meeting from which ladies are to be excluded," the proper gentleman "will invite the men of wit and science" to his own home (461). Within the domestic salon the "mixture of the talents and knowledge of both sexes" will increase "domestic happiness" (461).

Domestic happiness, in turn, will increase the public good,

as Edgeworth makes clear in a passage recalling--and reversing--Mandeville's "Fable of the Bees" (1714): "Private virtues are public benefits: if each bee were content in his cell, there could be no grumbling hive; and if each cell were complete, the whole fabric must be perfect" (461). Women's domestic reading is thus fully dissociated from the disruptive power of female reading. Julia's female reading destroys the domestic circle, and the domestic reading espoused by Caroline Percy compensates for the female reader's destructiveness by absorbing and countering Julia's subversive voice. Moreover, domestic reading also compensates for the divisiveness of the public sphere and of the political life of the nation by drawing men into a harmonious household. The domestic literary salon over which the proper lady and her companion, the proper gentleman, preside becomes Edgeworth's social ideal, and domestic reading becomes her model of the means of balancing the demands of the head and the heart, the way of uniting amiability and utility.

Chapter Three

Lady Delacour's Library:

Belinda and Fashionable Reading

Midway through Belinda (1801), Maria Edgeworth provides a striking representation of the power of the domestic reader. A chapter provocatively entitled "Rights of Woman" opens with the interruption of a static scene of reading. "Belinda was alone, and reading, when Mrs. Freke dashed into the room" (217; ch. 17).¹ Belinda Portman is the novel's exemplary figure, and like other such heroines of the period, she faces a number of challenges to her equanimity, but she is seldom rattled by her difficulties. Harriot Freke, on the other hand, is the novel's avatar of transgression. She repudiates all the conventions assigned to her gender. This scene, in fact, is the only one in which she does not cross-dress, the only one in which she is contained within a domestic space, and the only one in which she is unable to coerce her female companion to do as she wishes. When Belinda finds herself "seized and dragged towards the door," she draws back with "a degree of gentle firmness," a gestural oxymoron that defeats Harriot's clumsy attempts at persuasion (218; ch. 17). Belinda's ability to resist Harriot Freke's

¹ On the historical specificity of this chapter, see Colin Atkinson, and Jo Atkinson, "Maria Edgeworth, Belinda, and Women's Rights," Éire-Ireland 19.4 (1984): 94-118. For a brief analysis of the relationship of Edgeworth and Mary Wollstonecraft, see Iain Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies," Études Irlandaises 6 (1981): 13-31.

assaults, and her related ability to cure Lady Delacour's diseased mind and body, are grounded in her advocacy of proper reading. She quietly refutes Harriot's flippant allusions to literary texts and her specious arguments about female delicacy, steadily asserting the claims of reason and the utility of serious reading. Harriot informs Belinda that she too was once a "reading girl." She has, however, long ago given up reading, for books "only spoil the originality of genius: very well for those who can't think for themselves--but when one has made up one's opinion, there is no use in reading" (219; ch. 17). Belinda defends the value of reading, claiming that reading enables her to discover and to clarify her opinions: "I read that I may think for myself" (220; ch. 17). The facility with which Belinda uses literature to help her think for herself enables her to resist the intoxicating temptations of Lady Delacour's fashionable world. Through Belinda, Maria Edgeworth articulates a trope of domestic reading that acts as a counter to the world of fashion and the flux that is its fundamental characteristic.

Belinda sets up the three primary models of reading with which Maria Edgeworth will work throughout her career: female reading, as represented in Virginia St. Pierre; domestic reading, as represented in Belinda Portman; and fashionable reading, as represented in Lady Delacour. As we have seen, female reading is regarded as an agent of sexual excitement and corruption, and the typical female reader is marked by her excessive emotional response to texts. Edgeworth's fashionable reader, on the other

hand, is marked by her excessive display of textual knowledge. Fashionable reading transmutes the solitary physical excesses of the female reader into the excessive display of the social self. The fashionable reader's ability to quote and to allude to a wide variety of texts provides her with a series of literary costumes that enable the adoption of non-domestic identities. By contrast, the more orderly and more retiring domestic reader uses her knowledge of literary matters to regulate her own desires and the desires of other members of her circle. She privileges self-control over self-indulgence, the contained over the unbounded, order over chaos. The domestic circle supervised by such a reader produces an ideal femininity, women with hearts "wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility, capable of all the enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational constancy" (352; ch. 36). The novel explores each model of reading, but the centre of the novel is Lady Delacour and the problem of fashionable reading.

i

Readers have frequently found Belinda Portman to be a tiresome distraction from the more appealing and irrepressibly witty Lady Delacour. When she was revising the novel for Anna Laetitia Barbauld's British Novelists, even Edgeworth complained: "I really was so provoked with the cold tameness of that stick or

stone Belinda that I could have torn the pages to pieces."² All the same, Belinda's "cold tameness" is a necessary element of Edgeworth's plot. Belinda's task, much like that of Caroline of Letters for Literary Ladies, is to persuade the reader that reason, rather than emotion, is the best guide for a young woman entering the world. Because of the adept manoeuvring of Mrs. Stanhope, her socially ambitious aunt, Belinda has been welcomed into the household of the fashionable Lady Delacour, where she encounters various challenges to her integrity. Belinda's ability to judge rightly is tested by the fascinating Lady Delacour and the intoxicating world she represents. As the proper Lady Anne Percival notes early in the novel, Mrs. Stanhope's matrimonial speculation and Lady Delacour's worldliness place Belinda "in a dangerous situation." Lady Anne, however, also voices Edgeworth's underlying optimism: "some young people learn prudence by being placed in dangerous situations, as some young horses . . . learn to be sure-footed, by being left to pick their own way on bad roads" (101; ch. 8).

Belinda's ability to find the good road owes nothing to her aunt's instruction in the "art of rising in the world" (1; ch. 1). Before Belinda became a ward of Mrs. Stanhope, she "had been

² Maria Edgeworth, "To Margaret Ruxton," 26 December 1809, A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth with a Selection from Her Letters, ed. Frances Edgeworth, 3 vols. (London: Master, 1867) 1: 229-30. Reviewers were also disappointed by Belinda. The reviewer for the Monthly Review, for instance, complained that Belinda "usurped the superior right of Lady Delacour to give the title to the work: for it is to the character and agency of the latter, in our opinion, that the tale owes its principle attractions." Monthly Review ns 37 (Apr. 1802): 368.

educated chiefly in the country; she had early been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasure; she was fond of reading, and disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity" (1; ch. 1). This indistinctly sketched domestic background has made her unfit for the metropolitan life of fashion. Although Belinda's "taste for literature" initially declines "in proportion to her intercourse with the fashionable world," she rapidly regains her taste for reading when she discovers the duplicity of that world (4; ch. 1). This discovery begins early. At the masquerade that initiates much of the action of the novel, Belinda hears an unflattering description of herself. Clarence Hervey and his friends assume that the masked woman they are talking to is Lady Delacour, and they indulge themselves in spirited gossip about Mrs. Stanhope, the six nieces she has successfully managed to marry off, and her efforts to foist her latest niece on the world. Belinda is mortified to hear herself briskly compared to Packwood's ubiquitously advertised razor strops.¹ She is particularly distressed to find that Clarence Hervey, to whom she is attracted, cavalierly dismisses her as "an arrant" flirt, a "composition of art and affectation" (18, 20; ch. 2).

Following this humiliation, Belinda leaves behind the world of routs, drums, and masquerades, and retreats into a world of

¹ For an account of George Packwood's inventive advertising campaigns, see Neil McKendrick, "Commercialization and the Economy," The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England, eds. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 146-94.

domestic reading. Belinda, in effect, refuses to acquiesce in her aunt's wish that she present herself as a commodity on the marriage market. She resists the indiscriminate circulation that is integral to the fashionable world, and chooses instead to spend increasing amounts of time in Lady Delacour's library. While Belinda moves away from the sites of fashionable display into the library, she does not closet herself in the secret space of self-indulgent reading. Instead of the romances and novels typically condemned by the trope of female reading, Belinda reads non-fiction by Adam Smith, Jean De La Bruyère, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and John Aiken. When she does read fiction, she picks up the blameless moral tales of Jean-François Marmontel and John Moore, writers to whom Edgeworth herself has often been compared.⁴ Such texts do not lend themselves to female reading.

Belinda's refusal to participate in the indiscriminate circulation of the fashionable world culminates in her decision not to attend the birthnight ball. While Lady Delacour attends the ball, Belinda spends the evening reading, and she is surprised that she is content to do so. She realizes that "six months ago" she would have thought the "loss of a birthnight ball a mighty trial of temper." As Lady Anne Percival had predicted, a winter spent "with one of the most dissipated women in England" has indeed sobered Belinda's mind (118; ch. 10).

Belinda's refusal of Lady Delacour's and Mrs. Stanhope's

⁴ On the influences of these writers on Edgeworth, see Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 76, 91, 150, 155, 219, 220, 303, 315, 334, 392.

methods of self-display earns her the approval of the exemplary Percival family, and her contact with them and their domestic literary salon confirms her commitment to domestic reading. Here no one person dominates the conversation. The entire family, including the children, participates in discussions. Furthermore, conversational skills are not used to display the individual's brilliance; rather, they are used to encourage the talents of others. The competition that marks the fashionable world of Lady Delacour is utterly absent. As a result, the domestic realm is a suitable place for courtship. According to Lady Anne Percival, the masculine prerogative of moving freely about in the public spaces denied to women gives men the power to "assume the appearance of every thing that is amiable or estimable, and women have scarcely any opportunities of detecting the counterfeit" (232; ch. 18). The solution to the interpretive difficulty posed by the masculine capacity for counterfeit, however, is not a compensating outward movement on the part of women, but a movement of men into the domestic. The "slight and frivolous intercourse, which fashionable belles usually have with those fashionable beaux who call themselves their lovers," Lady Anne argues, cannot reveal the "real character" of their suitors. She reminds Belinda that a woman "who has an opportunity of seeing her lover in private society, in domestic life, has infinite advantages; for if she has any sense, and he has any sincerity, the real character of both may perhaps be developed" (232; ch. 18). The domestic sphere is free of the distortions

and the deceits that arise from the fashionable marriage market, and thus it enables both women and men to judge the private character rather than the public mask of a potential spouse. The importance of the domestic sphere to successful courtships and marriage is also the fundamental point of Edgeworth's account of the history of Clarence Hervey's misguided attempt to transform Rachel Hartley into Virginia St. Pierre.

ii

Disgusted with the licence of the fashionable Parisian women he meets before the French Revolution, Clarence Hervey, a man of fashion, turns away from these frivolous, sophisticated "slaves of art" and toward the "child of nature" he finds in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Émile (1762) and in Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Paul et Virginie (1788) (351; ch. 26). He decides to look for a Sophie or a Virginie whom he can train to be an ideal wife. His search for a young woman who resembles these children of nature is initially unsuccessful, for "it is difficult to meet with an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction" (352; ch. 26). Eventually, however, Clarence discovers deep within the New Forest an "object formed expressly for his purpose"--Rachel Hartley, then under the care of her grandmother (352; ch. 20).⁵

⁵ Edgeworth modelled Clarence's wife-training scheme upon Thomas Day's notorious and unsuccessful attempts to train two orphans from the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital as possible wives.

Edgeworth exploits the central assumptions of the trope of female reading in her portraits of Mrs. Hartley and her daughter, Rachel Hartley, whom Clarence Hervey renames Virginia St. Pierre. Mrs. Hartley is explicitly identified as a female reader, a "sentimental girl," whose character is "spoiled by early novel-reading" (396; ch. 27). Her father has "a small place at court" and lives beyond his fortune, but he insists upon educating his portionless daughter at a fashionable boarding school (396; ch. 27). Her experience there only encourages her inappropriate reading habits, and, like other female readers before her, she makes a premature and unwise marriage. Her elopement with Mr. Hartley ends badly; he disavows her and abandons their daughter. Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Hartley dies, and her mother assumes care of the daughter. With a belated but intense grasp of the dangers of female reading, Mrs. Hartley's mother retires to a cottage in the New Forest where she can exercise scrupulous and unchallenged control over her granddaughter's access to sexual (and textual) knowledge. She absolutely forbids any contact with men or with any representations of masculinity. Her suspicion of fictional representations of men points to a conventional motif of the trope of female reading, and it links her to the conduct manual writers. Like them, she is "particular about the books" her granddaughter is permitted to read, and she never allows her

Maria Edgeworth comments on the fictional problem posed by using this improbable but historical episode in Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth Begun by Himself and Concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth, 2 vols. (1820; Shannon: Irish UP, 1969) 2: 349.

to read novels (358; ch. 26).

Edgeworth begins to play with the conventions of the trope when she provides an alternate, but equally representational, source of sexual knowledge. One day during a rare visit to a friend of her grandmother, the young Rachel sees a portrait of a "young sea-officer, in his full uniform" (358; ch. 26). Her grandmother is extraordinarily disturbed by this seemingly innocuous encounter. As the portrait's owner puts it, she nearly went into "fits about a picture of a man, that Rachel lit upon by accident, as if a picture had any sense to hurt a body! Now if it had been one of your naked pictures, there might have been some delicacy in her dislike to it; but it was no such thing, but a very proper picture" (358; ch. 26). This "very proper picture" is, nevertheless, the first representation of masculinity that the young girl has encountered, and it subsequently plays a crucial role in her sexual imagination. In essence, the grandmother's prohibitions are attempts to forestall her granddaughter's sexual awakening. Edgeworth's plot, however, suggests that such an awakening is inevitable and that an attempt to prevent it is futile. Female desires may be contained and transformed into domestic affection, but they cannot be entirely eliminated. Thus, while female reading may be a source of contaminating sexual arousal, Edgeworth contends that the isolation and ignorance generated by the grandmother's prohibitions lead to a more subtle but ultimately more powerful threat to feminine propriety. The disruptions caused by female

reading and by female sexuality can be controlled only by the rational education and experience of the world that a well-supervised domestic circle can provide.

Edgeworth maintains that the domestic situation provided first by her grandmother, and then by Clarence Hervey, is incapable of directing Virginia's "exquisite sensibility and ardent imagination" (369; ch. 26). The young girl's ignorance, which her grandmother understands to be innocence, leaves her vulnerable to the stimulation of female reading. Indeed, the grandmother's interdictions have simply "awakened her curiosity" and "increased her appetite for books--it was insatiable" (369; ch. 26). When Clarence Hervey assumes control of Rachel's education and turns her into Virginia, he exacerbates her appetite for reading by providing her with inappropriate books and an inadequate companion. Familiar with the conventional dangers of female reading, Clarence denies Virginia "common novels," but he allows her to read old romances. He believes that romances, unlike novels, improve rather than corrupt the female character. Romances, according to Clarence, offer their readers "a spirit favourable to female virtue." They exalt "the respect for chastity," and inspire "enthusiastic admiration of honour, generosity, truth, and all the noble qualities which dignify human nature" (369; ch. 26).^o

Virginia's reading, however, gives her a confused

^o Clara Reeve offers a similarly positive view of the romance in The Progress of Romance (1785; New York: Garland, 1970) 2 vols.

understanding of the "social affections," and it increases her sensibility (369; ch. 26). Virginia, like her mother before her, becomes a female reader, devouring "romances with the greatest eagerness" (369; ch. 26). The romances she reads, in conjunction with her peculiar isolation, intensify the impression made by the portrait of the sailor. The figure in the portrait becomes "the only man who could, in her imagination, represent a hero" (369; ch. 26). His image fuses with the sense of desirable masculinity that Virginia draws from her reading. This figure "haunts" her "day and night." When she reads of "heroes in the day," his image appears in her daydreams; when she sleeps, he "speaks" to her, he "kneels" to her (453; ch. 31). Her imagination is "exalted by solitude and romance," and she becomes "enamoured of a phantom" (454; ch. 31).

Thus far Edgeworth presents a fairly straightforward version of the delusions of the female reader. Complications ensue, however, when Mrs. Ormond begins to meddle in Virginia's emotions. Clarence Hervey hires Mrs. Ormond to take care of Virginia after her grandmother dies and to prepare her to be his wife. Although Mrs. Ormond is not "a woman of superior abilities, or of much information," Clarence believes that "her excellent temper and gentle disposition" make her a suitable chaperone for Virginia (359; ch. 26). But Mrs. Ormond, however well-meaning, is an emotionally clumsy woman with little skill in discerning the workings of Virginia's innocent but intense and confused desires. Her "ignorance of the human heart," coupled

with her ignorance of the effects of female reading, leads Mrs. Ormond consistently to misinterpret the nature of Virginia's desire (454; ch. 31). Ultimately, Virginia is hampered less by her own sexual imagination than by the absence of a skilful confidante. Unlike the typical female reader, Virginia realizes that she suffers from confusion, but since she lacks other modes of analysis, she turns to fiction to help her elucidate her confusion. She struggles to articulate her confused desires to herself and to Mrs. Ormond by comparing herself to the characters she has encountered in Paul et Virginie. Without Clarence's knowledge, Mrs. Ormond has permitted Virginia to read the story of the woman after whom she has been named, and her attention is caught by a passage which describes the troubled sexual awakening of Saint-Pierre's heroine. When questioned by Mrs. Ormond about her reading "reverie," Virginia explains that she does not feel "pleasure" in reading this passage. On the contrary, the passage frightens her, for in it Virginia recognizes the nature of her own disturbed imagination. Like her namesake, Virginia appeals to a maternal figure for guidance: "Virginia threw her arms around Mrs. Ormond, and laid her head upon her friend's bosom, as if she wished to realize the illusion, and to be the Virginia of whom she had been reading" (370-71; ch. 26). Virginia then tells Mrs. Ormond that she is troubled by the "confused ideas floating in my imagination from the books I have been reading. I do not distinctly know my own feelings" (371; ch. 26). Her awareness of the deleterious influence of her reading and her hesitant

attempts to discuss her situation differentiate her from the self-assured emotional enthusiasms of the female reader.

Mrs. Ormond, however, proves to be an inadequate guide. She dismisses Virginia's accurate statements that she is distracted by the fictional man who haunts her imagination, assuming instead that Virginia is in love with Clarence. Instead of recognizing the sources of Virginia's uneasiness, Mrs. Ormond reads Virginia's silence as a sign of affection, her statements about the insufficiency of her love as a sign of its depth, and her denial of a wish to marry Clarence as a sign of her modesty. In a misguided attempt to assist Virginia, Mrs. Ormond tells her that Clarence intends to marry her. This imprudent disclosure disturbs Virginia more than the anxieties generated by her female-reading. She is now tormented by her recognition that she does not love Clarence in the way that she should if she is to marry him. While Mrs. Ormond may believe that Virginia's modesty leads to her denial of love for Clarence, Virginia herself recognizes that what she feels for Clarence is mixed with fear. Her reading of Paul et Virginie confirms this observation, teaching her that what she feels for her imaginary suitor is love, and that what she feels for Clarence is gratitude. Nevertheless, Virginia struggles to subordinate her narratively produced desire for a hero to the gratitude she knows ought to bind her to Clarence. Mrs. Ormond's revelation, in conjunction with Virginia's reading, begins to disturb Virginia's sleep. Where once she had vaguely disturbing dreams of a chivalric lover, she now has nightmares in

which her chivalric lover kills Clarence. These nightmares dramatically render the clash between two forms of female desire: the desire to be pleased by a lover and the desire to please a father. Virginia is tormented by the repetition of dreams in which the figure associated with filial love is conquered by the figure associated with erotic love.

Although Mrs. Ormond dismisses the dreams as the product of an overwrought love for Clarence, the nightmares are derived from Virginia's refusal to confuse the two forms of desire. Until Virginia is provided with a more suitable domestic circle, she is unable to resolve this conflict. Only when Clarence arranges a reunion with her father is Virginia able to confess to Clarence the source of her distress. Once her love for Clarence is correctly interpreted as that of a child for a parent, Lady Delacour provides Virginia with Captain Sunderland, the sailor who sat for the portrait which initiated her sexual awakening. The provision of a domestic situation in which Virginia is able to gain a broader social experience, rather than the inappropriate isolation Clarence has offered, will assist Virginia to regulate her passions and to judge the worthiness of Captain Sunderland. Virginia's story makes the case for the primacy of the domestic sphere by demonstrating the effect of excessive isolation upon Virginia's sexual imagination. In the story of Lady Delacour, the opposite movement makes a similar case, for here Edgeworth explores the effect of excessive publicity on Lady Delacour's body and family.

Throughout her career, Edgeworth addressed the threat posed to a stable social order by fashionability. Her most extended exploration of this topic appears in the eight works that make up the Tales of Fashionable Life, but the issue underlies most of her work.⁷ For the late eighteenth century, the fashionable world was a source of profound cultural ambivalence, since fashionability is at once a sign of national and individual prosperity and a sign of profligate waste. As Neil McKendrick notes, the increased consumption associated with fashionability underwrote the Industrial Revolution and was a critical factor in England's economic development. In many quarters, he remarks, fashionable consumption was thus seen as "socially desirable, for as the growth of new wants stimulated increased effort and output, improved consumption by all ranks of society would further stimulate economic progress."⁸

At the same time, the fashionability that demonstrates individual and social prosperity contains within it the potential for social chaos and decay. The uneasy status of fashionability was intensified by the difficulty of restricting fashionable

⁷ Tales of Fashionable Life appeared in two series. The first series was published in 1809 and contains Ennui, Mme. Fleury, Almeria, The Dun, and Manoeuvring. The second series appeared in 1812 and contains Emilie de Coulanges, The Absentee, and Vivian. Works such as Popular Tales (1802) and Moral Tales (1801) address the danger fashionability poses to the lower orders.

⁸ McKendrick, Birth of a Consumer Society 19.

goods or notions to a particular group of people. Fashionable goods, that is, tended rapidly to lose their exclusivity (and their ability to signify social status) as the pressure of social emulation and competition encouraged the indiscriminate reproduction of the fashionable sign. Once the fashionable was reduced to the merely popular, a new series of expenditures had to be undertaken to reassert the status of the fashionable individual. Paradoxically, then, the act of fashionable display both demonstrated and dissipated prosperity.

Not surprisingly, the proponents of domestic ideology viewed fashionable display with ambivalence. Mary Poovey suggests that while the affluence displayed on a woman's body or in her actions could be read as a sign of her husband's or her father's status, her displayed body could also be read as a sign of economic and sexual corruption.⁹ Fashionable self-display made social status visible while depleting the economic basis of that status. Nancy Armstrong makes a similar point when she explores the role of self-display in differentiating the theatrical, and thus undesirable, female body from the modest and thus desirable female body.¹⁰ The fashionable woman, like the aristocratic woman with whom she is associated, is understood as a sexual threat to domesticity. The force of her sexual threat is

⁹ Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Style as Ideology in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 11.

¹⁰ Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 72-77.

heightened by her economic threat: she dissipates not only the bodily energies, but also the economic energies of her husband.

The disruptive potential of fashionability is clearly evident in Edgeworth's portrayal of the Delacour household. Lady Delacour's account of her unhappy marriage and dissipated life, which dominates the first third of the novel, reveals that neither of the Delacours has a firm grasp of domestic economy. The marriage itself is a manifestation of their wilful rejection of the self-regulation integral to domesticity.¹¹ At the time of the wedding, Lord Delacour was severely in need of what his wife calls the "heiress lozenge," since he had "lost at Newmarket more than he was worth in every sense of the word" (31; ch. 3). Lady Delacour, complete with her hundred thousand pounds, agreed to marry him in a fit of pique. She foolishly hoped that her marriage would provoke regret and jealousy in her first love, Henry Percival, who relinquished his claim upon her because she refused to reform her many faults. Not surprisingly, this inauspicious beginning was rapidly followed by a series of matrimonial disasters. The Delacours "set out in the fashionable world with a mutual desire to be as extravagant as possible," and this shared taste for fashionability and their shared refusal to regulate their spending have become the source of their "perpetual quarrels" (31; ch. 3).

At the centre of these quarrels is a struggle for household

¹¹ On the importance of economy to domestic ideology, see Armstrong 81-88.

mastery. Lady Delacour absolutely refuses to restrict her energies to the domestic management of the household economy. Instead she claims a far more active (and far less legitimate) form of female authority. She believes that her superior intellectual and financial endowments authorize her mastery of her husband and her public display of her considerable literary talents. Her husband, in turn, is provoked by her refusal to conform to the domestic model, and is outraged by her attempts (and her ability) to govern him. The marriage disintegrates as both Lady Delacour and Lord Delacour indulge themselves in successively more damaging incidents of financial and moral dissipation. The financial irregularities of the Delacour household are accompanied by sexual irregularities. These irregularities are preceded by Lady Delacour's maternal failures. Her first child, a son and heir, is born dead, and her second dies in infancy. Her third child and namesake, Helena, survives but is sent away; first to a wet nurse and later, when Lady Delacour discovers that her husband has indulged himself in a liaison with the governess, to a boarding school.¹²

This series of disruptions to the financial and libidinal economy of her marriage intensifies Lady Delacour's commitment to her non-domestic activities. As she explains to Belinda, she "had nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children,

¹² For a similar reading of the significance of the disruption of the domestic and libidinal economy in *Belinda*, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah Moore, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 118-28.

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" (37; ch. 3). Lady Delacour's association with Harriot Freke leads her further into the world of fashion, a world in which women compete for the applause and admiration of a fickle audience. She initially allies herself with Harriot Freke in order to ensure maintenance of her public prominence.

Harriot's audacity leads Lady Delacour into increasingly serious instances of gender transgression. Her dalliance with Colonel Lawless is engineered largely by Harriot. The death of Lawless at the hands of the jealous Lord Delacour is the consequence of Harriot's bruiting about of the aggressive sexual advances that she, not Lady Delacour, has encouraged Lawless to make. Most important, the breast cancer Lady Delacour believes is killing her is the consequence of a cross-dressing escapade instigated by Harriot. During the duel held between Lady Delacour and Mrs. Luttridge (her much hated rival for dominance of the world of fashion), Lady Delacour's over-charged pistol recoils and damages her breast. This diseased breast metonymically represents Lady Delacour's diseased mind and her refusal to accept that legitimate femininity is defined by its domesticity and ability to regulate a domestic circle.

Edgeworth's use of metaphors of disease and her overlapping analogies of mind, body, and domestic sphere are standard in domestic novels of the period. What gives the portrait of Lady

Delacour's domestic failure its characteristically Edgeworthian accent is the prominence assigned to textual matters. Edgeworth supplements the familiar signs of domestic inadequacy--profligate spending, maternal inadequacy, and dubious sexual behaviour--with a striking emphasis upon literary transgression. Indeed, Lady Delacour's fashionable success is dependent on her ability to use her literary skill to support her fashionable status.

Although Edgeworth's fashionable women rely on their ability to shine in public venues, the techniques Lady Delacour uses to establish her fashionable status should initially be distinguished from those used by her companion Harriot Freke and her rival, Mrs. Luttridge. Mrs. Luttridge's success is the result of the economic dissipation encouraged by the gambling parties held in her home. Her faro bank and EO table attract numerous people, including Lord Delacour, and the debts her guests incur lend Mrs. Luttridge the leverage she needs both to maintain her popularity and to enable her to assist her husband's political ambitions. Harriot Freke establishes herself upon the fashionable stage with more flamboyant and dangerous violations of gender conventions. Her prominence depends most notably upon visible signs of gender transgression: her preference for men's clothing, her persistent incursions into masculine spaces such as the galleries of Parliament, and her public participation in the exclusively male rituals of the duel and the military exercise. She supplements these techniques with an ill-disguised sexual corruption. As Lady Delacour comes to realize, Harriot makes it

"her sport to 'touch the brink of all we hate'" (38; ch. 3). Harriot's actions are so extreme, in fact, that she "swam in the sea of folly out of her depth," and when "the tide of fashion ebbed," she was "left sticking knee deep in the mud" (60; ch. 4). Only Lady Delacour's powerful public influence is able to restore Harriot to a position of fashionability.

Like Mrs. Luttridge and Harriot Freke, Lady Delacour is devoted to obtaining public attention. She is highly self-conscious about the necessity of constant publicity to maintain her fashionable status, and she is particularly adept at manipulating newspapers in order to gain even anonymous admiration. When Belinda first arrives in her home, the "newspapers were full of Lady Delacour's parties, and Lady Delacour's dresses, and Lady Delacour's *bon mots*" (4; ch. 1). Lady Delacour's concern about the stylishness of Belinda's court-dress is less an expression of her wish that Belinda might thus attract a suitor than of her determination that Belinda's appearance will exhibit them both in the press. Lady Delacour cuts short a debate about the decoration of the court-dress by urging the milliner to decorate the dress as she pleases, as long as it "be something that will make a fine paragraph" (29; ch. 3). Lady Delacour is quite aware of the ephemeral nature of the fashionability provided by newspaper puffs. In contemplating her mastectomy, for example, Lady Delacour fears most, not that her physical body will suffer, but that her public body will suffer. She fears that she will become a subject of gossip and

caricature: public discourses that she cannot control. For her, to be "struck up in a print shop window " as "The Reformed Amazon" would be an unbearable "vexation" and humiliation (285; ch. 21).

Although Lady Delacour is implicated in many of the actions through which Harriot Freke and Mrs. Luttridge promote themselves, she is set apart from them first by her skilled theatricality and second by her use of literary references to support her theatricality. Lady Delacour is consistently characterized as an actress. In the midst of the fashionable glare of "well-dressed crowds," Lady Delacour is the "soul and spirit of pleasure and frolic," the "Mistress of the Revels." Unwatched in her home, however, she is "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" (5; ch. 1). The novel is permeated with this theatrical motif, from the masquerade that opens it to the epilogue that marks its closure. Lady Delacour's feverish promotion of theatrical entertainments is both a manifestation of the self-dramatization essential to fashionability, and a desperate attempt to disguise her diseased body and her diseased mind. Lady Delacour's wit furnishes her (and her associates) with an ever-replenishing stock of alternate and primarily non-domestic modes of self-characterization, only some of which are accomplished by the donning of actual costumes. Many of the other moments of theatricality are associated with literary allusions. Lady Delacour's ability to assume a

constantly shifting series of identities is the key to her success in the fashionable world and a sign of her refusal of domesticity."

Lady Delacour supplements her more obvious theatricality with frequent and ostentatious reference to literary texts. A rough tally of the rates of allusion and quotation by the characters and the narrator of Belinda reveals that Lady Delacour out-quotes them all, alluding to literary texts eight times more frequently. This concentration of literary allusion is not simply a function of Lady Delacour's dominance of the plot. Her deliberate proliferation of literary references through quotation, parody, or allusion is her most distinctive form of self-display. Lady Delacour's literary self-display is designed both to attract the admiration of the fashionable world, and to hide her secret torment: the "aching void" of her domestic failure, which Edgeworth punningly represents in her longing for a "bosom friend" and in her breast cancer (37; ch. 3).¹³

In Lady Delacour's efforts to maintain her social prominence through a display of her literary skills, Maria Edgeworth develops a trope of fashionable reading. Essentially, the

¹³ Terry Castle analyzes the masquerade's ability to offer its participants multiple possibilities of self-characterization, and the responses of anti-masquerade writers such as Edgeworth to this fluidity, in Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986).

¹⁴ For a reading of Edgeworth's use of the breast as metaphor, see Kowaleski-Wallace, 126-29.

fashionable reader misuses her literary knowledge and skill to support a rapidly altering sequence of personas whose novelty and daring enable her to maintain her public pre-eminence. The fashionable reader shares a number of characteristics with her more common counterpart, the female reader. Both tropes present women's reading as a breach of domestic femininity, and both represent the relationship of the female body to textuality as problematic. The trope of female reading emphasizes the secretive eroticism of the passive female reader. Female reading offers its practitioners an illicit and solitary sexual pleasure that leaves them vulnerable to seduction. Virginia St. Pierre's female reading, for example, over-stimulates her adolescent sexual yearnings, creating the nightmares that torment her. Her reading is a form of confused and confusing sexual arousal, and her disorder is largely a private matter.

The trope of fashionable reading retains the problematic female body, but its emphasis falls upon the active public display of the female body. Edgeworth does link Lady Delacour's fashionable reading to a disruption in the libidinal economy of her marriage, but she insists that her fashionable reading is not primarily an agent of sexual arousal. While female reading brings women lovers (whether real or imagined), fashionable reading brings them admirers. The female reader entertain lovers in a secret, erotic space, but the fashionable reader commands centre stage, displaying her literary skill to ensure the publicity upon which her status within a system of fashionability

rests. Thus, although Lady Delacour's flirtation with Clarence Hervey (a flirtation that relies heavily upon the manipulation of literary texts) is perceived by her husband as a sexual threat, it is not in essence erotic. Clarence is Lady Delacour's admirer, not her lover.

Edgeworth's trope of fashionable reading is, nevertheless, associated with a disruption of the sexual economy. The displayed female body is a visible denial of domestic ideology, and much of Lady Delacour's fashionable reading is calculated to display either her own body or that of Belinda. Lady Delacour's textual practices tend to draw Belinda into excessively public (though generally indirect) expressions of sexuality. The fashionable reader's insistence upon publicizing others at the same moment that she draws attention to herself is the foundation of many of the conflicts between Lady Delacour and Belinda during the first half of the novel. Lady Delacour's literary allusions, especially when used to characterize Belinda, are encoded expressions of the sexual ethic of the fashionable world, in which courtship is negotiated through publicity and in which marriage is a primarily a financial arrangement. Fashionable adepts such as Lady Delacour and Mrs. Stanhope understand that publicity is an essential aspect of fashionable marriage, whether one is advertising the "heiress lozenge," or the more bitter pill of a less financially well-endowed woman.

Belinda, however, repudiates the display inherent in fashionable courtship and resists her aunt's and her chaperone's

attempts to advertise her charms. Belinda's resistance to Lady Delacour's use of literary reference to encourage Clarence in his fittful courtship is evident in the episode that follows Belinda's refusal to be at home to him during one of Lady Delacour's absences. When Lady Delacour returns from her visit to the royal drawing room, she finds Clarence Hervey languishing on her stoop. Upon learning that Belinda has refused to see Clarence, Lady Delacour reassures him, insisting that "not at home is nonsense, you know" (67; ch. 5). She then takes Clarence to Belinda's sanctuary, the library, crying as she goes, "Shine out, appear, be found, my lovely Zara!" (67; ch. 5). The allusion to Voltaire's Zaire (1732) underlines Lady Delacour's insistence that Belinda be visible to Clarence, and that she engage in the self-display essential to the fashionable world. Lady Delacour goes further in her attempt to publicize Belinda by proffering another literary allusion. Finding Belinda in the library, Lady Delacour remarks: "Here she is--what doing I know not--studying Hervey's Meditations on the Tombs, I should guess by the sanctification of her looks" (67; ch. 5). Lady Delacour ironically conveys her hidden preoccupation with death through this reference to James Hervey's Meditations Among the Tombs (1746-47). More important, she uses the reference to suggest that Belinda is at some level interested in the scene's other Hervey.

This intersection of forced publicity, literary text, and courtship is repeated during the same visit when Lady Delacour

attempts to enact a second "rape of the lock" (66; ch. 5). In response to Lady Delacour's mimicry of the awkward movement of women in hoop skirts, Clarence declares that he can "manage a hoop as well as any woman in England" (67; ch. 5). Lady Delacour immediately agrees to wager fifty guineas that he cannot fulfil his boast by deceiving Lady Boucher, who has just arrived at the door. Clarence dons the appropriate clothing, and plays Madame de Pomenars quite convincingly until Lady Delacour pulls the comb out of Belinda's hair and drops it on the floor. Clarence, befuddled by the "sight of the finest hair that he had ever beheld," bends to pick up the comb, "totally forgetting his hoop and his character" (69; ch. 5). As a reward for his good-natured acceptance of the lost bet, Lady Delacour offers him a lock of Belinda's distracting hair. Belinda, however, escapes the force of the allusion and its illegitimate advertisement of her sexual availability. Her response to Lady Delacour's display is a corresponding and resisting retreat. Belinda retires as soon as she can, but the "modest, graceful dignity" of her manners guarantees that she escapes "without even the charge of prudery" (69; ch. 5).¹⁵

Although Lady Delacour ostensibly uses literary references

¹⁵ Edgeworth's *Belinda* thus successfully enacts the solution Pope's *Clarissa* proposes in the fifth canto of The Rape of the Lock (1717). Pope's *Clarissa* advises Belinda to set aside her splenetic rage at the theft of her lock, suggesting that "good humor can prevail / When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail." Alexander Pope, The Rape of The Lock, The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, 3rd. ed. (London: Methuen, 1962) 5.31-32.

to promote a flirtation between Clarence and Belinda, the performances also call attention to Lady Delacour herself, setting up an uncomfortable triangular relationship. This triangle is most forcefully expressed in the sequence in which Lady Delacour appears dressed as Queen Elizabeth, and Clarence casts himself as the Earl of Essex. The narrator announces that both "the actor and actress were highly animated, and seemed so fully possessed by their parts as to be insensible" to the implication of the scene they are playing out (106; ch. 9). The "deep blush" that appears on "Belinda's cheek, when Queen Elizabeth addressed her as one of her maids of honour, of whom she affected to be jealous" abruptly makes Clarence aware of the subtext of this masquerade (106-07; ch. 9). This charade is doubly revealing. Dr. X---, a rational physician, is able to read through Lady Delacour's disguise, for it paradoxically reveals the disease it is designed to hide. Dr. X--- observes to Clarence and Belinda that Lady Delacour's feverish "gaiety" is not the sign of "a sound mind in a sound body" (107; ch. 9). Further and more telling is the betraying ruff. The shadow cast by the ruff of Lady Delacour's costume trembles and reveals her hectic pulse to the discerning eye of Dr. X---, who chooses this moment to admonish Clarence about the frivolity of a life devoted to the "evanescent amusement of a drawing-room" (108; ch.9). He urges Clarence to strive to be "permanently useful to his fellow-creatures" (108; ch. 9). This encouragement breaks the triangular flirtation, and Clarence begins to reform. He well

knows that Lady Delacour is not in love with him, that "her only wish was to obtain his admiration" (116; ch. 9). To encourage her reformation, therefore, he resolves to withdraw his admiration and to "show her that it could no longer be secured without deserving his esteem" (116; ch. 9).

Clarence's assurance that he can correct Lady Delacour's flaws is somewhat impertinent, but his recognition that Lady Delacour needs a friend rather than an admirer is crucial to Edgeworth's point: the health of Lady Delacour's person and of her household requires that she replace her admirers with friends. Friendship, however, is the product of domestic not fashionable reading, and the course of Lady Delacour's recovery is dependent on her ability to perceive the difference between admiration and friendship. Thus the willingness of her former admirers to exchange fashionable reading for domestic reading is essential to her cure. Belinda Portman is the central figure in this process, and she gradually draws Lady Delacour away from self-display and toward the domestic literary practices exemplified in the Percival family. Belinda, in effect, must act as a "cordial," gradually healing Lady Delacour and her household.

Belinda's task is to unlock Lady Delacour's secrets, essentially the secret of her denied affection for her child and for her husband. Belinda transforms the Delacour household by arranging the return of Helena, and with Helena comes an altered relationship to literary texts and to the question of self-

display. Shortly after Clarence resolves to be Lady Delacour's friend rather than her admirer, Lady Delacour asks Belinda to "look over" some of the letters that have accumulated unread on her desk (111; ch. 9). Lady Delacour is surprised by Belinda's reaction to one of the letters. From Belinda's "countenance," she guesses that the letter must contain "something wondrous pathetic" (111-12; ch. 9). When she learns that it is from Helena, she dismisses the letter, telling Belinda to "read it to yourself, my dear--a school-girl's letter is a thing I abominate--I make it a rule never to read Helena's letters" (112; ch. 9). Belinda, however, possesses formidable "powers of persuasion," and she quickly convinces the seemingly indifferent mother to read her daughter's letters (112; ch. 9). Lady Delacour is pleased to discover that her daughter writes well, but she is less pleased by Helena's obvious affection for Lady Anne Percival. Lady Delacour is jealous of Lady Anne; but as she reveals her jealousy, she also reveals that she has, in fact, read this letter and previous letters with some care. Ultimately, it is less the content of Helena's letters that is important than the act of reading them, for in reading Lady Delacour betrays the maternal and domestic identity that is essential to proper femininity in Edgeworth's works.

In striking contrast to her mother with her volubility, Helena is linked to silence and restraint. She is, in fact, reintroduced into the home because of a gift of silence. Helena learns that her mother has insisted that her maidservant give up

an odious, screaming macaw. Through Belinda, she offers her mother goldfish, "which you know cannot make the least noise," to replace the macaw (154; ch. 12). Belinda encourages Helena to send the goldfish, and the reunion of Lady Delacour and her daughter takes place in the privacy of the Delacour library during the half hour preceding a fashionable reading party. The interview between mother and daughter reveals that Helena does not share her mother's tendency to self-dramatization. Helena's responses to her mother's questions about the goldfish demonstrate that she possesses the modesty essential to domestic femininity. She has won the goldfish she gives to her mother in a contest that epitomizes the Percival family's pedagogical practices: Lady Anne promised the fish to the child who could give the best account of a learned conversation about various experiments on the "hearing of fishes" (164; ch. 13). But Helena is reluctant to tell her mother how she came by the fish because she is "afraid it would not be right to praise" herself (164; ch. 13). The exchange of the goldfish demonstrates that the separation of mother and child, which shocks Clarence Hervey and Margaret Delacour (Lord Delacour's aunt) has ensured that Helena was guarded from the contagion of her mother's obsession with fashionable self-display."

Edgeworth frequently wrote about the problem of maternal contamination, most notably in her treatment of Maria Hutton of Patronage (1814) and Grace Nugent of The Absentee (1812). For a discussion of this aspect of Edgeworth's works, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), ch. 6.

When Helena enters her mother's house, she brings with her the invisible but formidable influence of the Percival family. The Percivals themselves never enter the Delacour home, but Lady Anne and Henry Percival are responsible for its reform in that they embody the domestic literary practices essential to Lady Delacour's cure. The *Sortes Virgilianæ* sequence that follows the reading party is animated by the Percival influence. After the reading of Voltaire's L'Ecosaise (1760), Lady Delacour, Belinda, Helena, Clarence, and a few others stay. They idle away the time before the meal looking at the miscellaneous collection of books on the drawing-room table. Clarence takes up one of them, crying "Come, let us try our fate by the *Sortes Virgilianæ*" (166; ch. 13). Lady Delacour, always eager for any game of chance, opens at random the proffered volume of Marmontel's tales. The book opens to "a description of the manner in which la femme comme il y en a peu managed a husband, who was excessively afraid of being thought to be governed by his wife" (166; ch. 13). Lady Delacour can scarcely avoid the coincidence between the text and her own marital situation. When she finds Belinda's book mark between the following pages, Lady Delacour assumes that Belinda and Clarence have contrived the *sortes* to provide her a less than subtle lesson.

Lady Delacour's fortuitous reading of Marmontel has indeed been contrived, but not in the obvious manner she supposes. Nor is she correct in her conjecture that Belinda's marker is a sign that she has been studying Marmontel in anticipation of becoming

the second Lady Delacour. This moment of reading is contrived by Edgeworth as a means of embedding the Percival family model of maternal conduct in the heart of Lady Delacour's diseased household. The conjunction of Lady Delacour and "*La femme il y en a peu*" was first made by Lady Anne Percival, during a dinner party earlier in the novel. On that occasion, Lady Anne refuted Margaret Delacour's assertion that Lady Delacour was monstrous in her neglect of Helena by invoking both the rational principles of Marmontel and the more fanciful notion of enchantment. Lady Delacour's "enchantment will soon be at an end," she assured the company, "and she will return to her natural character. I should not be at all surprised, if Lady Delacour were to appear at once *la femme comme il y en a peu*" (98; ch. 8). Thus the *sortes virgilianæ* gains its predictive power, not from Lady Delacour's random selection of a passage, but from its deliberate association with Lady Anne's rational domesticity. Lady Anne's indirect influence is augmented by the bookmark, which is a sign of Belinda's domestic reading, a reading marked by an absence of randomness as well as by its propriety.

The conversation that follows the *sortes virgilianæ* is dominated by Clarence's obvious efforts to persuade Lady Delacour to adopt a more appropriate maternal identity. He openly expresses his "admiration" of a fashionable duchess, who had "stopped short in the career of dissipation to employ her inimitable talents in the education of her children; who had absolutely brought virtue into fashion by the irresistible powers

of wit and beauty" (168; ch. 13). While Lady Delacour dismisses his enthusiasm, advising him to "write a sentimental comedy, a comédie larmoyante, or a drama on the German model, and call it *The School for Mothers*," she is moved to express a bitter regret that it is too late for her to become the heroine of such a text (168; ch. 13). And indeed until Lady Delacour is willing to reveal her secrets to the eye of her husband, she has no hope of reform.

Belinda, however, gradually persuades Lady Delacour to do just that. After Lady Delacour has been convinced that Belinda is not preparing to usurp her place in her husband's or her daughter's affections, she agrees to expose her breast to her husband and to Dr. X---. Each of these physical revelations is accompanied by a textual revelation, one also encouraged by Belinda. Soon after she bares her diseased breast to her husband and tells him the secret that has driven her onto the fashionable stage, Lady Delacour also opens her secret library to him. This secret library contains Clarence Hervey's letters, which she teasingly tells Belinda are "calculated to make you fall in love with the writer of them" (264; ch. 20).

Lord Delacour returns home from a physically draining search for a country-house suitable for Lady Delacour's surgery and convalescence to find her sitting with a bundle of these letters. She opens Clarence's letters "one after another, looking them over without seeming well to know what she was about" (272; ch. 20). Irritated at her husband's unexplained absence, she ignores

him anxious inquires after her health: "merely bowing her head to him, she went on reading" (272; ch. 20). When he realizes whose letters she is reading, his previous jealousy of Clarence returns, and Lady Delacour exacerbates it by asking Belinda to put the letters in her "cabinet of curiosities" with the "secret lock, which I alone can manage" (273, 274; ch. 20). In an aside, Belinda entreats her to open the secret of the letters to Lord Delacour, suggesting that he is not jealous of Lady Delacour's "person"--her body or her heart--but of her mind. Domestic harmony can be restored only when this final lock has been opened, and this final secret told. By being opened up to the nominal supervision of a husband, Clarence's letters cease to belong to the world of fashion and enter into domestic circulation. Lady Delacour's demonstration of "confidence," "kindness," and "condescension" in this matter fixes Lord Delacour at home (275; ch. 20).

The transformation of Lady Delacour's fashionable household into an Edgeworthian domestic salon, however, requires that one final secret library be opened. As the time for her mastectomy approaches, Lady Delacour engages in a secret reading that recalls the solitary self-indulgence of the female reader. She takes to reading religious texts, and she is as ashamed of them as other heroines are of lewd novels.¹⁷ These "methodistical

¹⁷ This episode illustrates the suspicion of revealed religion that marks Edgeworth's works and was a contentious issue during her lifetime. She was often charged with irreligion, most frequently in reviews of Tales of Fashionable Life. See, for example, H. J. Stephen, and W. Gifford's review of the first

books" are "highly oratorical," and generally "of a mystical cast" (262; ch. 20). To Belinda, who happens upon them by chance, they are "scarcely intelligible" (262; ch. 20). When Lady Delacour learns that Belinda has been examining them, she orders that the books "be locked up in my own bookcase" and the key returned to her (262; ch. 20).

Operating outside rational discourse and sociable domestic space, Lady Delacour's religious reading is linked to the motifs of disease and morbidity. Her religious mania comes upon her "by fits," generally when the effect of the opium is weakening and her mind is overwhelmed by "the most dreadful superstitious terrors--terrors the more powerful as they were secret" (262; ch. 20). Secret and fearful, Lady Delacour's religious reading makes her vulnerable to manipulation and itself produces wrong interpretations, most clearly in the episode of Harriot Freke's final foray. Misled by gossip, Harriot believes that Lady Delacour has taken a lover. In an attempt to discover his identity and to frighten Lady Delacour, she dresses herself as a ghost and climbs over the garden wall. Confused by her reading, Lady Delacour readily believes that the vision she sees on three successive nights is a forerunner of her own death. Once she

series in the Quarterly Review 2 (1809): 146-54; and J. W. Croker's review of the second series in the Quarterly Review 7 (1812): 329-42. Reviews in the Monthly Review, the Eclectic Review, and the British Review make a similar point. For a defence of the morality of Edgeworth's novels, see Y. Z. Letter to the Editor in defence of Tales of Fashionable Life, vols. 1-3. Gentleman's Magazine 80 (Mar. 1810): 210-21. For the persistence of the hostility, see J. W. Croker, Rev. of The Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Quarterly Review 23 (1820): 510-49.

confermed this vision to Belinda and to Dr. X---, they are able to unmask Harriot and to expel her once and for all from Lady Delacour's life. The following morning, Dr. X--- determines that Lady Delacour's breast is not cancerous, and he points out that if she had "permitted either the surgeon or him to have examined sooner into the real state of the case, it would have saved herself infinite pain, and them all anxiety" (306; ch. 22).

The third, final element of Lady Delacour's cure also underlines the importance of texts. Relieved of her fear for her health, Lady Delacour turns her attention to her family's library, complaining to Belinda that the books in the library are "in dreadful confusion" (308; ch. 23). She notes that Lord Delacour "has really a very fine library," but instead of such a profusion of books, she would prefer a more orderly collection: "I wish he had half as many books twice as well arranged: I can never find any thing I want." (308; ch. 23). She turns from Belinda to Dr. X---, asking him to "recommend a librarian to my lord--not a chaplain, observe" (309; ch. 23). Lady Delacour's interest in restoring order to the library is an implicit assumption of her role as the domestic superintendent of her husband's resources.

The novel's emphasis on the regulatory capacity of books might lead one to expect that Dr. X--- will indeed provide a librarian, but he introduces a figure more suited to remove the residual effects of Lady Delacour's feverish descent into the obsessive reading of religious texts. The introduction of this

figure, the chaplain Moreton, is framed by a literary text. Mr. X--- begins by quoting the famous description of the Parson in Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (1387). Chaucer's model, he goes on to claim, is fully present in a contemporary minister, Mr. Moreton. Moreton himself then enters the story to complete Lady Delacour's cure, relieving her from "the terrors of methodism," and replacing these with "the consolations of mild and rational piety" (312; ch. 23). With the elimination of Lady Delacour's secret remorse, her transformation from fashionable reader to domestic reader is complete: "She was no longer in continual anxiety to conceal the state of her health from the world. She had no secret to keep--no part to act; her reconciliation with her husband and with his friends restored her mind to ease and self-complacency. Her little Helena was a source of daily pleasure; and no longer conscious of neglecting her daughter, she no longer feared that the affections of her child should be alienated" (308; ch. 23). Lady Anne's prophecy has been fulfilled.

The most striking instance of Lady Delacour's adoption of domestic reading strategies is her assertion that a man's response to a carefully selected literary text can be used to reveal his moral integrity. Although the Percivals have encouraged a match between Belinda and Mr. Vincent (Mr. Percival's creole ward), Lady Delacour continues to support Clarence's suit, distrusting Vincent because of his association

with the gambling Mrs. Luttridge." Belinda has agreed to accept the attention of a second suitor because of Clarence's refusal to declare his interest, and more important, because of the rumours that he is keeping Virginia St. Pierre as a mistress." Lady Delacour now attempts to divine Clarence's true character by testing his ability to read a particularly appropriate piece of poetry. Vincent has brought Belinda a copy of Thomas Day's The Dying Negro (1773), and included in it is a poem about the seduction and betrayal of an innocent woman.² Lady Delacour use the occasion of a debate between Vincent and Clarence about whether the appearance or the reality of virtue is most important to the greatness of an orator to test Clarence's virtue. Declaring herself an "arbitrary power," she seizes Vincent's book and demands that Clarence read the poem. She warns him that she has imposed a "difficult, a dangerous task"

Suvendrini Perera analyzes the colonial implications of Edgeworth's portrait of Vincent and of Juba, his slave, in her chapter on Belinda in Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 15-34.

Edgeworth's interest in the possibility of second loves was ill-received by her contemporaries. In the first edition of the novel, Belinda accepts Vincent's proposal, prompting the reviewer for the Monthly Review to state that "we should have been better pleased to have seen her in the weeds of widowed affection, than in the gay attire of a second courtship." Monthly Review ns 37 (Apr. 1802): 369. In the 1810 edition of Belinda, Edgeworth restructured her plot, so that Vincent merely courts Belinda. For a summary of these changes, see Butler 494-95; Mark D. Hawthorne, "Maria Edgeworth's Unpleasant Lesson: The Shaping of Character," Studies: Irish Quarterly Review 64 (1975): 167-77; and Perera, Reaches of Empire 15-34.

For a discussion of the importance of The Dying Negro to Belinda, see Perera, Reaches of Empire, 30-32.

and she defies him to read the lines she selects "without faltering" if he has "any 'sins unwhipt of justice'" (341; ch. 25). The poem recounts the history of an "unhappy young woman, who had been a victim to the perfidy of a lover," and who "overpowered by her sensibility of shame," ended up dead "of a broken heart" (341; ch. 25). Clarence reads these "lines with so much unaffected, unembarrassed energy, that Lady Delacour could not help casting a triumphant look at Belinda, which said or seemed to say--you see I was right in my opinion of Clarence!" (342; ch. 25). Lady Delacour may be convinced by this demonstration, but Belinda waits to read the explanatory package Clarence has promised them; in it he tells the full story of his association with Virginia. Shortly afterward, Vincent's habitual gambling is exposed and he is dismissed, clearing the way for Clarence to resume his suit.

The troubled courtship of Belinda and Clarence is eventually resolved with the assistance of Lady Delacour. Her manipulation of the sequence of events that closes the novel--the confrontation of Clarence and Virginia, the reunion of Virginia and her father, and acceptance of Clarence as Belinda's suitor--is the occasion for one of Lady Delacour's most theatrical performances. This performance, however, is crucially differentiated from her earlier theatricals by its domestic intent. Following a brief debate about the proper way of ending the story of a female reader's confusion, a domestic reader's courtship, and a fashionable reader's reformation, Lady Delacour

announces that she can "conclude the business in two lines" (462; ch. 31). She closes the novel by placing her players "in proper attitudes for stage effect. What signifies being happy, unless we appear so?" (463; ch. 31). She asks Captain Sunderland to kneel with Virginia "at her father's feet," and tells Mr. Hartley that he is "in the act of giving them your blessing" (463; ch. 31). She assembles a second domestic tableau by informing Clarence that he has "a right to Belinda's hand" and that he "may kiss it too," for "it is the rule of the stage" (463; ch. 31). When Lord Delacour enters with Helena, Lady Delacour turns to her own domestic circle, praising her husband's "good start of surprise," and instructing him to "stand still, pray; you cannot be better than you are: Helena, my love, do not let go your father's hand" (463; ch. 31). Pleased with the three domestic tableaux, Lady Delacour steps forward "to address the audience with a moral--a moral! Yes, 'Our tale contains a moral; and no doubt, / You all have wit enough to find it out'" (463; ch.31). The legitimacy of this literary display is guaranteed by Lady Delacour's domestic purpose. The theatrical tableaux she creates are not designed to display her person, but rather to display the harmony made possible by domesticity. The future happiness of Virginia, Belinda, and Lady Delacour is affirmed by their membership within these completed domestic circles.

The ability of Lady Delacour to use a previously disruptive theatricality to highlight the importance of domestic order has a secondary function. Just as the trope of female reading enables

Edgeworth to confront the problems associated with women's literary consumption, her trope of fashionable reading enables her to explore the problems associated with women's literary production. Lady Delacour's non-domestic theatricality and her misuse of her literary skill articulate the improprieties implicit in a woman's assertion of public literary authority. Though transformed into a domestic reader, Lady Delacour has not lost her literary verve. As she herself says, she has been "won, not tamed!--A tame Lady Delacour would be a sorry animal, not worth looking at" (306; ch. 22). By reforming Lady Delacour rather than silencing her, Edgeworth implies that a woman's literary skill can coincide with domestic propriety. Edgeworth's first portrait of a reformed fashionable reader thus suggests that a woman may possess both domestic and literary authority. When Maria Edgeworth comes to write her final consideration of fashionable reading, in Helen (1834), she will offer a less optimistic account. But in the early Belinda, as Lady Delacour illustrates, Edgeworth was prepared to consider the possibility of feminine access to forms of authority that were not strictly domestic.

Maria Edgeworth did not restrict her exploration of

Edgeworth's uneasiness about the status of the woman writer is most clearly expressed in her only portrait of a professional woman novelist. Rachel Hodges, who publishes sentimental fiction under the name Araminta, is characterized as a crude brandy-loving, sexually irregular hack in "Angelina," a story included in Moral Tales (1801). For a summary of problems that publication posed to proper woman writers and the solutions they found, see Mary Poovey's The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer.

domesticity to accounts of the construction of proper femininity. Many of her best known fictions explore the nature of masculine propriety, and while these works examine the professional lives of men, much of the energy of Edgeworth's narratives is devoted to the transformation of public men into domestic men. Central to this process is the construction of a domestic, or proper, masculinity that enables the Edgeworthian gentleman to function in both the public and the domestic realms. In works such as "Forester" and Ormond, Maria Edgeworth suggests that domestic masculinity is dependant upon the adoption of the reading habits that also guarantee proper femininity.

Chapter Four

From Robinson Crusoe to Benjamin Franklin:

"Forester" and Gentlemanly Reading

The action of "Forester," the first story in Moral Tales (1801), a collection of stories written for adolescents, begins with the arrival of its eponymous hero at the home of his guardian, Dr. Campbell. Following the death of his father, Forester travels north to Edinburgh by carrier, refusing upon political principle to travel by the coach appropriate to his station. As a result, he arrives late and Campbell's footman, who judges Forester by his dishevelled appearance and his rough manners, refuses to admit him, advising him to "call again at six o'clock, maybe he may see you, my good lad" (2).¹ At this rebuff, Forester attempts to force his way into the house. Once the footman learns his name, he allows him to enter. Dr. Campbell appears, and after a futile attempt to persuade Forester to change his clothing, he leads his ward into the drawing room. Forester appears before the assembled company "with dirty shoes, a threadbare coat, and hair that looked as if it never had been combed" (2). He is shocked by the effect his "singular appearance" has upon the "risible muscles of some of the company" (2). In particular, he is irked by the "malignant, half-

¹ "Forester" is more novella than short story, and it is divided into twenty unnumbered sections. All of them, except the first, are given separate titles. I therefore cite by page number and section heading. Quotations taken from the initial section of the tale are indicated by page number only.

suppressed merriment" of Archibald Mackenzie, Dr. Campbell's pupil (2). Dr. Campbell's son Henry soon relieves his embarrassment with the "secret magic of politeness," but Forester responds to Henry's kindness by silently lamenting that it is a "pity this lad was bred up a gentleman" (2). With this episode, Maria Edgeworth sets forth the central problem of "Forester": how can its hero's attitudes toward gentlemanly behaviour be made "conformable to the complicate [sic] relations of modern society"?

Although the phenomenon has received less attention from the historians of gender, masculinity underwent a redefinition that paralleled domestic ideology's redefinition of femininity. The history of Forester's reformation suggests some of the ways in which Edgeworth as a domestic novelist reshaped masculinity in order to accommodate men within the domestic sphere. As her satiric portrait of the superficially polite and secretly malicious Archibald Mackenzie indicates, Edgeworth is quite aware that Forester's suspicion of the name "gentleman" has some justification. Archibald Mackenzie and his companion, Sir Philip Gosling, are Edgeworth's representatives of a corrupt masculinity, a masculinity based on aristocratic codes of male behaviour. While Edgeworth's portraits of Mackenzie and Gosling

* The phrase is Richard Lovell Edgeworth's, and appears in his prefatory discussion of the difficulties of writing fiction for young people that "shall display examples of virtue, without initiating the young reader into the ways of vice." Richard Lovell Edgeworth, preface, Moral Tales, by Maria Edgeworth (New York: AMS P, 1967) iii.

confirm some of Forester's prejudices, she argues that Forester must be reformed because his renunciation of gentlemanly behaviour implies a rejection of domestic masculinity and of civil society. Forester must give up his mistaken notion that rejection of a corrupt, aristocratic masculinity also requires a rejection of gentlemanliness. Instead he must learn to accept the domestic masculinity embodied in the family of his guardian, Dr. Campbell. Only when he conforms to this new idea of gentlemanly behaviour will he be able to "reform society" (1).

As Forester progresses through the various ranks of Edinburgh society, he discards the reading habits that are symptomatic of his rejection of gentlemanly behaviour and gradually adopts the model of proper reading offered by Dr. Campbell and his son Henry Campbell. The unregenerate Forester is easily abstracted from his surroundings (and from his social obligations) by the fantasy of solitary humanity depicted in his favourite text, Robinson Crusoe (1719). But the reformed Forester draws useful principles from his new favourite, Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography (1793), and begins to participate, as is fitting to both his rank and his gender, in the discourse of the public realm. His reformation is completed by his turning away from the public literary sphere and toward Edgeworth's domestic literary sphere.

Forester is the son of an "English gentleman, who had paid some attention to his education, but who had some singularities of opinion." The narrator tells us little about the father's rationale, and simply states that he has fixed his son's attention on "the follies and vices of the higher classes of people" (1). The persistent association of "selfish indolence" with "the name of gentleman" has caused his son to despise "the common forms of society" (1).³ As a result, Forester scorns the signs of his social rank. Gentlemanly manners, he believes, are "either odious or ridiculous," empty gestures used to maintain a variety of unnecessary inequalities between the rich and the poor (1). The nineteen-year-old Forester "ardently" wishes "to be a man, and to be at liberty to act for himself, that he might reform society, or at least his own neighbourhood" (1).

Forester's miseducation has been "singular" in a number of ways. His father's "singularities of opinion" have led to Forester's "singular appearance" on arrival at the Campbells and, more problematically, to his preference for a singular life (1, 2). Forester's "love of independence was carried to such an

³ According to Marilyn Butler, Forester was modelled on Thomas Day. See Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 164. Richard Lovell Edgeworth comments that Day "smiled with philosophic indifference at these prejudices in favour of politeness." See Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth Begun by Himself and Concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth, 2 vols. (1820; Shannon: Irish UP, 1969) 1: 202; ch. 8.

extreme, that he was inclined to prefer the life of Robinson Crusoe in his desert island, to that of any individual in cultivated society" (1). Although Robinson Crusoe exemplifies a number of the virtues Edgeworth extols--industry, perseverance, and invention--she argues on several occasions that it should not be given indiscriminately to children. In both Practical Education (1798) and Professional Education (1809), Edgeworth invokes the trope of female reading when discussing Robinson Crusoe, noting that the novel over-stimulates the imagination. It is not girls, however, who are at risk in this case. Defoe's intoxicating adventures do not pose a danger to them, because girls "must very soon perceive the impossibility of their rambling about the world in quest of adventures; and where there appears an obvious impossibility in gratifying any wish, it is not likely to become, or at least to continue, a torment to the imagination."⁴ Boys, by contrast, are encouraged by their gender code to identify with Crusoe. They are taught to admire the fortitude and courage of figures like him, so that their desire for a life such as his will not be "repressed by the impossibility of its indulgence" (Practical Education 1: 338; ch. 12). Significantly, Edgeworth recommends that only those boys destined to be sailors or soldiers be allowed to read Robinson Crusoe. The book will "rouse" in them "the notions of honour"

⁴ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1974) 1: 338; ch. 12. All further references will be included parenthetically in the text.

and the "enthusiasm" necessary for a military life.' But Robinson Crusoe will not provide the "nice calculations of prudence" and "more accurate judgments of reason" that are crucial to civil pursuits, notably to the pursuit of the liberal professions (Professional Education 124; ch. 3). Robinson Crusoe is inappropriate reading for most boys because it encourages the development of a masculinity that is essentially non-domestic.

Forester's preference for the social model he derives from Robinson Crusoe is not without an important precedent. Jean-Jacques Rousseau states in Émile (1762) that reading is "the plague of childhood," but he makes an exception in the case of Defoe, arguing that the isolated Crusoe provides an important model for his pupil. According to Rousseau, the "surest means of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one's judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge everything as this man" would.' Edgeworth, on the other hand, absolutely rejects the notion that the solitary individual ought to be used as the basis for making evaluations of any sort.' For Edgeworth, the solitary

' Maria Edgeworth, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Professional Education (London: Johnson, 1809) 124; ch. 3. All further references will be included parenthetically in the text.

' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile; or on Education, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1979) 185.

' The Edgeworths' rejection of Rousseau was based on both intellectual and practical grounds. Richard Lovell Edgeworth educated his eldest son according to Rousseau's methods and was disappointed with the results. The young Richard Edgeworth's primary faults were excessive self-reliance and a vigorous resistance of paternal authority. His father later acknowledged

individual may judge accurately only when incorporated within civil society. Rousseau's advocacy of a Crusoe-inspired abstraction is therefore rejected in favour of a model that firmly embeds the process of judgement in a social network. For Edgeworth, the legitimacy (and utility) of any judgement made by the individual depends in large measure upon her or his recognition of the "dependencies of civilized society."⁸ Forester's habitual refusal to consider himself as a part of a larger society is a source of individual and social disruption. Edgeworth consistently uses the well-regulated circulation of affection and gratitude within a domestic circle to represent social dependencies; hence Forester's maturation and reformation depend upon his willingness to accommodate himself within a domestic circle.

His reading of Robinson Crusoe works against this necessary accommodation. He is unable to judge the value of sociability in part because his ideal form of society is derived from the solitary world of Crusoe. This novel becomes, in effect, a fathering text to which he repeatedly returns, but one that must be displaced if he is to be integrated into the sphere of sociability represented by the Campbell home. Until Forester is able to deport himself as a fully sociable man (that is, a man

both that he had erred in adopting Rousseau's theory and that he had failed to apply the theory consistently. See Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 2 vols. (1820; Shannon: Irish UP, 1969) 1: 274.

⁸ Richard Lovell Edgeworth, preface to Moral Tales, iv.

willing to claim his rank and the conventional behaviours appropriate to it), his presence in civil society is disruptive and his attempts at reform destructive. Forester must learn to recognize the utility of common social forms and to discriminate between the hollow gestures of a hypocritical politeness and the "secret magic" of genuine politeness. Edgeworth leads him to this recognition by acquainting him with the contrasting practices of Archibald Mackenzie and Henry Campbell.

Archibald Mackenzie and Sir Philip Gosling represent the aristocratic masculinity Forester's father has taught him to associate with the idea of gentlemanly manners. Both men confirm Forester's conviction that the outward qualities associated with the name "gentleman" are meaningless expressions of rank. Mackenzie's and Gosling's friendship is based upon shared tastes for outmoded forms of masculinity (gambling, horse racing, and drinking); upon an exaggerated belief in the importance of birth and wealth; and upon Mackenzie's inveterate flattery. Gosling's inadequacy as a model of a man's accommodation within civil society is signalled by his substitution of incomprehensible slang for the polite conversation suitable to a mixed social circle: "if conversation that might be called, which consisted of a species of fashionable dialect, devoid of sense, and destitute of any pretence to wit" (11-12; "The Geranium"). Gosling and Mackenzie are "absolutely unintelligible" to Forester and are mocked by the narrator (12; "The Geranium"). Furthermore, Gosling's deviation from the Edgeworth norm is signalled by his

open hostility to Dr. Campbell. Gosling has been sent to Edinburgh to be educated, but he rarely attends Campbell's lectures, and, when he does, he takes "care to make it evident to every body present, that he did not come there to learn, and that he looked down with contempt upon all who were obliged to study" (11; "The Geranium").

Although Mackenzie and Gosling are linked, Edgeworth condemns Mackenzie with greater vigour. Gosling may be a feeble-minded bully, but Mackenzie is a cunning cheat whose deceitfulness poses a greater threat to civil society. Edgeworth uses Mackenzie to point out that excessive cultivation of the superficial signs of politeness is as undesirable as inadequate attention to those forms. Lady Catherine Mackenzie has been responsible for her son's education, and, like Forester's father, she has mismanaged her son's induction into polite behaviour. Her fault, however, is not that she values politeness too little but that she values it too much. She asserts that a fluent command of manners is of greater value than talent or merit in "the art of rising in the world" (5). As a result of her mismanagement, her son is "alternately supple to his superiors, and insolent to his inferiors" (5). In his deceitful transactions with those above and those below him, Mackenzie violates the code of generosity and deference with which Edgeworth links the upper and the lower ranks of society. When Mackenzie attempts to gull Gosling, he encourages the deceitfulness of Gosling's servants, thereby fracturing the link

between generosity and deference that underwrites civil order.

In contrast to Mackenzie and his crew stand Dr. Campbell and his son Henry, who articulate a model of masculine sociability that enables both the domestic and the public realm to function properly. Dr. Campbell's version of sociability rests upon the assumption that society is and ought to be divided into various ranks. Where Forester advocates levelling, Campbell asserts that division and differentiation are essential. Dr. Campbell, however, denies that an individual's inclusion in the higher classes of society should be based simply on birth, money, or the power to force obedience. He thus articulates the middle-class displacement of birth and landed wealth as signs of the gentleman. In establishing a new system of distinguishing the higher classes from the lower, Campbell begins by asserting a commonplace: "virtue is not confined to any particular class of men" (4). Campbell then moves on to the central premise in Edgeworth's defense of social hierarchy: he argues that "education, in the enlarged sense of the word, creates the difference between individuals more than riches or poverty" (4). Here Edgeworth elides virtue into a particular, if not precisely defined, type of education. The use of education, or rather "education, in the enlarged sense of the word," as both the crucial social boundary and the foundation of an exemplary character is characteristic of all Edgeworth's writing. The practically educated individual is disciplined to observe the world carefully, to privilege reason over emotion, to judge her

or his observations and experiences by primarily rational criteria, and to act prudently." Dr. Campbell maintains that politeness must be added to these qualities if education is to act as a marker of rank and social distinction. He argues that attention to the feelings of others is central to proper masculinity and, by extension, to proper femininity. For him "real politeness" is not a superficial gesture but the difficult virtue of sparing others "unnecessary pain" while still acting within the bounds of propriety (26; "The Flower-Pot"). The "higher classes" of people within a society, he asserts, are those virtuous individuals who are willing to use the knowledge and discipline gained from their education to spare others unnecessary pain. Out of this amalgam of disciplined knowledge and sympathetic politeness, Edgeworth forges her notion of proper masculine sociability.

On this sociability, in turn, rest the dependencies that maintain domestic and public order. The "higher" classes of people are distinguished from the "lower" less by wealth or by birth than by this form of sociability. This sociability finds its ideal expression in families such as the Campbells, whose domestic circle is dominated, not by economic competition, but by the congenial pursuit of literary and scientific conversation. Suggestively, all three men of the lower classes who hire

⁹ For representative accounts of Edgeworthian pedagogical theory, see Butler, Maria Edgeworth 169-72; Brian Simon, Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870 (1960; London: Lawrence, 1969) 17-71; and Alice Paterson, The Edgeworths: A Study of Later Eighteenth-Century Education (London: Clive, 1914).

Forester--the farmer, the brewer, the printer--demonstrate a fundamental selfishness that serves only to further isolate the protagonist from Edgeworth's ideal social expression, the domestic sphere. Forester is fully integrated only in the home of Dr. Campbell, whose relationship to him is untrammelled by financial competitiveness and to whom attention to the feelings of others is the fundamental expression of civil society and gentlemanly behaviour.

While Edgeworth uses the model of sociability articulated by Dr. Campbell to mark social difference, she also proposes that it provides the only efficacious means of ameliorating social inequities. The improvement of the situation of the lower ranks that Forester wishes to make when he comes to full manhood cannot, according to Edgeworth, be achieved through revolutionary violence or standard charity. Rather, such improvement is dependent upon the lower orders' acquisition of knowledge and self-discipline. The gift of knowledge is the best form of charity the higher classes can offer to those who have already demonstrated their capacity for self-discipline.¹⁰ In effect, Edgeworth replaces the notion of economic charity with that of intellectual charity.

¹⁰ Edgeworth's belief that education, and not charity or revolution, would ameliorate the conditions of the lower classes is the foundation of many of the stories in The Parent's Assistant (1796), Moral Tales, and Popular Tales (1802). The novel that best articulates this belief is Ennui (1809), with its exploration of the effect of education on two infants exchanged at birth and its portrait of a failed rebellion and futile acts of charity.

Engrossed by the social paradigm provided by Robinson Crusoe and his father, Forester regards as slavish posturing "all that attention to the feelings of others, all those honest arts of pleasing, which make society agreeable" (20-21; "The Key"). His efforts to assist others all involve breaches of gentlemanly behaviour. Forester's actions are abrupt, excessively forceful, and ineffective. Since he does not merge his desire to help with an acceptance of the necessity of rank, an attention to the feelings of others, and a body of useful knowledge, his attempts to assist the lower orders are futile. Whenever Forester wishes to relieve pain, for example, he only causes more pain. On one occasion Henry and Forester go to a watchmaker's in order to repair the watch of M. Pasgrave, a dancing master who has been the victim of one of Forester's misguided and violent attempts to assist the lower ranks. (Mistakenly believing that Pasgrave has been cruel to a group of urchins, Forester administers a practical joke as a form of punishment, in the course of which Pasgrave's ankle is sprained, and his violin and watch smashed). While Forester and Henry are "consulting with the watchmaker upon the internal state of the bruised watch," a little girl emerges from the back room of the shop where she lives with her grandmother (11; "The Geranium"). She brings with her a flowering geranium that she has nursed through the winter. Her grandmother has fallen ill, and the consulting apothecary has told the girl that the geranium has poisoned her grandmother and that he will gladly take it as payment for his services. Though

she is "very fond" of her plant, she agrees to give up in order to preserve her grandmother's health (12; "The Geranium").

Although both Henry and Forester pity the little girl and, more important, admire the "unaffected generosity with which she gave up her favourite geranium," neither offers her money (12; "The Geranium"). Forester cannot do so because he has already "lavished" all his money "in undistinguishing charity," while Henry, who does have money, resists giving it to the girl in order to impress upon Forester the utility of a more prudent benevolence (13; "The Geranium"). In a gesture that is typical of Edgeworth's notion of masculine sociability, Henry offers the little girl his sympathetic attention and his knowledge instead of money. He begins to put his "enlarged education" to her service by rejecting the apothecary's diagnosis and questioning the little girl about the circumstances of her grandmother's illness (4). Through this process, he determines that the apothecary has made a careless and erroneous diagnosis and has ignored the true cause of the grandmother's illness: the accumulation of carbon monoxide produced by a charcoal brazier used to warm their apartment. While Forester rages indignantly against all apothecaries, Henry calmly explains the cause of the illness and the ways of preventing its recurrence. Delighted to learn that she does not have to give up her geranium, the little girl offers both Henry and Forester some of its flowers. Forester fails to respond to this social sign of deference and gratitude; as he continues to fume about the injustice of the

apothecary, he shreds his flower, pulling it "to pieces as he went on thinking" (14; "The Geranium").¹¹ Henry, in contrast, responds to his reward properly by continuing to attend to the girl. When he accepts the flower, Henry notices that the back of her hand is badly bruised. This observation prompts another sequence of questions in which the little girl reveals that the mistress of the charity school she attends beats her scholars if they do not spin as much yarn as she demands.

The pattern established in the story of the apothecary is now repeated: Henry prudently defers his response until he can find an appropriate means of applying his knowledge to the situation; Forester rages and storms off to denounce the schoolmistress. This hasty intervention has immediate, disastrous consequences. Upon learning that Forester has no authority for his tirade, the schoolmistress ejects him from the school, beats the little girl, and refuses to allow her to attend school again. Far from rectifying an injustice, Forester's harangue results only in more pain for the child he has attempted to assist. Henry's approach, on the other hand, though slower, more circuitous and cautious, is far more effective because it relies on an appeal to a clearly established authority, and because it rests upon a foundation of proper reading. Henry's habitual prudence and caution are, of course, designed to

¹¹ The shredded flower is a distinctly Edgeworthian note. In his review of Harrington and Ormond, the reviewer for the British Review complained bitterly of the motif as a mannerism. British Review 11 (Feb. 1818): 58.

illustrate Edgeworth's overt moral: "prudence renders us able to assist others, whilst enthusiasm frequently defeats its own purposes, and injures those whom it wildly attempts to serve" (56; "The Saddle and Bridle"). More significantly, however, Henry's method of assisting the little girl exemplifies the efficacy of Edgeworth's model of masculine sociability. Henry's ability to spare the little girl the unnecessary pain Forester carelessly increases is predicated on Henry's willingness to participate in seemingly trivial (and feminine) conversations.

Unlike Henry, Forester refuses to attend to the trivial conversations and occupations that Edgeworth suggests provide the foundation of domestic happiness. His prejudice against politeness leads him to assume that Henry's willingness to listen to the chatter of silly women is simply an instance of the "mean address" of hypocritical politeness (20; "The Key"). Early in the story Edgeworth establishes Forester's unwillingness to participate in the gender-mixed conversations that characterize the exemplary domestic circle. On the evening of his arrival at the Campbells, Forester stops listening as soon as Lady Catherine Mackenzie begins to speak, preferring to play with a cat and to sit "apart from the company in a corner of a sofa" (3). Henry, however, has no difficulty attending either to the feelings or to the seemingly trivial concerns of those around him. When confronted with shallow conversations, he listens patiently, for he "knew that his father had the art of managing the frivolous subjects started in general company, so as to make them lead to

amusement and instruction" (3). The importance of this distinction becomes clear in a visit Forester and the Campbell family pay to some family friends shortly after the encounter with the little girl and her geranium.

Forester eagerly agrees to accompany the Campbells on the visit because the gentleman of the house has "an excellent cabinet of minerals" that he wishes to see (16; "The Canary Bird"). He is irritated to discover that the lady of the house is preoccupied by the deaths of a series of pet birds and fears that her newest canary will also die prematurely. Annoyed by the feminine turn of the conversation, Forester attempts to draw Henry out of the room to discuss more masculine topics such as his "adventure with the schoolmistress" (16; "The Canary Bird"). Henry, who is enjoying himself despite the slight nature of the conversation, refuses to leave. Forester sulks and, picking up a book, seats himself "in an arm-chair, which had been placed on purpose for an old gentleman in company, and was deep in the history of a man who had been cast away, some hundred years ago, upon a desert island" (17; "The Canary Bird"). He emerges briefly from his absorption in this fantasy, "as if he had just awakened from a dream," when the conversation turns away from the "foolish woman's history of her extraordinary favourites" to a discussion of the fossils. (18, 16; "The Canary Bird"). However, once the conversation again turns to dancing, a subject Forester thinks is feminine and contemptible, he returns "to his arm-chair and his desert island" (19; "The Canary Bird"). This is the most

striking illustration of the ill-effects of Forester's reading of Robinson Crusoe. His absorption in Robinson Crusoe is dangerous, not because it leads him into the precocious sexuality associated with female reading, but because it leads him away from things domestic and thus away from civil society. A gentleman's reading should not be used to isolate him from his society; on the contrary, it ought to sustain that society. By withdrawing his attention from such everyday conversations in what might be called ungentlemanly reading, Forester not only selfishly privileges his own feelings over those of others but also misses opportunities to assist others.

Henry, on the other hand, listens to the chatter about the canaries, and he recalls comments about poisons made by his father in an earlier, unrelated but equally trivial conversation. As a result of those comments, Henry himself read several essays full of "many curious facts" about poisons (17; "The Canary Bird"). This earlier reading now enables him to imitate his father's "art of managing the frivolous subjects" so that they "lead to amusement and instruction" (3). He remembers an account of a bird poisoned by its cage that "bore a strong resemblance to the present" (17; "The Canary Bird"). Repeating the procedure he used when talking with the little girl, Henry goes on to examine the physical evidence and to question the woman whose birds have died. He discovers that the birds have not been poisoned by their cage after all, but that when allowed to fly about the room, they have eaten portions of wafers of sealing wax and have

consequently died of lead poisoning. He then suggests that the woman try the experiment of locking up the wafers. This sequence illustrates one of the central principles of domestic masculinity and gentlemanly reading. Henry uses his reading, combined with careful empirical examination of current circumstances, in order to spare someone unnecessary pain. Reading, observation, and sympathy coalesce in an exemplary instance of the uses of polite knowledge.

Edgeworth goes on to use the same episode to demonstrate the larger social significance of Henry's methods. When his experiment with the bird is successful, the beneficiary wishes to grant him a favour in return. Henry asks that she listen to his account of the mistress of the charity school of which she is a patron. He tells the canary owner "all the circumstances" of the little girl's story "with so much feeling, and at the same time with so much propriety, that she became interested in the cause" (19; "The Key"). She agrees to try to persuade her fellow "lady patronesses" to investigate the school mistress's conduct, assuring him that she will be "dismissed immediately, if it should appear that she had behaved improperly" (20; "The Key"). Shortly after, at a supper following a ball, Henry is asked to tell the assembled company the story of the geranium that graces the table. Once again, Edgeworth makes a point of his manner of telling: "When Henry related the poor little girl's story, his language and manner were so unaffected and agreeable, that he interested every one who heard him in his cause" (23; "The

Ball"). What affects them, it should be noted, is the girl's generosity and deference rather than her suffering. As a result of his moderate rhetoric and his appeal to those who possess the authority to regulate the school, Henry achieves what Forester could not: a subscription fund for the girl and the investigation that exposes and corrects the injustice. In this manner, Henry enacts the efficacy with which domestic masculinity translates trivial situations into useful social actions.

Forester remains unimpressed by Henry's demonstration of the utility of domestic masculinity, and his self-involved literary practices continue to dominate his interaction with others, eventually prompting his self-expulsion from the Campbell household. Forester's self-exile follows a ball which he attends with ill-grace, and his response to the ball (like his response to the woman with the canary) is another manifestation of the association Edgeworth makes between an inappropriate form of masculinity, rudeness, and unsociable literary practices. Forester's tendency to isolate himself is prophetically repeated before the ball. When everyone else is getting ready, Forester lapses into an "unsociable humour" and cannot be found when it is time to leave. He is finally discovered in the study, "reading the natural history of the elephant," and he is led out of his isolation by Henry (27; "The Ball"). Once Forester arrives at the ball, he refuses to honour its generic decorum. He makes every effort to abstract himself and the male members of the Campbell family from the surrounding gaiety, first by physical

means and then by intellectual means. He again physically isolates himself by standing "behind a pillar" where he can watch but not be involved in the "music, mirth, and sympathy" of the dance (28; "The Ball"). When stopping up his ears fails to block out the gaiety, Forester gloomily occupies himself by planning a tragedy and attempts to "open the plot" to Dr. Campbell (30; "The Ball"). Campbell, however, refuses to attend to Forester's tragic explication: neither buskin nor tragic muse is appropriate to the circumstances. Despite Campbell's reminders that he ought to conform to the genre of the evening, Forester persists in his unsociable manners: he ignores his friends and absentmindedly begins to plan "an essay upon the power of the ancient bards, and the effect of national music" (32; "The Ball").

Forester's flight from the Campbell family is precipitated by the events that occur at the supper that closes the ball, the same supper at which Henry tells the story of the little girl. Following supper, Flora Campbell, Henry's sister, drops a precious moss-rose given to her by Henry who has raised it in his conservatory. Forester, who admires Flora, retrieves the flower, but when he tries to restore it to her, she recoils from his touch. Forester has contracted a disfiguring skin disease either from the carter who brought him north or from the cobbler who taught him how to mend his own shoes. When he offers the flower to Flora, he exposes his wrist and those who see the lesions respond "with unequivocal tokens of disgust" (34; "The Ball"). When Archibald Mackenzie continues to draw the assembled

company's attention to Forester's disfigurement, Flora responds with "hesitation and blushes," and Forester, wilfully unfamiliar with the signs of the proper woman's modest expression of sympathy, flees from the room "with the strength of an enraged animal from his keepers" (35; "The Ball"). His anger and shame are reinforced later that night by a sequence of dreams in which he is "continually presenting flowers, which nobody would accept" and trying on hundreds of pairs of gloves, none of which will fit (35; "The Ball"). Forester's dream expresses what he himself does not recognize: his status as a desirable male is compromised by his refusal of the physical decorum of the gentleman, a point made in the dream by the refused flowers and ill fitting gloves. To enter into full and proper manhood, Forester must learn to perform the gestures of the domestic man, that is, to accept the femininity of the domestic sphere, and at the same time to recognize that domestic values will guarantee his success in the public sphere.

ii

The second half of "Forester" recounts Forester's movement away from the Campbells and his journey through a series of alternate domestic situations in the lower ranks of Edinburgh society, as he tries his hand at progressively more complicated and more prestigious employments. These new situations have their own preferred forms of textuality, which in two cases are utterly

inadequate, and all manifest deficient forms of sociability. Each situation teaches Forester that the Campbells' model of sociability is essential to his happiness and to his social usefulness. As well, each situation moves Forester farther away from a masculinity characterized by its physicality and toward a masculinity characterized by its literacy and its domesticity. Crucial in Forester's reformation is his acquisition of a new fathering text; he replaces Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe with Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography.

Forester leaves a confused letter for Dr. Campbell, informing him that he must flee from the "fatal contagion" of the Campbells' effeminate and "absurd ceremonies of daily dissipation" (38; "Breakfast"). Since he has "yet sufficient manly pride, unextinguished" in his "breast," he has decided to embark upon the useful (and manly) work of farming. Forester goes to work for Farmer M'Evoy, a "square, thick, obstinate-eyed, hard-working, ignorant, elderly man," who pays him well below the current wages to dig in his gardens (43; "The Gardener"). The novelty of such physical labour soon dissipates, and Forester begins to apply his understanding instead of his muscles to the situation. His researches take him to a bookstall where he finds an account of an horticultural experiment that promises increased yields from fruit trees. Unlike Henry Campbell, Forester finds that his attempts to assist others by applying his text-based knowledge to their circumstances is unsuccessful. His efforts to teach M'Evoy more progressive farming techniques are met with

contempt. M'Evoy "peremptorily forbade all experiments," and he orders Forester to "leave such nonsense, and mind his business" (48; "The Gardener"). Forester's failure to re-educate M'Evoy is due, in part, to his lack of authority within this community. The authority that his book-learning might accord him in other circumstances is inaccessible when he lives among those who cannot and do not recognize its value. Their ignorance, he comes to feel, is "tyrannical" (48; "The Gardener").

The frustration of Forester's desire to assist others is compounded by his unequivocal isolation within the M'Evoy family. In an instance of emotional avarice, M'Evoy's "affection was accumulated and reserved" for his own family (43; "The Gardener"). His daughter and son are similarly limited; neither welcomes Forester. His experience with the M'Evoys thus reinforces the willingness to attend to the feelings of others that is central to Edgeworth's model of domestic sociability. M'Evoy might be the head of a household, but he is not the head of a domestic circle. Not surprisingly, Forester notices that he misses "a number of little pleasures and conveniences" that he had taken for granted while living with the Campbells (44; "The Gardener"). He feels "most severely the want of Henry's agreeable conversation" (44; "The Gardener"). In particular, he laments the absence of conversation based upon a commonly held fund of literary knowledge. Forester no longer has someone "to whom he could now talk of the water-cresses of Cyrus, or the black broth of the Spartans; he had no one with whom he could

dispute concerning the Stoic or the Epicurean doctrines, the mercantile or the agricultural system" (44; "The Gardener"). He has no one to whom he can confide his realization that M'Evoy's son "though his name was Colin, had no Arcadian simplicity" and does not in the least resemble "the Gentle Shepherd, or the Ayrshire Ploughman" (45; "The Gardener").

Disgusted by the M'Evoys, Forester decides to try his hand at the mercantile system and takes a position as a clerk in a brewery. This change in occupation is both a move up the social hierarchy, and a move away from a masculinity defined entirely by physical prowess. Forester's realization that his happiness and his ability to be a useful member of society rest on his ability to participate in literate conversation is confirmed in his sojourn in the mercantile system. In the end, Forester leaves his clerkship at the brewery because he is unwilling to participate in his fellow clerks' customary evasion of excise laws, but before this point he discovers an equally significant barrier between himself and his fellows. As he walks out with his fellow clerks, Forester attempts to engage them, as he once did Henry in similar circumstances, in "moral and metaphysical arguments" (58; "Forester, A Clerk"). Disappointed that the clerks know nothing of Cicero or Pliny, Forester resorts to quoting Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751): "But knowledge to their eyes her ample page, / Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll; / Chill penury repressed their noble rage, / And froze the genial current of their soul"

(59; "Forester, A Clerk"). Edgeworth's readers will recognize the aptness of Forester's quotation of Gray, but the brewery clerks do not recognize the allusion, and they believe that Forester has commented upon their financial position rather than their weak education and their narrow self-interest. Their response to him thereafter is as hostile as was the M'Evoys'. As a result of the unsatisfactory nature of the conversations he holds with the clerks, Forester begins to repudiate a claim he once made to Henry. He once opposed the "pleasures of society," by declaring "'My mind to me a kingdom is'" (58; "Forester, A Clerk").¹⁴ But now he recognizes that "separated from social intercourse, his mind, however enlarged, would afford him but a dreary kingdom" (58; "Forester, A Clerk"). He rapidly and dejectedly concludes that no "friendships can be more unequal than those between ignorance and knowledge" (59; "Forester, A Clerk"). This is, of course, Edgeworth's point.

When Forester leaves the brewer's employ, he happens upon a profession that more nearly embodies the Campbells' model of a sociability based on shared literary knowledge. After he has been thrashed by a group of boys for attempting to stop them from making a group of exhausted dogs dance, Forester meets a printer, who discerns in his "good language" the rank and education Forester hides and offers him a job (62; "Forester, A Clerk"). Forester enters the printing trade because he believes that

¹⁴ Forester here quotes the opening line of an Elizabethan lyric frequently attributed to Sir Edward Dyer, "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is" (1588).

printing has "emancipated mankind" and that "disseminating knowledge" is a "noble" employment (62; "Forester, A Clerk"). His optimistic view of the trade is not shattered as were his similarly optimistic preconceptions about the agricultural and mercantile systems, and he rapidly progresses through the various ranks of the publishing industry. He begins by learning the trades of a compositor and a pressman, then he is promoted to that of "corrector," whose tasks involve both proof-reading and copy-editing, and finally he becomes an anonymous contributor to his employer's newspaper.

By entering the printing trade, Forester also enters one of the primary institutions of the bourgeois public sphere, and his immersion in print culture is a gender-specific rite of passage.¹⁷ Since men must function in both the public and domestic realm, his sexual maturation must also include a period of immersion in the public sphere. Only after passing through the public sphere is Forester able to re-enter a domestic literate community and to become a gentlemanly reader, a reader undisturbed by the pressure of economic competition or political fractiousness. Significantly, Forester's participation in the public sphere is inaugurated by his adoption of a new literary model.

Forester discards Robinson Crusoe and picks up Benjamin

¹⁷ For an account of the bourgeois public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. Thomas Berger and Frederick Lawrence (1962; Cambridge: MIT P, 1989).

Franklin's Autobiography (1793). Franklin is unlike Crusoe; he is fully engaged in the social, intellectual and political life around him. Forester's interest is first piqued by Franklin's representation of his career as printer and writer. But the book offers him more than trade-specific lessons; it also provides a model of political and literary sociability by providing an exemplary model of the bourgeois public sphere. Conversation and reading occupy a privileged position in Franklin's Autobiography. His memoir is replete with accounts of the importance of reading in his life, and rarely is his reading a transgressive activity. His reading practices are utterly sociable and often lead him to new friends and to group activities. In 1727, for example, he and a number of friends founded the 'Junto,' a literary club in which the members wrote, presented and debated essays on various topics. The members of this group went on to set up a number of subordinate clubs on the same model and to use them to influence the development of public opinion in Philadelphia.¹⁴ Franklin's autobiography thus emphasizes his ability to influence his community by means of his writing and publishing, and Forester adopts this method of doing good. From Franklin, Forester learns that it is possible "to do good to his fellow-creatures" without resorting to random violence, "without overturning all existing institutions" (64; "Forester, A Printer").

Forester's progress through the ranks of the printing

¹⁴ Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, eds. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall (New York: Norton, 1986) 47-49, 83-86.

industry is based on the discipline he acquires by emulating Franklin and on his possession of three forms of hidden capital: his family connections, his hidden reserve of money, and his classical education. Forester's denied family connections are instrumental in his success; unbeknownst to Forester both the brewer and the printer solicit a character reference from Dr. Campbell. In addition, Dr. Campbell maintains a distant though effective surveillance of Forester's actions. Forester also has guineas in his wallet that he rarely uses, preferring to rely on his earnings. But his movement from the position of journeyman printer to corrector of the press requires a new suit of clothing, which he must purchase with his hidden reserves. (Forester's willingness to attend to the superficial details of his appearance betrays his growing conformity to the common forms he once repudiated.) Finally, Forester's classical knowledge is the cause of his promotion from printer to corrector of the press.

Initially, as a compositor and pressman, he is immersed in the physicality of books--their types, their inks, their papers. It is "some time," the narrator reports, before he acquires "dexterity in his new trade" (62; "Forester, A Printer"). Forester's study of Franklin's life, however, has taught him that the "the smaller virtues of order, economy, industry, and patience" are necessary prerequisites for a "great character and splendid success" (64; "Forester, A Printer"). He therefore applies himself to his new trade with great diligence, and he

soon learns to manipulate his font "with amazing celerity" (62; "Forester, A Printer").

This entirely physical engagement in print culture is soon translated into a more intellectual one. Forester's skill introduces him into the company of the "many ingenious men" who bring their works to the shop to be printed, and he no longer suffers the intellectual isolation he experienced when farmers or clerks were his companions (63; "Forester, A Printer"). Furthermore, encouraged by Franklin's model, he supplements conversation with an evening regime of reading. Although Forester's reading is still solitary, it does not lead to unsocial isolation, for he is constantly confronted with the opposing views of the writers and students who frequent the book shop. Having withstood the isolation of having no one with whom to converse, and having been partially convinced that his own opinions were not always correct, he now listens to various positions on "questions which he formerly imagined scarcely admitted of philosophic doubt" (63; "Forester, A Printer"). In his new humility, he does not lose confidence "in his own powers," but he has learned that his opinions must not be based upon solitary Crusoe-like cogitations (63; "Forester, A Printer").

The degree to which Forester has begun to accede to the Campbells' model of masculine sociability is tested in his friendship with a radical student named Tom Random. Random reproduces in a more vigorous form Forester's early rejection of

gentlemanliness and politeness. Random's rhetoric confuses "politics and poetry," presents "paradoxical" arguments in a "florid" diction, and oscillates "between the spouting action of a player, and the threatening action of a pugilist" (63; "Forester, A Printer"). The distinction between the two would-be reformers soon emerges. Whereas Forester's reformist zeal harms only a few individuals (most notably the girl with the geranium), Random's revolutionary rhetoric is apocalyptic in tone (he believes the world is "doomed to destruction" unless his political ideas are universally adopted), and it is used to incite actual mob violence (63; "Forester, A Printer").

Forester's necessary estrangement from Random is initiated by a literary-political disagreement, and it reflects his growing comprehension of the superiority of the domestic literary practices of the Campbell household. When Random's entry in a literary competition is rejected because his "violence hurts the cause he wishes to support" and when he discovers that Forester prefers the essay which has won, Random betrays his true opinions (66; "Forester, A Printer"). He greets Forester's opinion with a "contemptuous laugh" (65; "Forester, A Printer"). Where he once advocated that rank should be based simply on intellectual merit, Random now dismisses Forester's arguments by reference to his low occupation: "'A printer's devil setting up for a critic! He may be a capital judge of pica and brevier, perhaps--but let not the compositor go beyond his stick'" (65; "Forester, A Printer").

Random's betrayal sobers Forester's "enthusiasm, without

lessening his propensity to useful exertion" (64; "Forester, A Printer").

The prize-winning essay that triggers Forester's loss of a false friend also renews his association with a true friend, Henry Campbell, the essay's author. Forester typesets and prints the prize-winning essay without any typographical errors, and he also identifies an allusion that the corrector of the press, "though a literary gentleman," cannot recognize (74; "The Illuminations"). Henry has "omitted to name the satire and line, and the author" of a quotation. Forester immediately identifies it as an excerpt from Juvenal, and knows "where to look for the passage in the original author: he found it, and inserted the book and line in their proper place" (74; "The Illuminations"). This demonstration of his literary knowledge earns him the position as corrector of the press, and it foreshadows his entrance into an active participation in public debate. Edgeworth, however, compromises the publicness of Forester's entrance into political debate by making Henry his primary debating partner.

Following his promotion to corrector of the press, a more prestigious and more intellectual occupation, Forester begins to re-examine the question of the utility of social division by pseudonymously inserting a series of essays in his employer's paper. In one of his publications, Forester asks "What should be the distinguishing characteristics of the higher classes of people in society?" (77; "Forester, A Corrector of the Press").

A reply written by Henry Campbell soon appears in which he repeats those "arguments in favour of subordination in society, in favour of agreeable manners, and attention to the feelings of others in the small as well as in the great concerns of life" that formed the basis of many of the conversations Forester had held while he lived with the Campbells (78; "Forester, A Corrector of the Press"). Now when Forester sees these ideas "in a printed essay," they strike him "with all the force of conviction" (78; "Forester, A Corrector of the Press"). What the Campbells tried to do within the domestic sphere, they now accomplish through their intervention in the public sphere. Forester's journey through the lower ranks, his immersion in the material techniques of literary discourse, and his absorption in the intellectual debates of the public sphere have fully transformed his understanding. He is now able to acknowledge the utility of social division.

Forester's sojourn in the public sphere and in the non-domestic households of the lower classes also teaches him that "an individual in society who has friends, an established character, and a home, is in a more desirable situation than an unconnected being, who has no one to answer for his conduct,--no one to rejoice in his success, or to sympathize in his misfortunes" (85; "A Summons"). Forester no longer wishes to be a Robinson Crusoe; instead he wishes to return to the Campbell household. However, he can return to a domestic sphere only after he has proven his ability to participate fully in domestic

masculinity. His new acceptance of the principles of sociability articulated by Henry and his father must be joined by an acceptance of the "trifles" he once condemned as effeminate.

Specifically, he must demonstrate that his relationship to femininity--and to feminine subjects--has altered. Forester's willingness to accept the model of domestic masculinity is therefore expressed in his efforts to learn to dance. (His acceptance of his new role is also expressed in the fading of the skin disorder that signified his rudeness and that precipitated his flight from Flora Campbell). Once he has learned to dance, once the complications caused by Archibald Mackenzie's various frauds have been untangled, and once Mackenzie (the story's true embodiment of ungentlemanly behaviour) has been banished, Forester re-enters the Campbell home, this time as a "well-dressed" gentleman (109; "The Catastrophe"). His acceptance of his role as a gentleman is signified in his final contact with the technology of print culture. As he leaves his position as corrector of the press, he promises his employer that he will complete his current task, and instructs him to send "home the proof-sheets of the work in hand." They will be returned "punctually corrected" (103; "The Catastrophe"). His transition from employee to benefactor is then completed by his gift of a "complete font of new types" (104; "The Catastrophe").

Forester's return to the Campbell home symbolically coincides with a dance. With an "open countenance, slightly tinged with the blush of ingenuous shame," Forester approaches

Flora, "as if he was afraid she had not yet forgotten some things which he wished to be forgotten, and yet as if he was conscious that he was not wholly unworthy of her esteem" (109-110; "The Catastrophe"). The tale concludes with Forester's demonstration that he has "cured" himself of his "foolish antipathy to Scotch reels," as he begs "the favour" of Flora's hand and leads her "to dance a reel" (110; "The Catastrophe"). Forester's willingness to dance with Flora Campbell signals his sexual maturation and his acquisition of a domestic masculine identity. Forester is now both a gentleman and a member of a domestic circle, and thus conforms to Edgeworth's preferred model of masculinity. While able to participate in the rational discourse of the public realm, he is also able to participate in the gestures of the domestic sphere.

Edgeworth will return frequently to the question of masculine identity and masculine duty in her later works. Indeed, her willingness to explore conventionally masculine issues and realms is the source of her distinctiveness as a domestic novelist. In novels such as Ennui (1809), Vivian (1812), The Absentee (1812), and Patronage (1814), all of which emerged from her work on Professional Education (1809), Edgeworth portrays men in a variety of situations and professions--lawyers, doctors, politicians, and most frequently, landowners.¹⁶ In these novels, however, few of her heroes go through a reformation

¹⁶ For a discussion of the relationship of Professional Education to Edgeworth's novels, see Butler 329-35; and Elizabeth Harden, Maria Edgeworth (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 75-93.

analogous to Forester's. Instead, the inappropriately educated men deteriorate, and the practically educated men remain virtuous, striving to reform those around them. Conscious of this limitation in her work, Edgeworth creates in Ormond (1817) a male character who struggles to correct the effects of his miseducation. Through his reading and his association with a group of exemplary domestic figures, Ormond gradually acquires a domestic masculine identity that enables him to become an exemplary landlord. Unlike those of Forester, however, Ormond's errors are not based upon a refusal of gentlemanly manners and a hostility to feminine trifles; instead Edgeworth links Ormond's errors more specifically to sexual transgressions.

Chapter Five

Reading on the Black Islands:

Ormond and Masculine Desirability

The hero of Ormond (1817), the last novel Maria Edgeworth wrote during her father's lifetime, makes a memorable entrance into the narrative.¹ Harry Ormond's guardian, Sir Ulick O'Shane, is holding a ball on his estate, Castle Hermitage, and both Ormond and Marcus O'Shane (Ulick's son) are unaccountably late. Without Ulick's knowledge, the two young men have gone to the Black Islands to keep the birthday of Ulick's cousin, Cornelius O'Shane (King Corny). As a result of contradictory orders from Lady O'Shane and her husband, the gates to the estate have been locked. At one point in the ball, Lady O'Shane is sitting next to the greenhouse adjoining the ballroom when she is "startled by a peremptory tap on the glass." She turns to see Ormond, "pale as death, and stained with blood." He then demands and seizes her keys (238; ch. 1).

In the commotion of the dance, few people notice Ormond's bloody arrival. One who does, however, is Florence Annaly, who, in conjunction with her mother, Lady Annaly, is the novel's emblem of proper, rational femininity. The brief glance Florence has of Ormond at the window has an immediate physical effect upon

¹ For an account of the importance of Ormond to the emotional and literary relationship of daughter and father, see Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 278-82.

her; like Ormond, she becomes "pale as death" (239; ch. 2). Ulick O'Shane, unaware of the cause of her distress, leads her out into the greenhouse to get some air. There Florence witnesses the next shocking arrival: Moriarty Carroll, a peasant, is brought bleeding in a barrow to the greenhouse. In their drunken haste to return to Castle Hermitage, it turns out, Ormond and Marcus provoked a quarrel with a group of peasants during which Ormond has shot Moriarty. In the greenhouse Ulick reads Florence's pallor--a mirroring of Ormond's reaction--as a betrayal of her attraction to Ormond. But the narrator insists that the response of her body--her "faintness and loss of presence of mind"--signals a generalized moral, rather than sexual, response (250; ch. 3). Her sudden "terror, and confused apprehension of evil" and her "pity for the agony" of Ormond's remorse simply reveal her "innocent and well-regulated mind" (250; ch. 3). The normative nature of Florence's response is confirmed by her mother: both are "extremely shocked" by the consequences of Ormond's "undisciplined passion" (251; ch. 3). In other circumstances, they believe, Ormond's "generous, good disposition" and talents would make him "a useful, amiable, and admirable member of society" (251; ch. 3). His disruption of the ball thus demonstrates the negative effects of his current circumstances. Ormond has adopted the manner of the O'Shane men, all of whom are marked by their refusal of the self-control fundamental to domestic ideology and to Edgeworth's construction of domestic masculinity.

The Annaly women's response to Ormond's violation of sociable space points, in fact, to the primary goal of the novel: the transformation of Ormond from an ill-educated, ill-governed, and propertyless orphan into a well-educated, judicious landlord. Ulick O'Shane, who assumed guardianship of Ormond when his mother died and his debt-ridden father departed for India, has neglected Ormond's education altogether: "there was no use in giving Harry Ormond the education of an estated gentleman, when he was not likely to have an estate" (235; ch. 1). Unlike Sir Ulick, Lady Annaly believes that a good education is useful even to a fortuneless and propertyless youth such as Ormond. Ormond's errors arise, she argues, from "bad education, bad example, and profligate indulgence"; hence they can be corrected (251; ch. 3). The novel then demonstrates that a rational education, such as that advocated by Dr. Campbell in "Forester," is the primary means of constructing the preferred, domestic form of masculinity. Those men in Ormond who are ill-educated tend to lack the self-control, moderation, rationality, and integrity Edgeworth associates with domestic masculinity. Once Ormond has remade himself and become both "useful" and "amiable"--Edgeworthian code for sanctioned desirability--he will also become the proper object of Florence's desire.

For Edgeworth, proper masculinity (like proper femininity) is

both instilled by and manifested in certain kinds of reading, and Ormond's domestication goes hand in hand with his acquisition of domestic literary practices. The reformation of his character is explicitly linked to textuality, more particularly to changes in his reading, as he moves through the houses of his guardian or mentor figures, each of whom embodies a different form of masculinity.² On the Black Islands and under the influence of King Corny, Ormond's career as a rake is encouraged by his (female) reading of Tom Jones (1749), and he pursues both Peggy Sheridan, the daughter of Ulick's gardener, and Dora O'Shane, the daughter of Corny. Paradoxically, his reformation is also begun on the Black Islands, fostered by the counteracting Sir Charles Grandison (1754) sent to him by Lady Annaly. During his sojourn in France, Ormond's allegiance to the code of domestic masculinity and sexual restraint is tested by Dora O'Shane Connal's sentimental intrigues. He is rescued by the intervention of a circle of French literary luminaries, whose domestic achievements are as important to Ormond's transformation as their intellectual or literary accomplishments.

Ormond's assumption of the role of proper landlord is also linked to texts, as he undergoes a course of reading under the tutelage of Dr. Cambray, the vicar of the living adjacent to both Corny's and Ulick's estates. The influence of the exemplary men

² The centrality of reading in Ormond has been noted by A. Norman Jeffares, "Maria Edgeworth's Ormond," English 18 (1969): 85-90; and Mary-Elizabeth Fowkes Tobin, "'The Power of Example': Harry Ormond Reads Tom Jones," Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy 19 (1988): 37-52.

Ormond encounters in his course of studies is crucially reinforced by his association with Sir Herbert Annaly, Lady Annaly's son. From him, Ormond learns a more equitable and rational form of estate management than that practised by either Ulick or Corny. Ultimately, the influence of the Annaly domestic circle, in conjunction with the set of texts and attitudes it privileges, enables Ormond to adopt the discipline necessary to fulfil his private function as a domestic gentleman and his public function as a landed proprietor.

The shooting of Moriarty proves to be a critical juncture in Ormond's life, for it allows Lady Annaly to intervene in his education. Lady Annaly's ability to discern and to value Ormond's potential goodness becomes the catalyst for his reformation. Witnessing the depth of Ormond's remorse for his actions, she expresses an interest in his fate, and extends an invitation for him to visit her estate, where she and her son may be able to "assist in forwarding" Ormond's plans for his future (256; ch. 3). Lady Annaly's "voice of benevolence," in conjunction with the "great and painful impression" that Moriarty's near-death has made upon him, initiates Ormond's "reformation and improvement" (256-57; ch. 3). Startled that "such a being" as Lady Annaly would be interested in his fate, Ormond resolves "to improve," believing that while he may never become great, perhaps he may "become everything that is good" (256; ch. 3). From this point on, Ormond struggles to undo the pattern of behaviour that has done such harm. He begins by

making a list of resolutions, a list written out, suggestively, "in a sad scrawling hand and incorrect style" (257; ch. 4). Each of the faults he enumerates is a manifestation of his non-domestic masculinity. He resolves to regulate his drinking, to "cure" himself of "being passionate"; to avoid "low company"; and to "cure" himself of his fondness of female flattery (257; ch. 4). In the rest of the novel, the reader witnesses Ormond's struggle to maintain his resolutions and to adopt a form of masculinity that does not threaten domestic order and virtue.

Following his shooting of Moriarty, Ormond is exiled to the Black Islands, and his reformation begins there. Ormond feels himself "obliged" to Ulick but "attached" to Corny; hence his exile is not particularly onerous, and Corny's extravagant welcome (a six-oared boat, a piper, a twelve gun salute, and so on) dispels any regrets Ormond may have on leaving Castle Hermitage. This pomp epitomizes both Corny's strength and, as the undercurrent of mockery suggests, his flaws. Corny's anachronistic delight in quasi-feudal ceremonies, his profuse use of bumpers of claret, and his riotous hunting combine with his disorderly and inefficient economic practices to place him outside the circle of civil and domestic order.³

³ Corny's eccentricities recall those of Baron Bradwardine of Waverley (1814), which was itself influenced by Edgeworth's Absentee (1812). For a comparison of Waverley and Ormond, see Pamela Reilly, "The Influence of Waverley on Maria Edgeworth's Ormond," Scott and His Influence, eds. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association of Scottish Literary Study, 1983) 290-97. On the influence of The Absentee on Scott, see Donald Davie, The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott (New York: Barnes, 1961) 73; and Butler 394-97.

In many ways, Corny is an eminently unsuitable guardian for Ormond; after all, it was his vinous birthday celebrations that led to Ormond's shooting of Moriarty. Nevertheless, he is presented with far greater affection and respect than Ulick O'Shane, who remains the locus for Edgeworth's most stringent satire and condemnation. Corny may too often be caught up in "absurd or trivial" schemes, but his folly is preferable to Ulick's deceitfulness (269; ch. 5). Corny's flaws are balanced by "inventive genius, energy, and perseverance," by his absolute adherence to his promises no matter how ill-thought out they might be, by his astute judgement of other men's characters, and, most important, by his fundamental integrity and depth of feeling (269; ch. 5). These two qualities--undisguised feeling and uncompromised integrity--are crucial to Ormond's re-education, and they offset the potential harm posed by Corny's adherence to decayed forms of aristocratic masculinity. In contrast to Corny, Ulick and Marcus O'Shane are notable for their coldness. Both, for example, easily discard Ormond when his presence becomes an impediment to their own plans. This machiavellian cast to their character offends Edgeworth as much as do their dubious moral standards. Corny, for all his faults, offers Ormond a model of masculinity that is based upon genuine feeling, and, not incidentally, upon the sanctity of bonds made between men. Unlike Ulick, Corny never forsakes a promise made to another man, and while part of the plot turns on the difficulties sometime posed by this loyalty, such integrity is central to Edgeworth's concept

of masculine virtue. Thus while the Annaly influence will guarantee that Ormond's mind is educated, Corny's influence guarantees that his heart--that which will bind him to both men and women--will also be educated.⁴

One of the most decisive consequences of Ormond's removal from Castle Hermitage is his entrance into a world of reading. When Ormond arrives on the Black Islands, he is not much interested in reading, but soon after his arrival he encounters his first novel: Henry Fielding's Tom Jones. Suggestively, his encounter with Fielding's novel is informed by the trope of female reading. Ormond's discovery of Tom Jones is entirely fortuitous: the novel falls out of the work basket of Dora O'Shane, as Corny's housekeeper, Betty Dunshaughlin, rummages about for a bit of ribbon. Even before it is identified or read by the hero, then, the novel is linked to women, and to reading conducted outside the legitimate or authorized sites of culture. Its presence in Dora's work basket implies a defalcation of time, time frittered away in idle reading instead of invested in housewifely tasks. The danger of the novel is also presaged by Ormond's hasty greed to know what it is: he "snatched impatiently, eager to know what book it was" (286; ch. 7).

⁴ The educated heart is as important to Edgeworth's notion of domesticity as the rationally ordered intellect, and she asserts the importance of its education in Practical Education, 2 vols. (1798; New York: Garland, 1974). See, for example, "Preface," 1: vii. For a brief discussion of Edgeworth's advocacy of the education of both the intellectual and emotional capacities of an individual, see Elizabeth Harden, Maria Edgeworth (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 42-44.

The power of this novel turns out to be overwhelming. Although he is in the "greatest possible hurry, for the hounds were out," Ormond finds that "when once he had opened the book, he could not shut it: he turned over page after page, peeped at the end, the beginning, and the middle, then back to the beginning" (286; ch. 7). His "curiosity was so much raised by the story, his interest and sympathy so excited for the hero" that he is transfixed, drawn firmly away from the hunt--one of Corny's favoured male rituals (286; ch.7). Ormond reads standing for a quarter of an hour, "fixed in the same position," hearing neither the hounds nor Betty's nattering: "At last he carried off the book to his own room, that he might finish it in peace; nor did he ever stop till he came to the end of the volume" (286; ch. 7). The intensity with which Ormond reads the novel recalls the standard female reader targeted by reviewers and domestic novelists. As with such readers, Tom Jones induces in Ormond a trance-like state, and it ultimately produces a private fantasy that temporarily transforms Ormond's relationship to those around him.

When he comes to the end of Betty's volume, Ormond discovers that the story has broken off "in a most interesting part" (286; ch. 7). As he goes in search of the next instalment, Edgeworth deploys another familiar motif of female reading: novel-reading as consumption. After just one volume, Ormond is not simply impatient but "ravenous" (286; ch. 7). He demands the next volume from Betty, who merges comically with the desired text:

"'Mercy, Master Harry,' cried Mrs. Betty, 'don't eat one up! I know nothing at-all-at-all about the book, and I'm very sorry I tumbled it out of the basket'" (286; ch. 7). Abandoning all claim to civility, Ormond torments her until she recalls that "in the apple-room" there was "a heap of old books" in which he might find the remains of Tom Jones (286; ch. 7). After some impatient rummaging, Ormond at last finds "the precious volume," and he "devoured it eagerly" (287; ch. 7).

As an inexperienced reader, Ormond is convinced that the story is true, "for it was constructed with unparalleled ingenuity, and developed with consummate art" (287; ch. 7). This novel is not "forgotten as soon as finished," and its persistence in Ormond's memory, according to Edgeworth, derives from the appeal of its characters, specifically the character of Tom Jones (287; ch. 7). Like other young and inexperienced readers, Ormond fancies that he has found "a resemblance" to his own character and situation in those of Tom Jones, and he is "charmed" by Fielding's hero: "a warm-hearted, generous, imprudent young man, with little education, no literature, governed more by feeling than by principle, never upon any occasion reasoning, but keeping right by happy moral instincts" (287; ch. 7).⁵ In tracing the impression Tom Jones makes on Ormond's imagination, Edgeworth draws on the central premise underlying critical arguments in the

⁵ The parallels between Ormond and Jones are commonplaces in modern critical considerations of Ormond, and they were noted by contemporary reviewers as well. See, for example, Blackwood's Magazine 1 (Sept. 1817): 635.

period on behalf of representing exemplary characters in fiction. That is, she assumes an imitative theory of reading, suggesting that "young readers readily assimilate and identify themselves with any character, the leading points of which resemble their own, and in whose general feelings they sympathize" (287; ch. 7).¹ The problem with Fielding's novel, then, is that it offers a character whose attractiveness to Ormond stems from his vices.

Enamoured with the model he has found, Ormond begins to shape his life to conform to Tom's. Ormond's attempt to "shine forth an Irish Tom Jones" is largely characterized by his attempt to imitate Tom's ill-governed sexual desires, an attempt that recalls the fear of sexual licence built into the trope of female reading (287; ch. 7). He searches out a more refined version of Molly Seagrim by courting the virtuous Peggy Sheridan, but his seduction is arrested just at the point of a symbolic deflowering. One evening, while carrying a rose he has snatched from Peggy, Ormond goes to see Moriarty Carroll, who is himself in love with Peggy. When Moriarty sees Peggy's flower in Ormond's hand, he turns "pale as death" (289; ch. 7). In a flash of "happy moral instinct," Ormond recognizes that his pursuit of

¹ Edgeworth's description of the effect of Tom Jones on Ormond's inexperienced imagination recalls Samuel Johnson's well-known argument that novels featuring mixed characters should not be given to those inexperienced in life or in fiction reading. See "The Modern Form of Romances Preferable to the Ancient," Rambler, 4 (Mar. 1750). The Rambler, eds. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969) 19-25, vol. 3 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. 16 vols. to date. 1963- .

Peggy is culpable. He suddenly perceives "an obstacle, that he could not overleap--a greater wrong than he had foreseen, at least a different wrong, and in a form that made his heart tremble" (289; ch. 7). This obstacle is not Peggy's hymen. Ormond's epiphany has little to do with a rational or a moral analysis of the function of chastity. Rather, he trembles in front of his nearly betrayed bond to Moriarty. It is this bond, and not any offence to Peggy, that is critical. Ormond halts his course of debauchery, not to preserve Peggy's virtue, but to preserve the bond of reciprocal gratitude forged between himself and Moriarty after the shooting. Suggestively, Moriarty characterizes Ormond's pursuit of Peggy as another stab to his heart--an oblique reminder of the first wound Ormond caused his heart. What is most threatened by Ormond's debauchery is precisely this covenant of gender and class: the bond between men, between master and servant. The threat fades quickly as Ormond relinquishes all claim to Peggy, reasserting his claim to the honour of a gentleman, and as Moriarty deferentially requests forgiveness for his lack of generosity in suspecting Ormond of sexual transgression. Edgeworth's emphasis in this sequence is upon the damage that rakes do to other men, but the social consequences for Peggy are not overlooked, for rumours persist that she is Ormond's cast-off mistress. Even as a married woman, therefore, she is only tenuously included within a domestic circle.

Meanwhile Ormond continues his debauchery. His "generosity"

may have forestalled fornication with Peggy and mended his relationship with Moriarty, but otherwise he "deteriorated sadly" (292; ch. 7). The narrator offers a succession of possible causes for Ormond's "vagrant courses," beginning with the most obvious: too little to do and the bad influence of Corny and Ulick. But there is also a less obvious if more significant cause: "Tom Jones was still too much, and Lady Annaly too little, in his head" (291; ch. 7). This pairing of Tom Jones and Lady Annaly is of particular interest, for in the subsequent episodes she, and more specifically, her texts, will begin to move Ormond into more virtuous paths.

After a winter lost to novel-induced lust, Ormond begins to think again of his "better self," and when he does so, he "remembered Lady Annaly" (292; ch. 8). Belatedly, he begins to answer a letter she had sent him; in rereading that letter, he discovers that "she had mentioned a present of books which she intended for him" (292-93; ch. 8). As in the case of Tom Jones, the means of acquiring a text is crucial. While Ormond happens upon Fielding's novel through chance and carelessness, Lady Annaly's books arrive in a far more deliberate fashion. They come, not from a mildewed heap of discarded texts in a storage room, but from the library of Sir Herbert Annaly. Lady Annaly sends Ormond duplicates of books found in her son's library. Thus any novels Ormond might find in this trunk of books will not be boudoir reading. By demonstrating her interest in his future and by providing him with the same books that her son has read,

Lady Annaly effectively moves Ormond into a filial position from which his reformation might be effected. When Ormond finally retrieves the trunk of books, he discovers "an excellent collection of what may be called the English and French classics" (293; ch. 8). Although Lady Annaly anticipates that the French books will be the most useful because they will help Ormond to learn the French he needs for a military career, the book that has the most striking effect on him is Samuel Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison.⁷

Edgeworth immediately distinguishes Richardson's novel from the addictive texts of female reading. In contrast to Tom Jones, Ormond is not immediately drawn into Grandison: it does not "seize his attention forcibly, like Tom Jones [sic]" (293; ch. 8). Indeed, Ormond hates Richardson's "moralizing and reflections," dislikes the stiffness of the main characters, and is disgusted by Harriet Byron's "perpetual egotism" and "dreadfully long letters" (294; ch. 8). Nevertheless, "there was something in the book that, in spite of the terrible array of good people, captivated his attention" (294; ch. 8). Instead of the immediate (and addictive) effect of Fielding's novel, Ormond discovers that Grandison wins "by degrees," drawing him on

⁷ Sir Charles Grandison had a special place in Edgeworth's affections. When her siblings C. Sneyd and Charlotte first read the novel, she envied them "the pleasure of reading Clementina's history for the first time. It is one of those pleasures which is never repeated in life." Maria Edgeworth, "To Sophy Ruxton," 7 February 1806, The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth, ed. Augustus J. C. Hare, 2 vols. (1894; Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1971) 1: 153.

"against his will, and against his taste" (293-94; ch. 8). Once his attention has been fixed on the novel, Ormond is deeply absorbed by it: "his imagination was so full of Clementina, and the whole Poretta family, that he saw them in his sleeping and waking dreams" (294-95; ch. 8). The "deep pathos" of this story so affects him that he can "scarcely recall his mind to the low concerns of life" (295; ch. 8). When called upon by Corny to participate in one of his principal male rituals--"to go out shooting"--Ormond betrays his "generous feelings" with his "red eyes" (295; ch. 8). Up to this point Ormond's reading of Sir Charles Grandison does not differ markedly from female reading, but Edgeworth goes on to establish a critical difference between the effect of the heroes of Grandison and Tom Jones upon Ormond.

Tom Jones cannot remain Ormond's model of ideal masculinity, despite his charm, for his energies are often focused outside the domestic circle, and they frequently involve sexual transgression. Grandison, on the other hand, is remarkable for the devotion of his energies to repairing various domestic circles, especially those damaged by sexual transgression. Although Grandison is not as immediately compelling a hero as Tom Jones, Ormond gradually comes to admire him. Specifically, he comes to sympathise with Grandison's "elevated sentiments," and "generous character" (294; ch. 8). By reading about Grandison's struggles to act honourably in a myriad of difficult situations, Ormond learns that it is possible to find the "generous feelings" he first associated with Tom Jones in "a man of virtue" who is

also "a man of honour," as well as a man of "cultivated understanding, and accomplished manners" (294; ch. 8). Moreover Ormond learns from Grandison that the restraint of passion is more likely to attract the attention of a worthy woman. What he is struck by most "forcibly" is Grandison's status as a desirable man. Grandison, he notes is "loved, passionately loved, by women--not by the low and profligate, but by the highest and most accomplished of the sex" (294; ch. 8). Richardson's novel thus teaches Ormond that it is possible to combine head and heart, that a man can be both desired by women and "admired by his own sex" (294; ch. 8). No longer ambitious for simple sexual conquest, Ormond is inspired to follow Grandison, an exemplar who fulfils "every duty of his station in society," and hence is "eminently useful, respected and beloved, as brother, friend, master of a family, guardian, and head of a large estate" (294; ch. 8). Ormond becomes ambitious to be "a gentleman in the highest sense of the word (294; ch. 8). Sir Charles Grandison, in effect, undoes the damage caused by Tom Jones.

ii

In her accounts of the reformation of a character whose reading is disordered, Edgeworth typically includes a guardian or companion figure who possesses both a capacity to respond to literature emotionally and a thoroughly developed critical faculty. This figure intervenes in the disordered character's

reading, redirecting her or his energies toward more appropriate texts and activities. In Ormond the role of redirecting figure is shared by Corny O'Shane, Lady Annaly, and Dr. Cambray. Corny's intervention in Ormond's reading is as important as Lady Annaly's provision of a counteracting novel. Corny is tolerant of Ormond's "voracious appetite for books," but significantly he frustrates it and seeks to turn Ormond's attentions outward (295; ch. 8). Corny repeatedly interrupts Ormond, breaking his private and isolated fantasies to insist that he participate in more sociable activities. Renaming him "Harry Bookworm," Corny insists that he leave his novels (295; ch. 8). Upon learning that Ormond is reading the last volume of Sir Charles Grandison, Corny remarks: "The badger is worth a hundred of it--not a pin's worth in that volume but worked stools and chairs, and China jugs and mugs'" (295; ch. 8). Even worse, on another occasion and at "the very death of Clarissa," he hauls Ormond away to see a Solan goose, telling him to "let Clarissa die another time" (296; ch. 8). Corny's interruption of Ormond's reading counteracts the absorptive tendency of female novel-reading and thus begins to move Ormond toward more proper forms of reading.

Corny's interruption of Clarissa's death turn out to be the most significant. Following the viewing of the Solan goose, Ormond joins Corny in an egg hunt, and, over-reaching himself, he falls from a rock face and badly sprains his ankle. This physical injury turns Ormond away from novels (which exist in a vexed relationship to the body) by altering his usual routine and

creating the time he needs both to read more widely and, as important, to participate in evaluative discussions of what he has read. He starts out by reading the remaining novels in Lady Annaly's trunk, but since these are "very few," he is obliged to move onto the remaining non-fiction volumes (296; ch. 8). These he discusses every evening with Corny, who reveals that he is "no respecter of authorities in books; a great name went for nothing with him--it did not awe his understanding in the slightest degree" (297; ch. 8). Instead Corny asks whether novels "touch the heart" or "inflame the imagination"; whether a history is "true"; whether a work of philosophy contains "sound reasoning" (297; ch. 8). By basing his evaluation of a book on its fulfilment of appropriate generic criteria, Corny rejects any sense of the importance of canonical or fashionable authorial status. His literary independence, the narrator remarks, "wakened Ormond's powers, and prevented his taking upon trust the assertions, or the reputations, even of great writers" (297; ch. 8).

The education of Ormond's literary judgement is accompanied by an education of his sexual judgement, which began in his reading of Fielding and Richardson and is renewed in his encounters with Corny's daughter. After spending some time in Dublin with Mlle. O'Faley, her aunt, Dora returns to the Black Islands. Before she was born, Corny promised a drinking companion that their firstborns would marry. As a result, Dora was first engaged to White Connal, a sporting brute, and then

after his death to his twin, Black Connal, a franco-hibernian coxcomb. Both are models of non-domestic masculinity. Ormond is greatly attracted to Dora, despite his knowledge that she is to be considered a married woman, and he is inspired to a "new and extraordinary desire to please" (305; ch. 9). In an effort to render himself the object of feminine desire (in effect to become as desired as Grandison), Ormond engages in a vigorous display of his accomplishments: "he liked to show how well he could ride; how well he could dance, how gallant and agreeable he could be" (305; ch. 9). Soon he is "the delight of every eye," earning "the admiration of every woman, and the envy of every man" (305; ch. 9).

Significantly, he is admired but not loved by women, and more important, envied not admired by men. He has chosen both the wrong woman (Dora) and the wrong method (self-display). Dora, he discovers, is neither a Harriet Byron nor a Clementina della Poretta. Dora wishes to be married for motives that Ormond finds "base" and "childish": she wants an establishment and freedom from her father's control (314; ch. 11). Furthermore, the tone of voice she uses when she discusses marriage disgusts Ormond: "there was something so unfeminine, so unamiable, so decided, and bold . . . as she pronounced the word *marriage*" (313; ch. 10). Without reluctance, Ormond quits her. His brief courtship of Dora marks both a distinct turn away from solitary fantasies and also one of his earliest realizations that fiction and reality are not transparent.

Ormond's awareness of the gap between the represented and the real is heightened when he returns to Castle Hermitage after the death of Corny in a hunting accident, and after he has inherited a fortune of £80,000 from his Indian stepmother. At Castle Hermitage, Ormond is immersed in a world of dubious sexual judgement. Throughout his stay, he confronts the problem of judging which women are worthy of his desire. Unfortunately, the women he meets there exemplify non-domestic femininity, and each of his infatuations is speedily dispelled when the woman he admires reveals that the personality she presents in public is a performance masking critical flaws in her character. The non-domestic sexuality of Castle Hermitage is derived from its owner's failed grasp of domestic order. Each of Sir Ulick's O'Shane's three marriages has been unsuccessful, and each reflects Ulick's refusal of a domestically defined masculinity. Ulick, indeed, prefers to follow the aristocratic model, which for him is epitomized in a text he recommends to Ormond as a means of increasing his "knowledge of the world" (404; ch. 20). Ulick unstintingly praises "a book at that time much in vogue, but which the good sense and virtue of England soon cast into disrepute" (404; ch. 20). This book is Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son (1774), a book containing "many sparkling and some valuable observations" but, Edgeworth's narrator insists, one fatally mixed with "corruption" (404; ch. 20). Ulick's submission to fashion ("much in vogue") is less important than his delight in a work widely perceived as recommending skilled

and polished deception as a means to achieve one's aims. His endorsement of Chesterfield betrays a fundamental aspect of his own character, for the skill with which he manipulates appearances in order to achieve his financial and political ambitions is worthy of Chesterfield's model.

Although Ulick's habitual dissimulation is conveyed by his praise of Chesterfield, Edgeworth's primary emphasis falls upon the sexual corruption implicit in his citation of the Letters. Upon hearing Ulick praise the book, Lady Millicent, a house-guest, "inveighed against it with honest indignation" (404; ch. 20). Ulick replies with mock amazement "'What! said Sir Ulick, smiling, 'you are shocked at Lord Chesterfield's advising his pupil at Paris to prefer a reputable affair with a married woman, to a disreputable intrigue with an opera girl!'" (404; ch. 20). Lady Millicent, he asserts, responds as an "Englishwoman"--indeed "Lady Annaly herself could not have spoken and looked the thing better" (404; ch. 20). Ulick's seeming compliment has a hidden sting, as Lady Millicent's blush intimates, for her reputation has been tarnished in an episode that closely resembles the scenario recommended by Chesterfield. While her husband was away on a military campaign, Lady Millicent carried on an ill-hidden dalliance with a "man of high rank and gallantry," only to be abandoned by him upon her husband's death (408; ch. 20). The immediate function of this sequence is to satirize Lady Millicent's ingenuous and inadvertently self-betraying objection to Chesterfield, and to foreshadow Ormond's response to an

analogous situation when he is tempted to enter into an affair with Dora O'Shane in Paris. Of greater consequence, however, is Edgeworth's use of this sequence to establish Ulick's household as a site of non-domestic sexuality and to broach the problem of female duplicity. Does Lady Millicent blush because she is remorseful or does she blush because Ulick threatens her wooing of Ormond?

Ulick's advocacy of Chesterfield provides the context for the women who attempt to beguile Ormond with their deceitful performances of feminine accomplishments and virtues. Ormond's encounters with the Misses Darrell, Dartford, and Lardner and Lady Millicent, all of whom present pleasant surfaces but also inadvertently reveal their vulgarity, deepen his understanding of the nature of domestic and therefore desirable femininity. His growing ability to discern true and false feminine virtue is the consequence of his association with Dr. Cambray's family and the course of study he undertakes with Dr. Cambray himself.

In the interval between Corny's death and Ormond's removal to Castle Hermitage, Ormond stays with Dr. Cambray, his wife, and his daughters at Vicar's Dale. During his stay with Ulick, he is also a daily visitor. At Vicar's Dale, Ormond encounters for the first time a fully domesticated family: a family devoid of the tensions and limitations of either Corny's or Ulick's household. This is a sober household and one in which Ormond is not subject to the temptations he finds on the Black Islands or at Castle Hermitage. When Ulick is puzzling over Ormond's wish to maintain

his connection with the Cambray family, he assumes that the primary attraction there is the two young women. But the Miss Cambrays are rarely in the foreground, rarely attract Ormond's attention, and never pose a threat to his equilibrium. Their presence enables Ormond to experience domestic life without the subterranean sexual conflicts that undermine Corny's and Ulick's households.

Ormond is attached to the Cambray domestic circle for far less libidinous reasons than those Ulick assumes to be normative in young men. When he first arrives at Vicar's Dale, Ormond begins a more serious and carefully thought-out program of reading than that he undertook on the Black Islands, and, despite Ulick's best efforts to distract him, he remains firmly committed to his reading. Much to the surprise of Ulick, Ormond returns every morning to his studies with Dr. Cambray, even in the midst of his infatuations with Ulick's female house guests. His "studies, to be sure, were sometimes interrupted by floating visions of the Miss Darrells, Dartfords, and Lardners. He every now and then sung bits of their songs, repeated their bon mots, and from time to time laying down his book, started up and practised quadrille steps" (392; ch. 19). But all this serves to "refresh" him and to "increase his attention" (392; ch. 19). Ormond's previous exposure to Corny's infelicitous interruptions has served him well, and now in the midst of delicious distractions he is able, for the most part, to discipline his passions and to attend to his books. His reading, in effect,

contains and thus controls his sexual fantasies, enabling him eventually to discern the falsity of each of the women he admires.

Ormond and Dr. Cambray have drawn up a reading list, and though its contents are left unspecified, its titles are serious enough to provoke Ulick's laughter. As he scans Ormond's list, Ulick quizzes Ormond: "if you are bent upon reading for a fellowship--I don't doubt but with Dr. Cambray's assistance, and with some grinder and crammer, we might get you cleverly through all the college examinations" (388; ch. 18). And if he does not die of "logical indigestion," "classical fever," or "metaphysical lethargy," Ormond might one day have "the pleasure, the glory of lecturing classes of *ignoramuses*, and dunces yet unborn" (388; ch. 18). Ormond's ability to bear this ridicule well and steadfastly to adhere to his plan of self-education underscores the limitations of Ulick's understanding of the role literature ought to play in the life of a gentleman. Ormond insists that the need to eliminate his ignorance is all the more pressing since he now possesses "the fortune of a gentleman," and "it would be so much the more conspicuous, more scandalous" for him to remain ignorant (389; ch. 18). Now fully detached from the trope of female reading, Ormond's reading becomes a sign of his suitability to be a landowner.

Ormond's desire to be a judicious man of property is confirmed by his association with the exemplary estate management of the Annaly family. Having quit Castle Hermitage, Ormond makes

two visits to the Annaly estate before embarking on a continental tour. On his first visit, Ormond finds that the Cambray family is in attendance. The gathering together of exemplary figures-- Dr. Cambray, Lady Annaly, Sir Herbert Annaly, and Florence Annaly--makes the Annaly estate the nexus of ideal domesticity. Here Ormond finds "the charms of domestic politeness, in the every day manners of this mother, son, and daughter," and he sees "the most delicate attentions combined with entire sincerity, perfect ease, and constant respect; the result of early habits of good-breeding acting upon the feelings of genuine affection" (430; ch. 23). In these congenial surroundings Ormond completes the education which prepares him to be a landlord.

He learns a new conception of the public obligations of a landlord as he watches Sir Herbert Annaly's efforts to bring order and justice to an estate that has recently reverted to his control. Annaly finds that his "idle, profligate, desperate" tenants have been encouraged by the "late middle landlord" to get the funds to pay their rents by various "nefarious practices" (431; ch. 23). Chief among these is ship-wrecking, and when the tenants discover that Annaly does not intend to allow this practice to continue, they simply seek a more agreeable landlord: Sir Ulick O'Shane. Ormond is thus forced to compare Ulick's method of managing his tenants through complicity in their depredations and "bribery, favour and protection" to Annaly's use of reason (432; ch. 23). As well, Ormond is forced to compare Corny's generosity to Annaly's subordination of

generosity to justice. In the end, Ormond sets aside both Ulick's and Corny's methods, seeing that Annaly's methods are more likely to succeed in reforming the Irish peasantry.

At the same time that Ormond learns much from Sir Herbert Annaly about the modes of fulfilling his public responsibility, he also moves toward embracing the private aspects of proper masculinity with his reintroduction to Florence Annaly. Before Ormond inherited his fortune, Corny once suggested that Ormond might desire or be desired by Florence. In a gesture that reflects his understanding of the importance of rank, Ormond dismisses the notion as ludicrous. Such a connection would, he insisted, be utterly impossible; he would never have the "treachery, presumption, folly, or madness" to think of Florence Annaly nor she of him (281; ch. 7). But he is no longer an "ignorant," "uninformed," "raw boy," nor is he fortuneless, and now he dares to think of her (281; ch. 7). At most he now hopes to elicit an expressive glance from her face, a face that comes "instantly" into "light and life" if "any stroke of genius" or "noble sentiment was expressed" (418; ch. 22). Florence as a proper woman responds to intellectual skill or moral integrity, the Edgeworthian signs of the gentleman, rather than mere physical prowess or the display of accomplishments that once attracted Dora O'Shane.

Although Ormond himself appears to be unaware of it, he has become a pre-eminent object of feminine desire. During the early stages of his visit, he reveals a timidity when he speaks with

those of "whose information and abilities he had a high opinion" (419; ch. 22). Despite its connotations of effeminacy, this tendency makes him "peculiarly engaging to women," for "in his timidity there was no awkwardness; it was joined with such firmness of principle, and such a resolute, manly character" (419; ch. 22). Ormond's masculine desirability rests on this fusion of principle, manliness, and deference, and the episode of Miss Black and Tommy Dunshaughlin confirms his internalization of the model of gender approved by Edgeworth.

Miss Black, once Lady O'Shane's companion and now the wife of Mr. M'Crule, an unregenerate and intolerant Cromwellian, calls upon the Annalys to announce her opposition to their support of non-sectarian education. The particular occasion of her visit is Tommy Dunshaughlin, the son of King Corny's housekeeper. Ormond has tacitly assumed guardianship of Tommy and enrolled him in a school on the mainland, where he has worked diligently, winning the prizes and commendations that entitle him to compete for a place in an "excellent charitable institution" that awards its scholars an apprenticeship fee when they graduate (439; ch. 23). Tommy is about to carry off a place in this school and Mrs. M'Crule warns the Annalys of the imminent danger he poses to them all. They "shall all be positively undone" by the admission of a Catholic to a Protestant school (440; ch. 24).⁷ The Annalys'

⁷ The Edgeworth family was committed to the ideal of non-sectarian education in Ireland. Edgeworth's most extended fictional representation of such an education may be found in the depiction of the school run by Lord Clonbrony's agent Burke in The Absentee (1812).

rejection of such an unenlightened view is not surprising; countering Mrs. M'Crule's dread, they assert that Catholicism is not contagious, nor education incendiary. Ormond's ability to restrain his long-standing contempt for Mrs. M'Crule and to repudiate politely though resolutely her bigotry and malicious slander earns him a "smile of approbation from Florence" (446; ch. 23). This combination of resoluteness and principle underscores Ormond's new ability to control his passions. There is now little question that Ormond possesses the domestic masculinity that renders him legitimately desirable to a figure such as Florence Annaly.

Edgeworth's faith that the situation of the Irish peasantry could be ameliorated through educational reform is enacted in Tommy's participation in an education system that de-emphasizes religious difference and emphasizes instead reason and merit as the basis for advancement. And Ormond's support of this pedagogical imperative, as much as his other characteristics, signals his readiness to be accepted into the Annaly domestic circle. In his defence of Tommy, Ormond illustrates his ability to integrate the role of generous guardian with the principles of justice. Ormond's desirability comes to rest in his willing assumption of the role of the paternal figure who defends the rights of a child to an education.

Florence's affection for Ormond is aroused and mediated precisely through the conflict over Tommy's education. Tommy stands as an analogue of Ormond's early life, and by attending to

Tommy's education, Ormond both rewrites his own early history and demonstrates that he is a far better guardian of his dependents than Ulick is or was. Edgeworth distances Florence's interest in Ormond from any improper expression of sexual desire by concentrating upon the struggle to make Tommy a useful and amiable member of society. In Tommy, Florence finds a "daily object of thought and feeling in common" with Ormond (449; ch. 23). This common purpose replaces the motivations more typically ascribed to heroines and renders Florence's desires legitimate. She recognizes that the "interest she felt for this child was uncommonly vivid," but she believes that "she might safely avow this interest--it was in the cause of one who was innocent, and who had been oppressed" (449-50; ch. 23). The "joining" of Florence and Ormond in "the cause of justice and humanity" enables Ormond to take "possession" of her "heart happily, safely--unconsciously at first, yet triumphantly at last" (450; ch. 23). But in a sequence that recalls the window scene opening the novel, Ormond's hopes are dashed. Through a window Ormond sees Colonel Albemarle, a suitor of long-standing and of excellent character and family, kneeling at Florence's feet in what Ormond assumes to be a lover's triumph. This, in

In a paragraph Edgeworth deleted from subsequent editions of Ormond, Tommy brings Ormond and Florence together in a literal sense. Tommy announces his willingness to sacrifice his education if it is to be a source of trouble to Ormond, who "caught hold of him, and at the same instant Florence and he stooped to kiss the child--she drew back blushing--it was the happiest moment in Ormond's life." Maria Edgeworth, Harrington and Ormond, Tales, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: Hunter, 1817) 3: 149; ch. 24.

conjunction with the Annalys' refusal to admit him that day and a miscarried letter, propels Ormond out of Ireland and into the dissolute life of Paris.

Goaded by Ulick and his own disappointed passions, Ormond flees Ireland for a course of dissipation in France that he hopes will both obliterate his memories of Florence and make her heartsick. There he discovers Dora O'Shane and her husband Black Connal, who are fully absorbed in the whirl of life associated with the court of Versailles. Never a champion of domestic life, Dora has become a devotee of the fashionable discourses of sentimentality. Like Lady Millicent, Dora has been led astray by "sentimentality sophistry," a discourse that Edgeworth repeatedly presents as used by women of doubtful virtue "to veil from themselves the criminality of passion" or to mask "the deformity of vice" (403; ch. 20). After her initiation into the fashionable discourses of Paris, Dora can no longer discern "the line between right and wrong"; her sentimentality has "effaced" the "line which should be strongly marked" (403; ch. 20). She promptly determines to seduce Ormond. But Ormond, however amused he is by Parisian antics, is singularly impervious to the sentimental, having been inoculated by his encounters with Lady Millicent. The education in genuine feeling he received on the Black Islands, upon the Annaly estate, and through his reading has taught him to feel deeply but to discipline his feelings in a way that is not amenable to the sentimental gestures favoured by Dora and her coterie. This imperviousness--essentially the

ability to contain emotion within proper boundaries--is the hallmark of domestic masculinity, and it ultimately leads to Ormond's meeting with an alternate circle of Parisian life.

One day Ormond and Mlle. O'Faley visit an art gallery to view a recent and highly lauded portrait of the then popular Dauphine, Marie Antoinette. While others respond to this painting with the emotionally flamboyant gestures of sentimental discourse ("exclamations," "lifting up of hands and eyes," "transports," "ecstasies," and "tears"), Ormond refuses to act the part dictated by Paris fashion (489; ch. 29). His refusal of Mlle. O'Faley's sentimental self-display, is overheard with approbation by Abbé André Morellet.¹⁰ Once disabused of his assumption that "le bel Irlandais" is yet another unthinking tourist, Morellet draws Ormond into a circle of literary men (491; ch. 29). The scenes following Ormond's meeting with Morellet contain a series of panegyrics to the men whose work and character the Edgeworths admired. However, it is the ability of the members of Morellet's salon to combine domestic with intellectual activities that is crucial to Ormond, drawing him

¹⁰ Ormond's friendship with Abbé Morellet is based on Maria Edgeworth's memories of the time she and her family spent with Abbé Morellet during their 1802-03 visit to Paris. On 31 October 1802 sh. writes to Mary Sneyd, her aunt, about Morellet: "it is impossible to believe that he is so old when one either hears him speak, or sees him move. He has all the vivacity, and feeling, and wit of youth, and all the gentleness that youth ought to have. His conversation is delightful, nothing too much or too little; sense, and gaiety, of learning, and reason, and that perfect knowledge of the world which mixes so well but so seldom with a knowledge of books. He invited us to breakfast, and this morning we spent with him." See Hare, Life and Letters 1: 103.

back into the domestic masculinity that Dora's world of pleasure has temporarily challenged.

At the abbé's breakfast gatherings, Ormond once again participates in conversations that praise literature and domesticity. Suggestively, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the figure most frequently associated by Edgeworth with sentimentality and the destruction of domesticity, is conspicuously absent from this gathering of luminaries. He is "always quarrelling with somebody, and generally with every body" and thus "could not be prevailed upon to come to this breakfast" (493; ch. 29). Ormond demonstrates his full command of the literary education conveyed to him by Lady Annaly and Dr. Cambray in his ability to identify the men he meets before Morellet tells him their names. He picks out Pierre Marivaux because he speaks as he has written: "full of hair-breadth distinctions, subtle exceptions, and metaphysical refinements and digressions" (393; ch. 29). Jean-François Marmontel he discovers "by his being the only man in the room who had not mentioned to him any of 'Les Contes Moraux'" (493; ch. 29). Only Jean D'Alembert sets Ormond's "skill at defiance" (493; ch. 29).¹¹

Marmonnel's example is especially important to the reaffirmation of Ormond's domestic masculinity. To the exemplary

¹¹ Edgeworth's contact with D'Alembert, Marivaux, Marmontel, and Rousseau was through their writings and through her father's memories. For an account of Edgeworth's visit to Paris, see Butler, 188-235; and Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth Family Letters, ed. Christina E. Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

Sir Charles Grandison and Sir Herbert Annaly, Edgeworth adds Marmontel. From him, Ormond learns that it is possible to give up the dizzying whirl of dissipation that Paris encourages and to find a happier life in domestic retirement. Marmontel has done so himself, and he has "returned to his early tastes for simple pleasures and domestic virtues": "No evidence could be stronger than Marmontel's in favour of virtue and domestic life, nor could any one express it with more grace and persuasive eloquence" (494; ch. 29). Ormond is "most agreeably surprised" to find in the persons of Morellet, his sister Mme. de Montigny and her daughter Mlle. de Montigny, and Marmontel, her betrothed, "an amiable, united, happy family, when he had only expected to see a meeting of *litterati*" (494; ch. 29). The Morellet domestic circle echoes the "family union and domestic happiness which he saw at Annaly," and this echo recalls Ormond "to his better self" (430; ch. 23; 493; ch. 29). In the weeks that follow, Abbé Morellet introduces Ormond to the gatherings of such *salonières* as Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. de Tencin, Mme. Deffand, and Mme. Trudaine. This succession of families of differing ranks and situations enables Ormond to compare their various modes of living, and it confirms his allegiance to the rational and domestic virtues exemplified in the Grandison, Morellet, and Annaly families.

When Ormond next meets Dora, who has been away from Paris for several weeks, he possesses a newly invigorated sense of the importance of domestic virtues. Ormond now tries to warn Dora of

the implications of her conduct with another man. At the sight of Dora's theatrically penitent tears, he finds himself at her feet, holding and kissing her "beautiful hand, which was but feebly withdrawn" (500; ch. 30). At this critical moment, however, he is "suddenly shocked by the sight of one of the rings on her finger" (500; ch. 30). Ormond is not, as Dora assumes, staring at her hated wedding band. Instead, his gaze is fixed on a ring containing a lock of Corny's grey hair. This scene recalls Ormond's previous realization that his pursuit of Peggy Sheridan is inappropriate. Here too Ormond is confronted by an invincible object, and, as with his earlier confrontation with Moriarty, the bond between men takes precedence over an illicit bond to a woman. Ormond does not interrupt his unintended seduction of Dora out of a sense of his duty to her marriage; he is, after all, not shocked by the sight of her wedding band and all it symbolizes. Rather, his first duty is to the debt (inextinguishable by death) he owes to Corny. Ormond's refusal to become entangled with Dora also demonstrates his refusal of Ulick's Chesterfieldian sexual mores. Ormond will not destroy even the tenuous domesticity of Dora's marriage.

Following this scene, the novel rapidly moves to a close. In an excess of misfortune and coincidence, Moriarty has been mistakenly convicted of murder, has been broken out of jail just before he is to be transported, and has been shipwrecked on the

shores of France as he attempts to sail to America.¹ He happens upon Ormond on a Paris bridge and informs him of a fraud Ulick is attempting to perpetrate in order to prevent the fall of his banking house. Ormond immediately returns to England and halts the fraud that would have deprived him of much of his fortune. He then goes on to Ireland, arriving in time for the funeral of the disgraced and heavily indebted Ulick. Ormond refuses to rescue Ulick's bank, for its success has been at the heart of Ulick's fiscal scheming throughout the novel. But he does agree to settle Ulick's domestic accounts: "the small debts that were due to his servants, workmen, and immediate dependants" (521; ch. 32). As a result of this attention to Ulick's domestic debts, Ormond learns of the crucial miscarried letter from Lady Annaly asking Ormond not to call on the day Colonel Albemarle was expected to call. He then expeditiously untangles the misunderstanding with Florence and, once they are married by Dr. Cambray, he purchases Corny's estate.

Although Ulick's is the better of the two estates, Ormond chooses the Black Islands, for they "were associated with all the tender recollections of his generous benefactor," and he believes that there "he might do a great deal of good, by carrying on his

¹ The passages recounting Moriarty's trial and jail break, his reunion with Peggy, and Corny's death and funeral were written by Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In a letter of 27 March 1818 to Henrica Broadhurst Edgeworth, her brother C. Sneyd Edgeworth's wife, Edgeworth outlined which portions of *Ormond* were dictated by her father. See *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth with a Selection From Her Letters*, ed. Frances Edgeworth, 3 vols. (London: Master, 1867) 2: 7. For an account of the significance of this act of collaboration, see Butler 281-82.

old friend's improvements, and by farther civilizing the people of the Islands, all of whom were warmly attached to him" (528; ch. 16). Ormond is now brother to the truant Dora, husband to Florence, guardian of Tommy, and master to the tenants on the Black Island. His passions are now bridled, and he has become an Irish Sir Charles Grandison. Like his fictional model, Ormond fulfils "every duty of his station in society, eminently useful, respected and beloved, as brother, friend, master of a family, guardian, and head of a large estate" (294; ch. 8). The prediction Lady Annaly made when the shooting of Moriarty disrupted Castle Hermitage is now fulfilled: Ormond is "a useful, amiable, and admirable member of society" (251; ch. 3).

Ormond's usefulness rests primarily upon his capacity to fulfil the role of country gentleman. The enlightened landlord described in Professional Education, and in novels such as Ennui (1809) and The Absentee (1812), is a crucial masculine ideal for Edgeworth.¹¹ She maintains that the rationally educated landowner is capable of governing his own passions and the passions of his dependents and thus is "as free" as "human nature

¹¹ The importance of the figure of the country gentleman to Edgeworth is evident in the stress she places on the danger of absentee landowners who rely on agents to provide ready money, and refuse to govern their tenants well. Her best known presentation of the ineffective landowner and the grasping agent is found in Castle Rackrent (1800). Inadequate English landowners are less common in her work but can be found in "The Contrast" of Popular Tales (1804). In Professional Education, Edgeworth treats the country gentleman as a professional man. See Professional Education (London: Johnson, 1809) ch. 5. All further references to this text will be incorporated parenthetically in the text.

will permit" (Professional Education 279; ch. 5). Since he is free from pecuniary obligations to others and immune to the temptations of fashionable life, Edgeworth's country gentleman embodies intellectual, political, and moral independence. In the midst of his domestic circle, he enjoys "friendship, love, and philosophic ease," and from this point of stability he is able to govern others (Professional Education 279; ch. 5). His creation of a rational domestic circle enables him to improve the lives of his tenants by rewarding those who are diligent and by guaranteeing that the administration of justice is based upon reason rather than prejudice or self-interest. Such a man performs his "duties, public and private, with knowledge as well as zeal," thus diffusing "a portion of happiness on all within the sphere of his influence" (Professional Education 279; ch. 5). This is the role Ormond chooses, and he and Florence continue on the Black Islands in "perfect felicity," bringing enlightenment to their tenants, and fulfilling Edgeworth's domestic and social ideals (538; ch. 33).

Chapter Six

"Few Actions and Many Words":

Helen and the Limits of Domestic Reading

Midway through Helen (1834), Maria Edgeworth's final novel, Lady Davenant, the novel's maternal figure, offers Helen Stanley, the novel's heroine, some familiar Edgeworthian advice. Helen is being courted by two superficially similar men of letters, Granville Beauclerc and Horace Churchill. Lady Davenant suggests that Helen may discern the true nature of each man by attending to his words, for "there are few actions and many words in life" (144; ch. 15).¹ And indeed Helen is able to distinguish rather easily between the two by attending not only to their own words but also to the ways in which they respond to the words of others. The courtship plot of Helen thus conforms to the pattern Edgeworth developed in earlier works, in which the responses of individuals to textual situations reveal their propriety and willingness to be accommodated within a domestic circle. In works such as Ormond, "Forester," Belinda, and Letters for Literary Ladies domestic reading triumphs over alternate modes of reading, ensuring domestic happiness and social order by containing and directing desire into useful and domestic modes of expression. In Helen, however, the capacity of domestic reading

¹ Unlike the rest of the novels contained in Tales and Novels, Helen is divided into three volumes. While the pagination is continuous, the chapter numbering is not. In the interest of facilitating reference, I cite the chapters as consecutively numbered in modern editions of Helen.

to provide order and stability is placed in question. Helen, the novel's exemplary reader, is drawn into increasingly disruptive and improper situations in which her well-developed ability to read domestically cannot help her. The primary threat does not, however, arise from the difficulty of interpreting men's words, as Lady Davenant's advice would suggest, but from difficulties posed by women's words.

The plot of the novel is fairly straightforward. As the novel begins, Helen is in mourning for her uncle and guardian whose death has left her in a financially awkward situation: his debts have consumed the fortune that was to be her portion. No longer an heiress, Helen discovers that most of her acquaintances are profligate in their letters of sympathy but parsimonious in their letters of invitation. Just as she is beginning to lose heart, Cecilia Clarendon, a childhood friend who has recently been married, sends her a generously worded invitation to join her, General Clarendon, and Lord and Lady Davenant (Cecilia's parents) at Clarendon Park. Helen happily and gratefully accepts this offer, eager to see Cecilia and Lady Davenant again after a separation of two years. While at Clarendon Park, Helen is courted by Granville Beauclerc, General Clarendon's ward, and by Horace Churchill, a man of fashion. Following many complications, she accepts Beauclerc's proposal. Before the marriage can take place, however, Helen's reputation is compromised by Cecilia Clarendon's lies.

As a child, Helen earned Lady Davenant's esteem by

repeatedly summoning the strength of mind and character to tell those whom she loved (and those whom she feared) unpleasant truths. Cecilia, on the other hand, lacks Helen's strength of mind and habitually resorts to evasion, omission, and prevarication whenever she faces an awkward or unpleasant situation. As the novel unfolds, Cecilia tells more elaborate and more dangerous lies, and these lies are increasingly linked to a refusal to accept the limitations placed by feminine propriety upon women's ability to speak of matters of the heart. Before her marriage, Cecilia had entered into an indecorous clandestine correspondence with the dissolute and now dead Henry D'Aubigny, and when these letters are sent to General Clarendon, who has an overly-rigid notion of feminine propriety, Cecilia asks Helen to claim them as her own. In a misguided attempt to spare Lady Davenant pain, Helen allows the letters to be attributed to her. By acquiescing to Cecilia's lies, Helen implicitly accepts responsibility for an improper articulation of female desire and thus compromises her status as a domestic reader.

Helen's initial acceptance of the authorship of Cecilia's texts is damaging enough, but the misattribution gains further disruptive power when the letters are augmented by scandalous interpolations and printed as a chapter in the salacious Memoirs of the late Col. D---v; or, Reminiscences of a Roué. Cecilia continues to refuse to acknowledge the letters, and Helen refuses to redeem herself by revealing her friend's secrets. Once the

letters are made public and General Clarendon withdraws his approval for the marriage, Helen breaks her engagement to Beauclerc. Beauclerc, however, refuses to break the engagement, and after much suffering on Helen's part, they are married. At the same time, Cecilia's character and marriage deteriorate, as she is drawn into increasingly dissolute company in a futile attempt to hide the truth about the D'Aubigny letters. Her estrangement from her husband is resolved only when her dying mother intervenes on her behalf.

Edgeworth initially reaffirms the principles of domestic reading in Lady Davenant's own transformation from a fashionable woman into a domestic woman, and in Helen's ability to discern the true characters of Beauclerc and Churchill. In any other Edgeworth novel, the adoption of domestic reading would guarantee the happiness of a character, but in Helen domestic reading becomes ineffective when it is most needed. It proves inadequate when faced with prevarication and with the promiscuous circulation of a woman's words within a fashionable literary culture. Given that Helen is presented as an embodiment of truthfulness and integrity, her inability to persuade Cecilia to tell the truth and to protect herself from literary scandal betrays an uneasiness at the heart of Edgeworth's model of domestic reading. The consequences of Helen's acquiescence in Cecilia's careless and illicit articulation of female desire in the D'Aubigny letters suggest that the power of domestic reading

to control female desires is limited. In her last novel, Edgeworth exposes domestic reading as vulnerable to even the slightest deviations from domestic propriety.

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In her portrait of Lady Davenant, the wife of a prominent politician, Edgeworth recapitulates the familiar trope of domestic reading, and the transformation of a woman of fashion into a domestic woman recalls the progress of Belinda's Lady Delacour. In a private conversation with Helen, Lady Davenant recounts the history of her life in the mock-heroic terms of the anti-romance, revealing that reading has been instrumental in shaping her life at several critical junctures. The most significant of these occurs after her reading of Germaine de Stael's Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française (1818).² Mortified by de Stael's assertion that although "there may be women distinguished as writers in England, there are no ladies who have any great conversational and political influence in society," Lady Davenant resolves to become a political woman (69; ch. 8). She sets about assembling "an audience" round her and begins to "exhibit" herself "in the character of a female politician" (70; ch. 8). This conjunction

² For Edgeworth's ambivalent view of the writings and personality of Germaine de Stael, see Marilyn Butler and Christina E. Colvin, "Maria Edgeworth et Delphine," Cahiers staëliens 26-27 (1979): 77-91.

of reading and self-display places the unreformed Lady Davenant within the trope of fashionable reading. Although her husband proves to be impervious to her political manoeuvring, she rapidly acquires a flattering audience consisting of those who futilely hope to induce her to influence her husband on their behalf. She relishes the "incense" of flattery her audience offers until she is "quite intoxicated" (70; ch. 8). As Edgeworth's language suggests, Lady Davenant enjoys an illicit pleasure in imagining she has political power and in displaying her supposed political acumen. But the fantasies engendered by her vanity and her reading are punctured by the intervention of a friend willing to reveal to Lady Davenant the unpleasant truth that one of her admirers has been busily lampooning her in a rival salon.

This salutary shock coincides with a change in the government, and Lady Davenant retreats with her husband to their country house. Giving up her fashionable salon and her futile attempts to wield political power, she now begins to find a place for herself in the circle of thinking men that forms around her husband. Instead of immersing herself in "such reading as ladies read," Lady Davenant takes up the serious study of political theory and history, so as "to keep pace with Lord Davenant and his highly informed friends" (78-79; ch. 8). This course of corrective reading, along with a parallel course of corrective conversation with more knowledgeable men, transforms Lady Davenant from the political hostess of a fashionable salon who attempts to manipulate her husband's power into a domestic woman who assists

her husband in his political endeavours by using the proper feminine mode of influence.' The reformed Lady Davenant continues to be engaged in political questions. As she points out to Helen, "female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others; but this influence should always be domestic, not public" (261; ch. 28). Lady Davenant assures Helen that she has successfully turned away from the public world in which women's political interests can only be understood as "interfering" (260; ch. 28). Her domesticity, she argues, guarantees that her political interest will never again leave her vulnerable to the seductions of the fashionable world.

The shift in Lady Davenant's relationship to the fashionable world is manifested most clearly in her collection of books and letters. The morning after Helen's arrival at Clarendon Park, Helen and Lady Davenant begin a familiar conversation about Helen's childhood and Cecilia's marriage, but their tête-à-tête is ended by the arrival of an important packet of papers from Lord Davenant's secretary. While she reads the most urgent letters, Lady Davenant suggests Helen amuse herself with "arranging the books on that table, or in looking over the letters in that portfolio" (19; ch. 3). The books Lady Davenant refers to are those that had accumulated in her carriage as she travelled through Europe. The use of a group of texts to

For the differentiation between women's power and women's influence as it was articulated during the period in which Edgeworth wrote, see Judith L. Newton, Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860 (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981).

characterize an individual's mind is typical of Edgeworth; what is striking about this collection is that it simultaneously conveys Lady Davenant's position as the wife of a prominent politician and her rejection of the world of fashion. Included among her books are "presentation copies, as they are called, from several of the first authors of our own, and foreign countries; some with dedications to Lady Davenant; others with inscriptions expressing respect or propitiating favour, or anxious for judgment" (19; ch. 3). In addressing a series of public and private dedications to Lady Davenant, these "first authors" attempt to cast her as a literary patron, distributing various forms of largesse to her clients in exchange for adept flattery. Such presentation copies are the residue of the intoxicating but ultimately empty flattery Lady Davenant received when she was the centre of a fashionable salon. Although she is still offered this flattery, she is unmoved by it, as her chilly reception of Horace Churchill, virtuoso manipulator of fashionable flattery, demonstrates. In effect, Lady Davenant refuses to participate in fashionable literary culture, and her refusal is most clearly demonstrated in the alternate private literary collection she has assembled: the portfolio of letters that Helen prefers to the books with their effusive dedications.

Lady Davenant's portfolio is a far less heterogeneous collection than her heap of travelling books. More important, it represents an ideal literary culture in that it is devoid of flattery, solicitations of favour, or specious self-display.

While Lady Davenant's collection includes letters "whose very signatures would have driven the first of modern autograph collectors distracted with joy," it contains "none of those nauseous notes of compliment, none of those epistles adulatory, degrading to those who write, and equally degrading to those to whom they are written" (19; ch. 3). Lady Davenant's letter writers are untouched by the world of literary competition for money and prestige, and thus her portfolio stands as the textual embodiment of the domestic literary salon Edgeworth idealizes as the source of individual and social order.

Helen's rejection of the flattering heap of books and her response to Lady Davenant's portfolio of letters immediately identifies her as a domestic reader. She is struck by the literary qualities of the letters she reads, but her response is measured and deliberate, devoid of the indiscriminate rapacity associated with the female reader. She sets aside letter after letter as "too good to be read first" until she has surveyed the entire collection, and she then responds to the profusion by systematizing it, a strategy typical of the rational reader (20; ch. 3). Glancing at "the contents" of each one, she begins "to deal them round alphabetically" (20; ch. 3). Helen is an orderly handler of texts, but she is not a pedantic one; she leaves off her cataloguing when she is "struck by a passage" in one of the letters. Helen reads the whole letter, discovering it (and others by the same writer) to be "striking and interesting," free of "affectation," "quite easy and natural," full of "real feeling

and genius" (20; ch. 3). She concludes that there is "something romantic and uncommon in the character of the writer" (20; ch. 3). Helen is undeterred when she finds that the author is "unknown to fame," and her refusal to judge literary quality by referring to the author's fame (that is, to his position within the hierarchy of literary fashionability) confirms her status as an exemplary domestic reader (20; ch. 3).

The letters Helen admires have been written by Granville Beauclerc, Lady Davenant's protégé, General Clarendon's ward, and, eventually, Helen's husband. Thus Lady Davenant's portfolio of letters not only testifies to her transformation from an intoxicated lover of literary flattery to a sober judge of realities, but it also introduces Helen to the character of her future husband without the sexual undercurrents that would unnerve the timid heroine. Unfortunately, the moral authority of Lady Davenant's domestic literary salon is severely circumscribed by her daughter's indiscretions. Lady Davenant's ability to contain the desires of the members of her household is thwarted by her daughter's repeated refusal to remain silent about the possibility that Beauclerc may be attracted to Helen. Lady Davenant warns Cecilia about the dangers of building "matrimonial castles in the air" on Helen's behalf, but Cecilia persists in her matchmaking (53; ch. 6). In effect, Cecilia's refusal to remain silent about Helen's desirability undoes all that which her mother's portfolio of letters accomplishes.

Cecilia's manoeuvring precipitates Helen's fall from

innocent admiration of Beauclerc's letters into embarrassed and premature consciousness of sexual possibility. In a garden scene that is both playful and foreboding, Cecilia manages a conversation so as to convey her expectation that Helen will soon be courted by Beauclerc. She begins her matchmaking by telling Helen that a match between Beauclerc and Esther Clarendon, her sister-in-law, has been the subject of family discussion. Cecilia imparts this gossip to Helen in a series of circumlocutions with many significant pauses and glances, a manner of telling designed to convey information without seeming to violate the codes of propriety and without requiring the teller to be accountable for the message indirectly disclosed. Helen responds to Cecilia's narrative method with a gesture that recalls Milton's Eve, an allusion whose significance will gradually become apparent: "Helen felt curious, and ashamed of her curiosity; she turned away, to raise the branches of some shrub, which were drooping from the weight of their flowers" (45; ch. 6). Cecilia expects that when Beauclerc meets Helen he will set Esther aside, for Beauclerc "has eyes as well as ears, and contrasts will strike. I know who I wish should strike him, as she strikes me--and I think--I hope--" (45; ch. 6). Helen, however, refuses the sham delicacy of Cecilia's vagueness, and when asked if she understands the unstated meaning, bluntly replies: "You mean that Mr. Beauclerc is to marry Miss Clarendon" (45; ch. 6). Though Cecilia means all this "most kindly," Helen is "sorry that some things had been said" (45-46; ch. 6). Her

delicacy' is mortified by Cecilia's insinuations. Cecilia's manoeuvring has destroyed the innocence of Helen's enjoyment of Beauclerc's letters. Helen herself is "conscious of having been interested by those letters of Mr. Beauclerc's; but a particular thought had now been put into her mind, and she could never more say, never more feel, that such a thought had not come into her head" (46; ch. 6). Her hitherto innocent literary pleasure is thus transformed into a sign of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual awareness. To Helen, "it seemed as if somewhat of the freshness, the innocence, of her mind was gone from her" (46; ch. 6). Edgeworth here picks up the underlying echoes of an edenic temptation scene, casting Helen as a reluctantly corrupted Eve, and Cecilia as the tempting and despoiling serpent. Belatedly realizing that her hints have only made the naturally timid and modest Helen awkward and self-conscious, Cecilia tells Helen that Beauclerc is secretly engaged to be married: "Helen was delighted. Cecilia could form no farther schemes on her account, and she felt relieved from all her awkwardness" (85; ch. 9). Once Helen's literary pleasure is again divorced from a suggestion of sexual desire, her status as Beauclerc's audience, the receptive partner of a literary exchange, ceases to be a source of discomfort. Cecilia's strategic lie is temporarily successful, and a courtship that is not a courtship, at least for Helen, begins.

Helen is courted by two men, both of whom are defined by their attitudes toward literary matters. By following Lady

Davenant's advice and judging Granville Beauclerc and Horace Churchill on the basis of their words and their relationship to the words of others, Helen is able to discern their true characters. Granville Beauclerc is a man of many enthusiasms; and although he is virtuous, he is frequently "rashly generous" (84; ch. 9). General Clarendon impatiently accuses him of needlessly indulging himself in metaphysical speculations. Beauclerc's contact with Lady Davenant, however, gradually teaches him to moderate his impulsive speculations and to balance his enthusiasm with reason. Horace Churchill, on the other hand, is anything but generous. He is a fashionable literary man whose claim to notice is his ability to purvey biting gossip: as Lady Davenant puts it, he possesses the "three new graces"--"Satire, scandal, and gossip" (134; ch. 14). He spares no one, satirizing even the most inoffensive once they have left the room. Churchill is, in fact, a denizen of the fashionable world Lady Davenant left behind, and his presence in her daughter's home hints at Cecilia's as yet hidden flaw.

Churchill, like Lady Davenant, is intoxicated by the fashionable world. He inherited his fortune "too early," and consequently "lapped the stream of prosperity," which was "sweet with flattery," long before he was able to discern that such intoxication ought to be avoided (171; ch. 18). His primary motivation whether he is gossiping about his fellow house-guests or courting Helen is to display his talents and to maintain his status within the world of fashion. He spends much of his time

at Clarendon Park fretting over the threat he believes Beauclerc poses to his prominence. He soon begins "cordially to detest Beauclerc," whom he views "with scornful, yet with jealous eyes; but his was the jealousy of vanity, not of love; it regarded Lady Davenant and his fashionable reputation in the first place--Helen only in the second" (143; ch. 15). His irritation with Beauclerc is only increased when he realizes that Beauclerc's literary efforts attract Helen while she remains impervious to his own talents.

Not surprisingly, the courtship of Helen and Beauclerc is conducted through their shared response to specifically literary situations. Helen recognizes allusions made by Beauclerc that simply puzzle others. Her skills as an "indefatigable" book hunter balance the seemingly directionless energies of Beauclerc's literary enthusiasms (160; ch. 17). By cheerfully searching out obscure books for Beauclerc's latest projects, she demonstrates that she is both a natural inhabitant of the library and a suitable mate for Beauclerc. Further, Helen is an adept interpreter of Beauclerc's sometimes confused literary documents. On one occasion, for instance, she discovers that he has "scribbled" notes for a play entitled "Tarquin the Optimist, or the Temple of Destiny" on top of the architectural drawing and notes for a house he is restoring. General Clarendon, who needs the architectural information embedded in Beauclerc's literary sketch, sees in this only confusion, and Cecilia sees in it only comedy. But Helen is able to decipher Beauclerc's texts, to find

his meaning, and to reproduce it in a useable and ordered form. Helen's domestic reading is thus able to contain and order Beauclerc's enthusiasm. Their compatibility is summed up by a scene of shared reading: "Beauclerc, seated on the ottoman, was showing to Helen some passages in the book he was reading; she read with attention, and from time to time looked up with a smile of intelligence and approbation" (140; ch. 14).

Churchill's courtship of Helen is similarly associated with textual matters, but it is singularly unsuccessful. His pursuit of her is thwarted from the beginning since Helen quickly discerns that Churchill is a performer and that he saves his best efforts for audiences whose praise he values. Early in his visit to Clarendon Park he rudely abandons a conversation he begins with her "the instant he caught the eye of a grander auditor" (130; ch. 13). Helen quite accurately concludes from this episode that Churchill would never "talk for only one insignificant hearer, could not bring out his good things, unless he felt secure of possessing the attention" of the entire company (130; ch. 13). Churchill's pursuit of Helen is the result of his desire less to attract Helen than to displace Beauclerc from the centre of attention at Clarendon Park. His courtship of Helen is simply an expression of his vanity and an attempt to assert his status.

Although Helen is amused by some of Churchill's conversation, she rapidly determines that he regularly embellishes his conversations with observations he has lifted

from other writers' work, usually unknown or anonymous writers. The narrator informs us, for example, that during a discussion of hawking in which Beauclerc is constantly citing the books he has just read on the subject, Churchill offers "an excellent observation" (158; ch. 17). Unfortunately, he neglects to tell his audience that he had lifted the anecdote "from a Quarterly Review [sic]" (158; ch. 17). While no one else seems to suspect Churchill of padding his conversations with the ideas of others, Helen, as exemplary domestic reader, discovers his frauds on several occasions. She is shocked to discover that Churchill has listened to a private conversation between herself and Beauclerc, and then taken one of Beauclerc's literary anecdotes and retold it as if it were his own. In another instance, she is surprised to find one of Churchill's maxims "word for word in a book, from which Churchill's card fell as she opened it" (176; ch. 18).

Churchill's failure to acknowledge his literary indebtedness is a distinctly Edgeworthian sign of his lack of moral character, and Helen's negative evaluation of Churchill's character is confirmed when he inadvertently reveals the full extent of his fraudulence and his vanity. When Helen praises the poetry of Miss Mapletofft, one of Churchill's protégées, Churchill attempts to refute every word of praise Helen bestows on Miss Mapletofft's poetry. In a preposterous fit of vanity, he forgets that the poems Helen praises are the very ones he had once praised and drawn to her attention. Even more damaging is his inadvertent admission that he wrote the dedicatory poem in which he is

praised. While "the blindness of his vanity" renders him incapable of seeing "the absurdity" of this situation, Helen sees it quite clearly, and shortly after this episode, she decides to put an end to Churchill's fitful courtship (178; ch. 18).

Helen is aware that she ought to govern her response to Churchill's fitful courtship according to the "ladies' code." As the narrator puts it, this code maintains that "a woman is never to understand that a gentleman's attentions mean anything more than common civility; she is supposed never to see his mind, however he may make it visible, till he declares it in words" (189; ch. 20). Nevertheless, having determined that she could "never make the happiness or redeem the character" of such a mean-spirited man, Helen decides to make it clear to Churchill "not only that he had not made any impression, but that he never could make any impression, on her heart" (189; ch. 20). In refusing Churchill before she has been asked, Helen wounds Churchill's vanity yet again, and she earns his bitter and lasting enmity. Churchill begins to exact his revenge by making Helen the subject of his persiflage. His malice, in concert with the malice of others who have been confounded by Helen's honesty, soon finds its way into the more damaging medium of print.

Helen's ability to discern the genuine characters of Churchill and Beauclerc is the last demonstration of the efficacy of

domestic reading in the novel. While the two courtships occupy the first two volumes of the novel, the last concentrates on the complications that ensue from Helen's precipitate rejection of Churchill and her acquiescence in Cecilia's denial of her first love, Henry D'Aubigny. Significantly, both of Helen's errors occur during Lady Davenant's absence. The events that follow these errors suggest that the authority of domestic reading is precarious and that the ability of the domestic reader to protect herself or others is fragile. Helen is unable to prevent the scandal that nearly ruins her reputation, and she is equally unable to persuade Cecilia to prevent that ruin by telling her husband the truth.

The spoiling of Helen's reputation takes place in two distinct stages, and it is associated with two distinct forms of textuality. In the first, Helen allows a package of love-letters to be attributed to her in order to protect Lady Davenant, who has had a series of seizures and is about to leave with her husband for a diplomatic posting in Russia. In this instance, the scandal remains private, a subject of family dissension, and the complications that ensue from it are, initially at least, easily contained. In the second instance, however, Helen is not faced with holograph letters but with scandal-mongering newspaper accounts of her character, and with a printed and falsified version of the original letters. Helen's association with the second appearance of these letters is far more damaging because of the publicity that ensues from print; once the letters and the

story appear in print neither the literary transgression imputed to Helen nor the consequence of her passive lying can be easily contained. The publication of the letters shatters the Clarendon domestic circle; ultimately, even Horace Churchill is harmed by the scandal that Helen's falsehood and Cecilia's betrayal allow to circulate. Domestic reading is incapable of repairing the damage caused by Helen's and Cecilia's lies.

The holograph love-letters arrive at Clarendon Park through the agency of a servant Helen has caused to be dismissed for copying and circulating Lady Davenant's political correspondence. In a striking contrast to the events that follow the circulation of the D'Aubigny letters, Lady Davenant, with Helen's help, quickly determines how the letters have left her house, stops their circulation, and repairs the damage their circulation has caused. By lying about the D'Aubigny letters, Helen forfeits the integrity that enables her to help Lady Davenant, and the power of the D'Aubigny letters to damage Helen is thus intensified. The dismissed servant anonymously forwards a package of letters he believes to be Helen's to General Clarendon in an attempt to disgrace, or at the very least embarrass, her. (The servant has discovered the letters after snooping in the desk of his subsequent employer, and he makes and keeps a copy of the letters which forms the basis of the published version). These letters, however, have been written by Cecilia to her first love, Colonel Henry D'Aubigny, a man she has repeatedly and falsely assured her mother and her husband meant nothing to her.

A series of marital disasters in General Clarendon's family has convinced him that a woman's sexual continence is dubious at the best of times and that a woman who has not married her first love (that is, a woman who has desired another man) is particularly suspect. He is convinced that thoughts of lovers are as dangerous as actual sexual contact; in this belief, he articulates an extreme version of the conduct manual writers' fear that a woman may be sexually contaminated through her imagination and through her reading. When he receives the bundle of letters, he opens one and begins to read it before he realizes that it is not addressed to him. He reads the first line--"My dear, too dear Henry"--and no more (293; ch. 31). He believes the handwriting is Cecilia's and confronts her. Cecilia, whose ability to tell the truth has never been strong, immediately denies that the handwriting is hers and insinuates that Helen's handwriting is nearly identical to her own.

Cecilia's lie is rendered more credible by a series of authenticating circumstances. She has prepared the way for this lie much earlier; when she was engaged to Clarendon, she denied that D'Aubigny was her suitor by insisting instead that he was interested only in Helen. Cecilia's lie is also authenticated by her inability to blush. Helen always blushes when D'Aubigny's name is mentioned, for she suspects that Cecilia has not told her husband or her mother the whole story; Cecilia, on the other hand, always hears his name mentioned with "perfect self-possession" (274; ch. 29). The misattribution is completed by

General Clarendon's discovery of a miniature of Helen amongst the letters. The miniature was stolen by D'Aubigny, not because he admired the sitter, but because he admired the artist, Cecilia. Cecilia, however, suppresses this information, allowing Clarendon to interpret the miniature as a final authenticating sign that the letters were written by Helen.

When Cecilia is unable to convince her husband that she is best suited to return the letters to Helen, she surreptitiously goes to Helen and begs her to do "the simplest thing in the world, but the greatest favour--the greatest service" (281; 30). She asks Helen "just to receive a packet" from Clarendon. There is no need, she insists, of viewing the transaction as a lie: "He will ask if it is for you. And you will just accept of it. I don't ask you to say it is yours, or to say a word about it--only receive it for me" (281; ch. 30). Helen's desire to please Cecilia and protect Lady Davenant mislead her, and she does not appear to notice the inconsistencies in Cecilia's account of the letters. When Cecilia asks Helen to accept the letters, she begins by asserting that they were simply "foolish letters" (284; ch. 30). When pressed by Helen, she denies that she can remember what the letters contain: "I cannot recollect--I cannot be certain what there is in them" (284; ch. 30). As Helen encourages her to tell her husband about the letters since they are merely foolish letters, Cecilia becomes more and more agitated, revealing that though she now knows she never loved D'Aubigny, the content of the letters suggests otherwise. Her

husband "from even seeing those letters" might think she did love D'Aubigny: "The very fact of having written such letters would be destruction to me with Clarendon" (286; ch. 30). Cecilia's fear is at once a sign of the weakness of her character and of the imprudence of her written expression of desire. Even if her letters are merely foolish, their existence nevertheless testifies to inadequately disciplined female sexuality.

Since Lady Davenant is very ill, Helen temporizes and agrees to accept the package, even though she knows that to receive the letters "in silence" will still "be telling or acting an absolute falsehood" (288; ch. 31). She believes that Cecilia will fulfil her promise and tell General Clarendon the whole story once her mother is out of danger. In a mortifying interview with Clarendon, Helen accepts the letters, and she learns that, contrary to what Cecilia believes, Clarendon is less concerned that Cecilia might have written the letters than that she might have lied about them. The ability to lie to one's husband, it turns out, is the thing that Clarendon fears most of all, for such lies pave the way to irreparable failings. Helen takes this news to Cecilia, reminds her of her promise to tell her husband the truth, and urges her to summon up the necessary courage. Helen, however, overestimates Cecilia's integrity, and overlooks the many instances in which Cecilia demonstrates a cavalier attitude towards honesty and promise-keeping. Instead of telling her husband the truth, Cecilia frantically burns the letters, crying that she "would not look at any one of them again for the

world; I know no more what is in them than if I had never written them" (303-04; ch. 32). Cecilia assumes that this confabulation guarantees the end of the problem and absolves her from her promise to Helen.

The danger of clandestine correspondence is, of course, one of the domestic novel's well-worn topics. Edgeworth censures Cecilia for this practice, which has the potential to encourage illicit desire, but her emphasis falls upon Cecilia's culpability in allowing Helen to bear the consequences of the correspondence. Except for one opening line, the letters themselves are never quoted; what is important to the novel is the characters' responses to the letters. Cecilia's refusal to acknowledge the letters is in the end as damaging as her expression of inappropriate desire. Helen muddles on, and the plans for her marriage to Beauclerc continue, despite a succession of increasingly awkward and embarrassing lies and Clarendon's increasingly chilly response to her.

Helen's second and more perilous contact with Cecilia's and D'Aubigny's letters occurs shortly after Lord and Lady Davenant's departure for Russia. Clarendon has received warning from Miss Maplettoft, Churchill's former protégée, that a volume "highly injurious" to Helen's character has been printed, and he undertakes a trip to town to avert its publication (345; ch. 36). Though they know nothing of the journey's real purpose, Helen and Cecilia delay the wedding preparations and accompany Clarendon to London. Once the two women arrive in London, they begin to hear

unsettling whispers about Helen's character and her postponed marriage. The nature of the murmuring becomes clear to Helen when General Clarendon presents her with the first bound copy of D'Aubigny's memoirs, telling her that it has come to be printed as a result of a "miserable intrigue between booksellers and literary manufacturers" (345; ch. 36). Clarendon unhappily informs Helen that she has "enemies who evidently desire to destroy" her reputation and prevent her marriage to Beauclerc: "For this purpose the slanderous press has been set at work, the gossiping part of the public has had its vile curiosity excited" (345-46; ch. 36).

The identities of the "literary manufacturers" are difficult to pinpoint. Various figures have a hand in circulating the rumours and letters: Sir Thomas D'Aubigny, the brother of Cecilia's first suitor; Carlos, Lady Davenant's dismissed servant; Horace Churchill, Helen's rejected and vengeful suitor; Lady Katrine Hawksby, one of Cecilia's house guests whom Helen has offended by her honesty, her youth, and her impending marriage; and Lord Beltravers, a false friend of Beauclerc's who wishes to marry his sister to Beauclerc once Helen's reputation has been destroyed. The profusion of conspirators reflects the profusion and multiplicity that is characteristic of the fashionable world in Edgeworth's works. The difficulty of identifying a single person who is responsible for the publication of the letters also highlights the difficulty the publicity of print poses to Edgeworth's trope of domestic

reading.⁴

The trope of female reading not only condemns the individual woman's inability to control the expression of her desires but also condemns the indiscriminate production and circulation of texts that emerge with the burgeoning of print culture. While Edgeworth's trope of domestic reading in the past has been able to regulate the expression of female desire, in this final novel, it is less successful in its encounters with the conjunction of print, female desire, and lies. Edgeworthian domestic order depends upon the ability of its members to accept responsibility for their actions and, by extension, for the texts they read or write. However, both the fashionable world and the print culture associated with it favour multiplicity, novelty, and scandal over certainty; the authenticity of a story or a text is of little importance to fashionable print culture.

When Cecilia denies her authorship and Helen falsely claims authorship, they disrupt the certainty of definition on which the domestic circle depends, and this disruption is inevitably heightened by the publication of the letters. Helen's and Cecilia's willingness to participate in a sequence of misleading actions which are designed to hide, rather than to clarify,

⁴ For an account of the publicity, profusion and multiplicity associated with print culture, see Alvin Kernan, Printing Technology, Letters And Samuel Johnson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

⁵ On the relationship of the trope of female reading to print culture, see Ina Ferris, The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) ch. 1.

authorial responsibility violates domestic propriety and cripples domestic reading. Lady Davenant's earlier ability to stop the circulation of her political correspondence was derived both from the limitations posed on the circulation by the letters' manuscript form and from her willingness to acknowledge that she has written the letters. By contrast, the circulation of Cecilia's letters first in manuscript and later in print form is surprisingly persistent.¹ Even though General Clarendon supervises the destruction of all the printed copies of the letters, the texts continue to damage Helen.

Shortly after General Clarendon destroys D'Aubigny's memoirs, he asks Helen to read the last copy. The original letters have been augmented with licentious passages, and, in preparation for a potential legal action, Clarendon insists that Helen mark those passages in the letters that she did write. Helen begins her reading task with much foreboding, but she begins it all the same. Her skill as a domestic reader is now frustrated, for "in each of these letters, there were some passages, some expressions, which certainly were Cecilia's, but mixed with others, which as certainly were not hers" (369; ch. 39). She finds that "truth and falsehood were so mixed up in every paragraph," and events she herself "witnessed" so "misrepresented," that it all becomes "inextricable confusion" (369; ch. 39). The confusion and multiplicity of the fashionable

¹ On this point see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 195.

world and print culture have infected the letters, and Helen is no longer able to distinguish between true and false. She must ask Cecilia to assist her.

But domestic reading functions only when it is guaranteed by its participants' truthfulness, and Cecilia continues to betray Helen and the domestic circle by refusing to read properly. She "fervently" insists that she will mark the appropriate passages, and she has no "no difficulty in recollecting, in distinguishing" her own "foolish girlish nonsense" from the "interpolated" scandal (372-73; ch. 39). However, she avoids "putting her mark of acknowledgement to any of those expressions which most clearly prove her love for Colonel D'Aubigny" (373; ch. 39). Cecilia rationalizes this deceit by telling herself that an eventual confession of her authorship would be possible only if she now left out "certain expressions" which, if marked, might "remain for ever fixed in Clarendon's mind, and for which she could never be forgiven" (373; ch. 39). Cecilia thus compounds the error of the illicit expression of desire by refusing to acknowledge it; only by acknowledging, by offering a truthful reading of the letters, can she or Helen be redeemed.

Through the agency of Miss Mapletofft, General Clarendon obtains the copies of the D'Aubigny letters as they stood before the lewd additions. When Clarendon compares the marked passages to the unamended holograph letters, he perceives that "every strong expression, every word, in short, which could show" the letter writer's attachment to D'Aubigny has been left

unacknowledged (376; ch. 39). He concludes that "the truth is not in her," and that Helen is "deceit--double-dealing in everything she does" (376; ch. 39). Clarendon's interpretation is flawed only in that Cecilia is the double-dealer, not Helen. As a result of Clarendon's contempt for her, Helen breaks off her engagement to Beauclerc and retreats to Wales, where she falls into a physical and mental decline and is cared for by Esther Clarendon. Cecilia continues to promise Helen that she will acknowledge the letters, but she repeatedly postpones doing so. Cecilia undergoes a similar decline brought on by the frantic participation in the fashionable world with which she attempts to assuage her remorse for having betrayed Helen and her husband. She spends little time at home with her husband or with her newborn son. Instead she has become intoxicated with gambling, telling more lies to excuse her frequent absences. Clarendon eventually discovers that Cecilia is constantly deceiving him, and requests a formal separation. At this point, the dying Lady Davenant returns to England.

Only when faced with her mother's return and with the inevitability of a separation does Cecilia attempt to redress the wrong she has done to Helen and to her husband. She makes her confession to her husband, but he remains impervious to her pleas and continues with his plans to separate from her. At this point, Edgeworth's conclusion slips into melodrama. Lady Davenant intervenes with Clarendon, but she speaks in the voice of the dying mother, not in the voice of the rational domestic

woman. She begs Clarendon to forgive her daughter, and she insists that Cecilia's crimes must be attributed to the mother, not to the daughter. Lady Davenant tells Clarendon that Cecilia is not the daughter she "might have had, but that is my own fault" (436; ch. 45). The daughter's lies, she asserts, are the result not so much of Cecilia's irresolute character as of bad mothering. Lady Davenant acknowledges that while she moderated her political ambitions by subordinating them to her husband's interests, she left Cecilia's education to a series of inadequate governesses and thus failed to fulfil the supervisory maternal role upon which Edgeworth's domestic circle relies.⁷

By asking that Lady Davenant represent the reformatory power of reading and at the same time the source of her daughter's flaws, Edgeworth exposes the vulnerability of her model of domestic reading. Even though she has become a domestic reader, Lady Davenant's interest in politics must be repudiated and condemned because it is a violation of domestic femininity. Similarly, Helen's precipitate rejection of Horace Churchill's suit is punished because it too is a violation of domestic norms. Cecilia's lies and her love letters are simply the most extreme violation of domestic propriety. The threat posed to domestic

⁷ Most of Edgeworth's fiction makes this claim. For a particularly clear instance of the supervisory power of the domestic woman see "The Good French Governess" of Moral Tales (1801) in which the governess restores order not only to her employer's children and servants but also transforms her employer into a domestic woman. Nancy Armstrong has identified the supervisory capacity of the domestic woman as crucial to the construction of the domestic circle, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 19.

order by all three women's errors is mitigated only by a rigorous reassertion of the necessity of feminine propriety. Thus Helen must suffer before she may marry, Cecilia must acknowledge her errors and accept the possibility that she has destroyed her marriage, and Lady Davenant, with whom the evasion of domestic feminine identity began, must die.

While Maria Edgeworth closes her earlier novels with confident demonstrations of the ability of domestic reading to restore or to create order in families and in characters' lives, the closure of Helen betrays an uneasy awareness of the limited nature of domestic reading. In this final novel Edgeworth portrays a domesticity that is vulnerable to the slightest deviation from the ideals of feminine propriety. Not only the flawed characters but also the most truthful and principled characters are unable to adhere to the discipline of domestic reading. In the fates of Lady Davenant, Cecilia, and Helen, Maria Edgeworth suggests that domestic reading fails without an exacting obedience to the codes of feminine propriety. Through her depiction of the difficulties faced by her heroines, Edgeworth insists that the articulation of desire or of the lack of desire has devastating consequences for women. The domestic reader may perceive desire, but she must express neither the presence of desire, as does Cecilia in her letters, nor the absence of desire, as does Helen in her premature rejection of Churchill's suit.

Maria Edgeworth's domestic reader, then, must essentially

remain receptive; she may be aware of the desires of men, but she must not articulate such knowledge. She may respond, but she may not initiate. Her ability to read and to discern the desires of others is the foundation of the domestic circle, but she may articulate her awareness of such desires in only the most indirect and circumscribed fashion. The ability of the domestic reader to sustain the domestic circle and social order Edgeworth derives from it is tenable only if women assiduously conform to the "ladies' code." There is no longer room for figures like the reformed Lady Delacour of Belinda. In the end Edgeworth insists that the domestic reader must always be a proper lady, her skills always confined within the boundaries of a propriety ever more precisely defined.

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