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Debates on Female Education: Constructing the
Middle Ground in Eighteenth-Century Women's
Magazines and the Novels of Fanny Burney and
Jane Austen

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the various strands of the female education debate which emerge from eighteenth-century conduct books, women's magazines and the novels of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. Across this body of work the main objective is to advise the middle-class woman about appropriate conduct in society. A surprising amount of consensus is shown to exist on this subject, even between conservative and radical writers. However, questions about gender equality placed conservative conduct-book writers and proto-feminists in ideologically opposed positions. In contrast, Burney, Austen and the authors of eighteenth-century magazines were unwilling either to demand gender equality or accept the inherent inferiority of the female sex. Taking a moderate stance in the female education debate, they either avoid extreme views or negotiate between them, often reaching contradictory conclusions. It will be argued, that the wide range of material and variety of opinions incorporated within these works, particularly the women's magazines, actively enabled the construction of a middle ground. This position was by no means stable and the parameters of what was considered acceptable and respectable for women were subject to continual modification. Central to the characterisation of the magazines as moderate works is the potential, built into the structure and integral to the content of these texts, for individual readers to resist meaning or interpret it in different ways. The novels portray the consequences of education through the integral detail of their heroines' lives. These works assume that domestic duties should be a priority for women, but they show that the education available to the female sex was inadequate for its purposes. Moderate writers are shown to adapt a variety of strategies in order to question the aims and objectives of female education without challenging the status quo.

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INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

'women could never be taught too much, as knowledge would qualify them to be proper companions for their husbands'

*'provided a woman can make a good pudding, cast an account, and keep her house neat, I think she may make a wife to please any reasonable man'*¹

Travelling on a stagecoach from Wincanton to London in 1789, governess Agnes Porter found herself engaged in a debate with her fellow passengers – three gentlemen shopkeepers and a young lady – on the subject of female education. As Porter records in a letter to her favourite pupil, the views of those present varied considerably. The excerpts above show the differing opinions of a middle-aged hatter who emphasised the importance of woman's role as rational companion, and a young glover who insisted that traditional housekeeping duties should continue to be a priority. The third shopkeeper also had an opinion on this matter: women would be taught their duty if they confined their reading to the bible. The conflicting expectations arising out of these different priorities placed the women aboard the stagecoach in a complicated position. As the gentlemen exchanged views about what kind of knowledge women should acquire, their two female travelling companions had to decide, not only what to learn, but what kind of image they wished to construct for themselves. The young lady, intent upon displaying herself as highly accomplished, overtly displayed her talents, first by entertaining the group with her singing and then by addressing Agnes in French. When it appeared that the governess could not understand her, she then greatly exaggerated her disbelief to emphasise the extent of her own learning. Agnes, however, worried about the opinions of the gentlemen they were travelling with, was merely feigning ignorance of the language. Ironically, when she later attempted to explain in French, once they were alone, that as their 'fellow travellers did not understand that language' she 'thought it better to decline the pleasure of answering her in French', it was the

¹ Joanna Martin (ed), *A Governess in the age of Jane Austen* (London: Humbledon, 1998) p. 81.

younger woman who had to admit that she was not familiar enough with the language to understand her.² While one woman deliberately concealed her skills and knowledge, the other affected an education she did not have.

Porter's account of this conversation with her fellow passengers records some of the complicated and contradictory attitudes which characterise eighteenth-century debates on female education. Throughout this period a variety of media, addressed to both men and women, including conduct books, periodicals, novels, histories of civilisation and treatises on human nature, scrutinised questions on female learning. The opinions proffered by the gentlemen aboard the stagecoach indicate two major preoccupations of these works – domesticity and religion. Despite the disagreement between the glover and the hatter about which specific duties a woman's education should prepare her to fulfil, both men assume that the overall objective of female learning is to produce good wives. The eighteenth-century witnessed a new emphasis upon training women to be wives, mothers and mistresses of households which undoubtedly resulted in some areas of learning being deemed inappropriate or unnecessary for the female sex. However, I will demonstrate that the increasing respect accorded to these roles also offered a new freedom to women which enabled them to extend, from within, the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Across a broad body of literature it was recognised that a range of skills and knowledge was requisite for the woman expected to safe-guard the morals of her children while being a supportive and rational companion to her husband. Religion, the other major area of education identified as particularly suited to women, could similarly be used to justify more extensive learning for the female sex. Rejecting the opinion of the old grocer aboard the stagecoach who insisted that women should confine their reading to the Bible, many female writers, from Mary Astell onwards, insisted that intellectual and spiritual development went hand-in-hand. We should not presume, therefore, that eighteenth-century women were passive dupes of a male-dominated ideology. Throughout this thesis I will be showing that many women formed their own opinions on what female education should prioritise and developed strategies to pursue their own goals and objectives. Aboard the stagecoach, Agnes Porter and her

² Martin, *Governess*, p. 82.

female travelling companion formulated deliberate responses to the shopkeepers' opinions. Although these deceptions may be interpreted at one level as attempts to conform to competing eighteenth-century educational ideals, clearly both women were quite capable of manipulating appearances for their own ends. Within the confines of this stagecoach, the choice either to resist or to conform to ideological pressures was neither straight-forward nor clear cut. Yet many eighteenth-century women successfully negotiated such complexities to achieve a useful and fulfilling education.

This thesis will look at the competing agendas which play out in different strands of the female education debate throughout the eighteenth century. It will investigate the varying responses and assumptions made by those advising upon the subject as well as consider the potential for middle-class female readers to promote, modify or resist such teachings. A central aim of the work is to show that eighteenth-century women did not passively absorb patriarchal views from their reading material and wider culture. Actively participating in debate about their own education, female writers and readers of this time performed complex negotiations between conservative and radical notions about women's abilities and relative position in society. I will focus upon the discussion of female education in eighteenth-century women's magazines - a source of largely untapped information on the range of contemporary attitudes which existed on this topic - and in the novels of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. We will see that while these works presume that women's lives will continue to revolve around the domestic sphere, they challenge in a number of ways assumptions about the inherent inferiority of the female sex. The attitude of these texts towards female learning, then, cannot be fully understood by referring only to the extreme positions of conservative and radical writers.³ I will be arguing that these works

³ Recent critical literature considering the interplay between conservative and radical ideas on female education have convincingly challenged the usefulness of the binary view implied in these terms. See Harriet Guest, *Small Changes: Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Anne Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002); Nicole Pohl and Betty A Schellenberg (eds) *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2003); Mary Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

stake out a middle ground in the female education debate by claiming respect for traditional feminine duties and demonstrating the range of skills and knowledge required by women within the home. Yet, we will see that this moderate position incorporates a surprisingly wide range of opinions and is fraught with complication. Although in some cases the middle ground is constructed by avoiding extreme views, we also see negotiations taking place between liberal and conservative beliefs which unite apparently incompatible assumptions, often without resolving inherent contradictions.

One significant difficulty arising from my chosen emphasis upon the moderate position is that practically all eighteenth-century texts which touch upon the subject of female education include both radical and conservative views. Even the most conservative conduct books which promote the inherent inferiority of the female sex, also emphasise the importance of women's civilising influence and recommend some form of education. Equally, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), generally recognised as one of the most radical texts in the female education debate, presumes that women's lives will continue to revolve around domestic duties. Some boundaries, therefore, have to be set up around my use of these terms if they are to have any value.⁴ Those texts and authors which I refer to as 'conservative' have been so labelled, because they overtly and consistently proclaim woman's intellectual inferiority, particularly calling into question the powers of female reasoning. On this basis, they attempt to restrict the experience of women, and educate specifically for the domestic sphere. Conversely, those writers I refer to as 'radical' insist that any differences between the abilities of the sexes are entirely the consequence of education. They claim that women have both a right and duty to be independent and responsible citizens. Although acknowledging that for most of the female sex, the roles of wife and mother would continue to be a priority, radical writers advocated an education which would prepare women to cope with any situation in which they found themselves. Writers and publications which borrow or

⁴ The necessity for setting out a definition of 'moderate' is highlighted in an article by Alison Sullo way where the term ceases to have any meaning because writers with vastly different agendas, notably Jane West and Catharine Macaulay, are clumped together as 'moderate women' ('Jane Austen's Mediative Voice' in Rhoda B Nathan (ed), *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English Speaking World* [New York: Greenwood, 1986] p. 195).

combine elements from both these positions I have labelled as 'moderate'. Clearly, this middle ground will incorporate works which differ significantly in the balance of conservative and radical sentiments they offer to the reader. In my consideration of eighteenth-century women's magazines and the novels of Burney and Austen I expand upon this point, demonstrating the range of strategies which may be utilised to negotiate extreme views. However, I wish at this point to acknowledge that much of the eighteenth-century female education debate claims respect for women on grounds which, judged by modern standards, would now be considered anti-feminist. Ideas about gender difference governed the part women were expected to play in society and consequently impacted upon their education at nearly every level.

Despite the quite different educational expectations faced by the domestic woman, as opposed to the public man, questions concerning female learning were not considered marginal to wider eighteenth-century society. The ideological construction of the virtuous woman shaped by her education stood at the very centre of cultural change. The emergence of new knowledge, changing physical environment and creation of new social and political relations all impacted upon the way women were perceived in society. Yet, there was little intrinsically new in the range of character traits identified as ideally qualifying the female sex for the discharge of their responsibilities. The early modern woman's education had also been geared towards questions of conduct and the traditional duties of wives and mothers.⁵ What we see, then, is not a radical new vision of woman, but rather an intensification of existing notions brought about by changes in wider society. In the ideology of femininity which took centre stage in the eighteenth century, the representation of virtuous women played a crucial role in reassuring the middle classes that the growing affluence they could see in society would not inevitably lead to moral contagion.

The concept of 'feminine' virtues is central to many eighteenth-century educational texts which assume that women are inherently suited to fulfil a moral role within the

⁵ Marlene Legates, 'The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1976): 26-7

domestic sphere. In the correct circumstances, these feminine values could extend beyond women and the private home. Many eighteenth-century writers argued that the age of commerce in which they lived had brought great advantages to society, promoting useful industry and virtue. The promotion of these views required the old cyclical model of history, which assumed that a nation's increase in material wealth would inevitably lead to luxury, corruption and decay, to be replaced with a linear progressive history. The adoption of a gendered language of feminine virtue aided this process. E J Clery has noted that before commerce could be moralised, the female character had to be reassessed and misogynistic attitudes which associated the 'acquisitive passions with the corrupting influence of women' rejected.⁶ As we will see, this more positive link between women and trade is particularly conspicuous in Enlightenment conjectural histories of civilisation which insist that the position and respect accorded to women in society indicate the degree of civilisation reached. Only in a modern, civilised society, it was insisted, could women's virtues be appreciated and disseminated for the benefit of all. Yet, this was less about changes in the lives of flesh-and-blood women and more about the construction of an ideological image which could be utilised to influence perceptions of wider society.

Clery shows that the discourse of feminisation offered female writers new opportunities for publication but also indicates that their achievements could be hijacked by male contemporaries for their own purposes. The learned lady occupied an elevated position in society but often it was not her work that was celebrated as a source of national pride, but rather the liberal attitudes of the country which enabled women to pursue their literary ambitions. As Harriet Guest has noted, in the biographical catalogues of famous women which appeared at this time the objective was to celebrate the number of learned women produced by Britain, rather than assess actual female achievements.⁷ Nevertheless, although the representation of these women's lives may appear to have been ideologically constructed to serve the needs of a newly commercialising society, identifying with, and taking pride in, the professional successes of other British women could cement feelings of national

⁶ E J Clery, *The Feminization Debate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) p. 97.

⁷ Harriet Guest, *Small Changes*, p. 50.

identity and belonging for the female sex. Further, there was an obvious paradox in many of these biographies which I would suggest could encourage eighteenth-century women to critically assess the information to which they were being exposed. In his study of eighteenth-century female biographies in periodicals and newspapers, Stephen Howard remarks that ‘many biographers showed a marked proclivity to focus upon private, moralistic elements, even when dealing with women who had enjoyed lives in the public eye’.⁸ Many critics have chosen to focus upon the significance that the representation of these women had for national identity, noting that they become identified ‘both with what belongs to the familial home and with what is “not foreign”’.⁹ However, the fact that famous writers, actresses and even queens are described in terms of their domesticity might have made the eighteenth-century woman consider not only her theoretical national identity but the potential compatibility of her immediate role within the home with more public achievements. At any rate it may have awakened in many the desire to attain less traditional skills, safe in the knowledge that this was acceptable and respectable.

The feminisation of eighteenth-century culture was by no means unambiguously enabling for women but I would argue that it did provide limited opportunities which many of the female sex ingeniously exploited. For Clery, however, the discourse of feminisation remained subservient to the needs of capitalism, not women.¹⁰ She appeals for this discourse to be considered separately from both the history of sensibility and the history of domesticity. Yet, the role played by women in eighteenth-century culture was defined by a combination of these influences which could be, according to the particular circumstances, either enabling or restricting for the female sex. Clery’s stated objective to investigate not what the feminisation debate could do for women but rather what women could do for it, places, for the most part, the question of female agency outwith her agenda.¹¹ However, for me, one of the most fascinating aspects of the feminisation debate is the potential for

⁸ Stephen Howard, “‘A Bright Pattern to All Her Sex’: Representations of Women in Periodical and Newspaper Biography’ in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Longman, 1997) p. 234.

⁹ Guest, *Small Change*, p. 69.

¹⁰ Clery, *Feminization Debate*, p. 11.

¹¹ Clery, *Feminization Debate*, p. 8

women to negotiate between liberal and conservative expectations to claim at least a modicum of control over their own lives. Undoubtedly the discourse of feminisation imposed new restrictive expectations upon women but it also offered them increasingly sophisticated ways to reinterpret the contribution they made to society and claim new opportunities for action. I would argue that as the century progressed and the role of women in this emerging commercialised society was debated, women engaged with the language of feminisation for their own purposes.

I am not suggesting that eighteenth-century women remained immune to the negative effects of an ideology of femininity. However, I do believe that by participating in debate, female writers could offset some of the most restrictive expectations on middle-class women. They were able, for example, to offer an alternative definition of an ideal sensibility. The cult of sensibility which emerged in the eighteenth century called into question women's powers of judgement by identifying the female sex primarily with emotion. This ideology reflected an amalgam of cultural, political and economic considerations but it was grounded in the physical body. Of particular significance was a new eighteenth-century understanding of the nervous system which provided a vehicle through which women's inferiority could be proclaimed on the grounds of physical difference. In his study of the culture of sensibility, G J Barker-Benfield has shown that, following the publication of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) and Newton's *Opticks* (1717), an influential psychology emerged which viewed the body as a machine which processed sensations. Expanding upon Locke's argument that humans were not born with innate ideas but rather gained these by processing sensations, such as sight, hearing and touch, Newton explains in his *Opticks* how information is carried from the eye to the brain through vibration of the nerves.¹² Differences between the nervous systems of men and women would account for their varying responses to these inputs. Increasingly invested with meaning, not just in scientific and philosophical writings but across conduct books, periodicals and novels, an ambiguity emerged about the desirability of delicate nerves. The belief that the female sex were

¹² G J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (London and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992) pp. 3-6.

particularly susceptible to a range of sensations was to create an inherent contradiction in educational writing for women; for while this led many to argue that women had an acute insight into issues of morality, this sensitivity was also believed to leave them vulnerable to their own tumultuous emotions. The question of whether sensibility should be embraced or resisted was central to a range of educational texts. Many women writers of this time, while embracing the notion that sensitive feelings aided the female sex in the fulfilment of their duties, insisted that feminine sensibility had to be balanced by reason. In doing so, they often had to challenge notions concerning what was 'natural' or inherent in women. Eighteenth-century writers often refer to the 'natural' as a guide but, as will become clear, the physical body may be cited to substantiate cultural assumptions and the distinction between what is natural and what is cultivated becomes blurred. Conservative conduct books are particularly guilty of recommending the cultivation of certain limiting 'feminine' virtues, such as delicacy and modesty, on the basis that they are 'natural' to the female character. However, in setting out to teach that which they claim to be already inherent to women these texts reveal a basic paradox. As we will see, what defines the 'natural' is a difficult and problematic concept throughout eighteenth-century educational writings for women, utilised by authors of vastly different persuasions to enforce their individual views of woman as correct. Clearly specific images of the 'natural' woman were being constructed for political and social reasons. Yet, this debate undoubtedly provided the eighteenth-century woman with alternative interpretations of her own role in life.

Although I am arguing that the eighteenth-century woman was far from powerless, it is important to acknowledge that at this time many of the female sex subscribed to what is now a historically distant set of values. Consequently, this female agency did not necessarily translate into recognisable modern feminist convictions. It is my contention that particular sensitivity is required on the subject of domesticity. Many eighteenth-century women held their domestic role in the highest regard and believed that their conduct in this area had great significance for wider society. In her study of eighteenth-century female writers, Guest argues that 'domesticity gains in value as a result of its continuity with the social or the public, and not only as a result of its

asocial exclusion'.¹³ While I do not wish to dismiss Guest's assessment, this thesis approaches the subject from a different viewpoint. I will demonstrate that the emphasis upon domesticity in women's lives enabled them to embrace, in a surprisingly wide range of contexts, the social and the public. Guest argues that domesticity 'is only ever one of a set of contradictory demands on women'.¹⁴ While I do not wish to suggest that domesticity was the only concern in women's lives at this time, I would argue that it was a dominant force, and that many of the contradictory demands that Guest identifies in women's lives emerge out of the domestic role, or at any rate as a result of their exclusion from the official public workplace. The domestic woman was expected to be a rational and loving mother and wife, a sound accountant and mistress of her household and a welcoming and intelligent hostess. All of these duties placed different educational demands upon women, which they were expected to combine with feminine virtues of modesty and delicacy. Guest's study prioritises women's interest and involvement in politics, and convincingly shows that patriotism was a significant concern in the public and private writings of many female authors, particularly within the Bluestocking circle. Yet, for most eighteenth-century women, identity was much more bound up with daily concerns within the domestic sphere. Literary critics attempting to reveal the elastic, shifting relationships women had with the public and private spheres have tended to focus upon the, at least nominally, public figures of female authors, particularly looking for evidence of individual outlooks and unique experiences from novels and private letters. Assessing the ordinary middle-class woman's personal responses is obviously more problematic but I will show that the woman's magazines of this time feature a range of letters and contributions from the general public which may shed valuable light on this subject. Keen to claim back for eighteenth-century women agency over their own lives, many scholars working in this field have chosen to emphasise women's interest and involvement with public issues which were previously thought to exclude them. Consequently, the exercise of female agency in more traditional areas has been neglected. This thesis will consider the eighteenth-century woman's domestic duties in the light of recent acknowledgements that the

¹³ Guest, *Small Changes*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Guest, *Small Changes*, p. 15.

female sex were not merely victims of patriarchy. I will show that most women claiming a part in the fate of the nation envisaged this as a consequence of the public being made up of private families. The eighteenth-century woman could make a contribution to the good of her country through the proper education of her children, responsible housekeeping and appropriate attention to the servants in her care.

Of course, the British identity adopted by many middle-class women of this time was, as Felicity Nussbaum has shown, in part constructed in opposition to images of ‘other’ women of the empire. Nussbaum pointedly notes that in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* the ‘middle-class Englishwoman seems to climb to liberty, closely associated with civilisation, on the backs of the Egyptian, the Turk, the African slave, and the servant’.¹⁵ An eighteenth-century fascination with the seraglio as the site of eastern women’s oppression, from which the British are happily exempt, extends from radical texts like Wollstonecraft’s to conservative works such as Hannah More’s *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1798) and Jane West’s *Letters to a Young Lady* (1810). Radical and conservative writers agree that the confinement of these women makes it impossible for them to assume responsibility or contribute in any meaningful way to their society or country. The women of exotic cultures were excluded from the cultivation of feminine virtue upon which many British middle-class women based their identity and self-respect. While Nussbaum demonstrates that the seraglio could be a site of fascination for eighteenth-century female travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, I think it is unlikely that many middle-class British women followed suit in viewing these female communities in a positive light. Nussbaum suggests that, as spaces free from the presence of men, the seraglio may be compared to the fictional utopian female community created by Sarah Scott in *Millenium Hall* (1762) or to the academy proposed by Mary Astell as a refuge for women.¹⁶ Yet, a key factor in the sites proposed by both Scott and Astell is that they are free from sexual oppression and as the seraglio was primarily associated with men’s sexual appetites this is a difficult connection to maintain. For those trying to emphasise the degree of civilisation

¹⁵ Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1995) p. 193

¹⁶ Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, pp. 135-162.

reached by middle-class society, the harem served as a tool which demonstrated that the superior virtues of British women were cultivated within the liberal boundaries of their own country. Interestingly, while conservative writers like More blamed French women for the degradation in the morals and manners of their country, the women of the harem are seen only as victims of their circumstances. It is assumed not only that feminine virtue is encouraged by British moderate attitudes towards women but that the future moral welfare of the country is dependent upon women exercising those virtues within their proper sphere.

The theory that men and women each had important but distinct responsibilities to fulfil in society significantly influenced the education advocated for each sex. While ideas varied considerably about the abilities of women, even the most liberal writers on female education tended to presume that the responsibilities allotted to women would be defined by their gender. Nevertheless, modern scholarship has become increasingly critical of the concept of separate spheres. The historical assumption that at some point in the eighteenth or nineteenth century women were suddenly confined to the home with consequent loss of economic power has been under fire since Amanda Vickery critiqued this position in her important review essay.¹⁷ Vickery argued that it was almost impossible to pick up a book on the history of wealthier women in Britain between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries which did not claim its period to be the time that separate spheres emerged. Not only was the chronology of the narrative problematic, there was little evidence that the past golden age of financial independence for women implied in these works had ever existed. Emphasising continuity rather than change in women's employment, Vickery notes that centres of commerce and manufacturing had a 'population of non-earning ladies long before the flowering of literature advocating domestic womanhood', while female paid employment was found clustered in the same narrow range of industries in the fifteenth century as it was in the nineteenth.¹⁸ This was not to deny the obvious association between women and the home but rather to point out that this was in existence long before the eighteenth century. Further, despite this long

¹⁷ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993): 383-414

¹⁸ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', p409.

standing connection, the gendered distinction between the public and private sphere was by no means straightforward. As Lawrence Klein points out, ‘if we are to provide an analysis of the gendering of space that takes account of the distinction between “public” and “private”, we need to know what these terms meant to contemporaries.’¹⁹ Klein argues that eighteenth-century perceptions of public and private depended upon the ‘modes of public life available’ and identifies some of the spheres to which the term public was attached. As well as the ‘State and its related agencies’ and the ‘economic public sphere’, there was a ‘civic public sphere’, and a ‘sphere of social, discursive and cultural production’. In each of these categories the public was defined in a slightly different way, and women clearly had greater access to some of these areas than others. For example, although historians such as Amanda Foreman and Elaine Chalus have shown that some women of the upper classes utilised a number of strategies to gain political power and influence state policy, most women were excluded from this public sphere.²⁰ In contrast there was an acknowledged important social and cultural role for middle-class women to play within society. As Vickery’s study of eighteenth-century Lancashire women has demonstrated the female sex were present in all sorts of public spaces, not least as a result of their participation in a growing range of leisure pursuits.²¹

The impossibility of truly separating the public and private spheres in any meaningful way is convincingly demonstrated by the revealing collection of essays *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1770-1830* edited by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O Gallchoir and Penny Warburton.²² Covering the subjects of female visibility and morality, culture and consumption, and intellectual endeavour, this work demonstrates that the definitions of public and private were continually shifting, whilst calling into question the assumption that women were

¹⁹ Lawrence Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytic Procedure’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:1 (1995): 103

²⁰ See, for example, Elaine Chalus “‘That Epidemical Madness’: Women and Electoral Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century’ and Amanda Foreman ‘A Politician’s Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig Party’ in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*.

²¹ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

²² Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

excluded from the public sphere. In a particularly interesting essay Caroline Gonda considers the public figures of the murderesses Mary Blandy and Elizabeth Jeffries, the penniless Irish beauties, the Gunning sisters, who bagged themselves a couple of rich husbands, and penitent prostitutes exhibited at Magdalen Hospital.²³ Gonda rejects the assumption that the transgressive notoriety of these women either resulted from or enabled female agency. Sylvana Tomaselli also disrupts traditional assumptions about locations of female agency in her essay on the family as the ‘most public sphere of all’. Tomaselli argues that it was Mary Wollstonecraft’s intention to show that the

qualities required in the household were not different in kind from those required outside of it; that if they were conceived as different, mothers would never be in a position to raise good citizens; and that while women could indeed teach men to be great and virtuous, they needed the means to do so.²⁴

The family as the ‘unit of the social and moral reproduction of society’ was not only a central component of the public, it defined the public.²⁵ Women’s position in society would be determined by their role in the family. Tomaselli suggests that Wollstonecraft would have welcomed the eradication of any distinction between the public and private spheres, and particularly between public and private virtue. The insistence in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* upon the equal abilities of the sexes and rejection of the notion of a specifically feminine virtue leads me to agree. However, as Eve Tavor Bannet demonstrates, the belief that the moral condition of society depended upon the state of individual families, and the education of those who governed them, was not restricted to radical figures. In the *Domestic Revolution* writers, such as Hannah More and Jane West, are shown to appropriate the family as the arena for female activity and they do so on the basis of sexual difference.²⁶ For

²³ Caroline Gonda, ‘Misses, Murdresses and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye’ in Elizabeth Eger, et al (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*.

²⁴ Sylvana Tomaselli, ‘The Most Public Sphere of All: The Family’ in Elizabeth Eger et al (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, p. 253-4.

²⁵ Tomaselli, ‘The Most Public Sphere’, p. 241.

²⁶ Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, pp. 149-50.

these conservative women it is the inherent qualities and specifically feminine virtues of their sex which equip women to fulfil their duties in the home.

As Susan Staves established in her recent impressive literary history of women in the eighteenth century, the concept of feminine virtue offered female authors various opportunities to challenge misogynistic attitudes.²⁷ The notion that there were specifically feminine virtues, and that these were particularly suited to a private, domestic sphere may not have been universal but it had continued resonance throughout this period and beyond. I, therefore, wish to avoid completely jettisoning the public/private distinction in my own work. Although I agree that there is no straightforward dichotomy between the male public world and the female private sphere, I believe that these categories still have value in their ability to indicate general organisational principles for the division of duties in the lives of eighteenth-century men and women. I will demonstrate that many women willingly embraced their domestic role, basing their self-respect and identity on their ability to properly fulfil their duties in this sphere. It could even be argued that the ideological construction of the private domesticated woman provided the female sex with a powerful tool which could be wielded to exert influence over the public sphere. In *Mothers of the Nation*, Anne Mellor effectively demonstrates that between 1780 and 1830 the efforts of many women writers to extend the moral code for women to men had a significant impact on public opinion. Although Mellor acknowledges that women's participation in these debates was often contested, she nonetheless insists that the female sex participated fully in a discursive public sphere in a way that collapsed the public/private distinction, and therefore recommends that the concept of separate spheres be discarded.²⁸ While a nuanced approach is obviously required if we are to represent the complexity of lived experience for eighteenth-century men and women, I wish at this point to emphasise that the ideological expectations regarding the behaviour of women in the private sphere offered the female sex a model to promote, modify or resist.

²⁷ Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 11-12, 3, 7.

Over the last two decades there has been increasing recognition among literary critics and historians that conservative feminism was a legitimate response to the complexities of historical circumstances. In a climate where women were generally not regarded as men's equals, but where the language of self-improvement carried considerable currency, moderate claims for female rights and abilities had a more realistic chance of success. Consequently, there has been a reassessment of the work of overtly conservative female authors who accepted or even promoted female subservience.²⁹ My investigation into the debate on female education has been significantly influenced by this re-evaluation of conservative women, which notes the commonalities shared with more radical writers, as well as expanding upon the importance of the middle-ground. However, I would argue that it is necessary to acknowledge the often limited vision of these conservative feminists. One particular difficulty with Mellor's book is that even a writer such as Hannah More who actively staked out the domestic sphere as the proper area for female action is declared to have 'advanced the cause of woman's social empowerment'.³⁰ This selective reading of More misrepresents both the writer's intentions and her actual achievements. In a more judicious article, Jane McDermid also argues that conservative women educationalists of this time 'sought not merely to preserve the established male-dominated order, but to transform the patriarchal world in which they lived by means of their domestic culture and moral authority'.³¹ However, McDermid notes that the conflict between a desire for improvement and the acceptance of providence which decreed that people were not equal created a central difficulty for conservative educational writing. No matter what superior skills a wife attained, she would always be subject to the authority of her husband. Moreover, although prominent conservative women may have helped widen the accepted role of

²⁹ See, for example, Mitzi Myers, 'Hannah More's Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology' in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (ed), *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists 1670-1815* (Athens, Ohio & London: Ohio University Press, 1986). See also Kathryn Sutherland, 'Hannah More's Counter-Revolutionary Feminism' in Kelvin Everest (ed), *Revolution in Writing: British Literary Responses to the French Revolution* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991).

³⁰ Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 18.

³¹ Jane McDermid, 'Conservative Feminism and Female Education in the Eighteenth-Century', *History of Education*, 18:4 (1989): 312.

the female sex, this was often an unintended consequence of their decision to publish and therefore enter public life. Although I am unconvinced by attempts to proclaim as feminists women who endorse views of the innate inferiority of their own sex, I do not wish to dismiss the achievements of these conservative women. McDermid demonstrates that although many of the women educationalists of this time accepted a limited definition of the female role, they also asserted the importance of women's contribution to society and demanded respect for this.

In particular, the teaching role of mothers provided eighteenth-century women with the justification for pursuing a more extensive education. As already noted, both radical and conservative writers demanded respect for women on the basis that they were raising the next generation. As the century progressed, increasing numbers of women began to produce educational manuals and guides, works which could be aimed at potential teachers as well as students. Mary Hilton points out in her authoritative study that 'around the core practices of teaching the young lay numerous intellectual and political subfields which these writers on education could enter, and in the process of making a moral argument, redefine'.³² Leading female figures in the educational field, including More, Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Sarah Trimmer, responded to, and revised each others' ideas not just on practical pedagogical issues but within these intellectual and political subfields. For the 'isolated woman incarcerated in a private family, denied any formal education and held responsible for inculcating ideas and morals in a range of children, these texts were keys which could unlock some of the large ideas and potent disputes of her times'.³³ Responsible for the education of sons as well as daughters, there was little that could be designated truly beyond the scope of women's legitimate influence. Intersecting as it did with issues of national significance, women's educational role provided them with access to a surprisingly broad area of information and encouraged acceptance of their contributions to wider fields of enquiry. Women did not necessarily have to reject their domestic role in

³² Hilton, *Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 4.

³³ Hilton, *Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 4.

order to pursue intellectual ambitions. In fact, exercising their intellect becomes a fundamental part of their most important duty in the home: the teaching of the young.

Despite differences in the ideological positions of conservative and radical writers on female education, they often seem to be responding to each others' works, constructively revising one another's advice to readers. In an interesting and revealing study Eve Tavor Bannet rejects the binary opposition implied in the terms conservative and radical by categorising female writers as either Egalitarian or Matriarchal. Egalitarians are defined as those women writers who openly attacked the gender hierarchy and sought a restructuring of social and gender relations. Matriarchs, in contrast, embraced their domestic role while subtly showing women how to gain ascendancy in their own sphere of influence. Given the complicated and contradictory negotiations performed by eighteenth-century women on these matters, the insistence upon assigning each individual writer to one camp or the other occasionally seems arbitrary and unjustified. However, Bannet's analysis of the crossover between these positions is lucid and insightful and adopting this approach enables her to differentiate the concerns of Egalitarians and Matriarchs, with issues which specifically affected women, from the conservative and radical interests of their male contemporaries. Egalitarians and Matriarchs are envisaged in conversation with one another and it is the intersections between these positions which I consider to be of particular relevance. Crucially, the ongoing dialogue between Egalitarians and Matriarchs is shown to shift the parameters of the female education debate. The Matriarchs 'studied conventionality' and their

cautious step-by-step and sphere-by-sphere approach, often succeeded in carrying points which had originated among the more impatient, openly ambitious, and sweeping revolutionary Egalitarians. By the same token, iterations by Egalitarians of positions preached or gained by Matriarchs often enabled them to present some of their own arguments as versions of a wider female consensus and to offer the more far-reaching changes they proposed as corrections, adaptations, or extensions of Matriarchal achievements or goals.³⁴

³⁴ Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, p. 9.

Clearly Bannet's admiration is largely reserved for the Matriarchs whom she credits with achieving practical changes but I would argue that the debate between female writers considering the fate of their own sex is of paramount importance. It was this variety of views which could invite the middle-class female reader to develop her own opinions through comparison.

Throughout this thesis I will be suggesting that particular types of literature invited eighteenth-century women to exercise judgment and form opinions. Examples of behaviour to condemn or endorse could be found not just in novels and short stories but in histories, memoirs and biographies. Bannet considers the educational potential of didactic novels which tap into an exemplary tradition and suggests that the reason so many novels of the eighteenth century repeat the same themes is because female authors were refining each others' ideals of behaviour. However, although exemplary narratives could teach by example, offering ideals of behaviour for readers to imitate, it was not a foregone conclusion that the right message would be extracted from the text. The reader's reasoning could lead her to an entirely unintended meaning. The novel was not the only genre to offer exemplary narratives. In chapter two I will investigate some of these implications for the eighteenth-century woman's magazine which similarly attempted to provide readers with examples of behaviour suitable for emulation. While eighteenth-century women did not unquestioningly imitate their reading material, example was regarded as a powerful educational tool, which, as I will show, could offer an alternative to direct experience.

The expansion of print culture in the eighteenth century provided new opportunities for middle-class women to produce and consume literature that addressed issues which had direct relevance to their lives. As previously stated, I will be emphasising that women were not merely passive recipients of a new educational philosophy: they engaged in dialogue on this subject and were instrumental in defining the parameters by which female education was to be judged. The private letters and diaries of eighteenth-century women provide particularly useful insight to the way in

which the female sex negotiated contradictory ideas about their education and the uses to which it was to be put. A number of recent literary studies have paid particular attention to the correspondence exchanged by first generation Bluestockings.³⁵ Emma Major and Harriet Guest both note the importance this circle of women attached to a gender specific socialisation role.³⁶ The Bluestocking hostess was to be admired for her ability to facilitate discussion and smooth over political disagreements. Guest suggests that while Elizabeth Montagu's and Elizabeth Vesey's gender designated them apolitical subjects, this neutrality, which allowed them to reconcile through the process of socialisation men from competing party interests, also enabled a quasi-political role. I do not think, however, that the Bluestockings should be taken as representative of the average eighteenth-century middle-class woman. Either single, separated or widowed early in life and nearly without exception childless, the Bluestockings' freedom to write and participate in public life was dependent upon their lack of family ties.

Of greater importance for female readers are the opportunities the expanding print culture of the day offered to ordinary eighteenth-century middle-class women to engage in debate and critical judgment. I will be suggesting that women of this time could embrace, resist or reinterpret the meanings encountered in their reading material and that their opportunities to do so may often be located within the texts themselves. I have chosen to focus upon representations of female education in conduct books, women's magazines, and the novels of Burney and Austen because, despite the differences between these genres, they frequently address the same questions and, although often reaching vastly different conclusions, share many of the same assumptions. Despite appearing to concentrate largely upon the domestic and private details of women's lives, political, social, economic and scientific considerations pervade these works. As we will see, none of these media exist in isolation: they interact with one another, adopting and modifying ideas from other sources and responding to changing events in society. It is often argued that conduct

³⁵ See, for example, Guest, *Small Change*; Clery, *Feminization Debate*; Eger et al *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*.

³⁶ Emma Major, 'The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium' and Harriet Guest, 'Bluestocking Feminism' in Nicole Pohl and Betty A Schellenberg (eds), *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*.

books exerted a considerable influence on the way women were represented in eighteenth-century novels. However, the advent of the novel, particularly the novel of sensibility, can also be seen to have a significant impact on the style of conduct books, which increasingly dramatised the predicaments of women in order to evoke emotion in the reader.³⁷ Yet there are also significant differences between these works, in both form and content. They do not share a common agenda, nor do they respond in the same ways to the wider concerns of society.

We will see that conduct books participate in an ideological construction of woman which is abstract and theoretical. In these works internal contradictions are glossed over and the complexity of women's lived experience is never acknowledged. For example, conduct books advise readers that women have superior judgment in matters of taste, manners and morals. This was believed to be a consequence of a more delicate feminine sensibility. Yet, as I have noted, it was also argued that such sensitivity left women vulnerable to their own uncontrollable desires. Despite attributing a superior standard of taste to the female sex, conduct books show little faith in the ability of women to judge more serious matters. Crucially, these works adopt a single authoritative voice, often claiming the right to advise on the basis of a combination of age, experience and genuine desire to improve society. Conduct books, then, provide one point-of-view, that of its author, offering little scope for debate. I do not wish to suggest that eighteenth-century readers unquestioningly accepted the ideology preached in such works, but rather that the choice was either to accept or reject rather than reinterpret the intended meaning.

Conduct books are, of course, prescriptive, driven by ideology, and should not be confused with the reality of the eighteenth-century woman's life. The marked increase in the production of conduct literature addressed to the female sex during the eighteenth century may even be viewed as a reaction to women's increasing opportunities to participate in wider society. Indeed, these texts may well have been aimed at a resisting audience. Various aspects of the content and structure of

³⁷ See Pam Morris, introduction to *Conduct Literature for Women 1720-1770* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004) vol 1, p. x.

eighteenth-century women's magazines and the novels of Burney and Austen lead me to argue that these publications were more open to differing interpretations than the closed format of the conduct book. Unfortunately accounts of reading left by eighteenth-century women in diaries and letters have tended to focus upon *what* they read, as opposed to their individual responses or modes of interpretation.

Consequently, reconstructing the eighteenth-century reader's response is fraught with difficulty. Histories of reading attempting to overcome these difficulties have increasingly adopted a multifaceted approach, combining textual analysis with reader-response theory, book history and anecdotal evidence.³⁸

Reader-response theorists largely agree that only the act of reading brings meaning to a text – without this it is merely symbols on a page – and that readers are actively involved in the construction of meaning. However, questions persist about how much of a reader's interpretation is determined by the content and structure of a text, and how much by their individual response. Handing complete control over to the reader, Stanley Fish argues that there is nothing 'in' the text that is not brought into being by the reader's interpretative acts. In contrast, other reader-response critics emphasise the transactional nature of interpretation; that 'the finding of meaning involves both the author's text and what the reader brings to it'.³⁹ Wolfgang Iser argues that readers create coherent meaning by relating the various segments of a text to one another. This process is enabled by the 'blanks' and 'negations' contained within a text; 'blanks' mark the text's 'missing links', 'negations' the disruption of reader expectations.⁴⁰ Both create a space which stimulates the reader to fill in missing links between different sections. I have found the theory of Iser particularly useful in articulating an argument which allows for the eighteenth-century woman's

³⁸ See, for example, James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (eds), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³⁹ Stanley E. Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*' in Vincent B Leitch (ed), *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York and London: Norton, 2001) p. 2079; Louise M Rosenblatt, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of The Literary Work* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) p. 14.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) pp. 182-225.

individual interpretation whilst acknowledging the ability of texts to guide readers. Throughout the thesis I assume that although readers have a significant degree of freedom to interpret, the text also contains an encoded authorial meaning with which the reader must engage, whether to accept, reject or modify this.

However, as Iser makes clear, his implied reader is a textual construction and not to be confused with an actual reader. As such his theory fails to account for the impact on reading practices of contextual factors not inscribed within the text. Reader-response theorists attempt to address this problem by acknowledging that reading is a political act and that gender, race and class all affect the way individuals are positioned by texts or how individuals position themselves in relation to texts and hence the strategies they adopt in order to make sense of a work. In particular the question of what it means to read as a woman has been pursued in a number of works. Patrocinio P Schweickart notes that ‘the feminist inquiry into the activity of reading begins with the realisation that the literary canon is androcentric’ and that consequently the reading experience differs depending on gender.⁴¹ In the *Resisting Reader* Judith Fetterley reveals the extent to which male values masquerade in works of American fiction as universal truths.⁴² Exposing the nature of these texts, she argues, enables women to become resisting readers and this is central to a feminist agenda. While the *Resisting Reader* continues to exert considerable influence on the understanding of reading as a political act, one criticism of Fetterley’s work is that it fails to acknowledge the complexity of real women’s responses. In contrast, Lynne Pearce’s interesting study ‘Feminism and the Politics of Reading’ reveals some of the mental gymnastics performed by readers in order to make and maintain connections to texts.⁴³ Pearce gives a highly personalised account of her own interactions with a range of works, recording the way in which she projects herself into texts and replaces elements of the author’s creation with her own imaginative substitutes. This self-conscious charting of response, however, is very much from

⁴¹ Patrocinio P Schweickart, ‘Reading Ourselves: Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading’ in Elizabeth A Flynn and Patrocinio P Schwickart (eds) *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1986) pp. 40-41.

⁴² Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

⁴³ Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997)

the perspective of a late twentieth-century feminist critic. It seems unlikely that an eighteenth-century middle-class woman would adopt this kind of reading strategy. Furthermore, Pearce's study revolves, to a great extent, around the reader's emotional engagement with texts, which she is at pains to differentiate from meaning production and interpretation. In contrast, I am primarily interested in the opportunities the expanding print culture offered to eighteenth-century women to interpret and exercise critical judgment. While many women of this time undoubtedly became emotionally involved when reading novels, such emotional investment did not prevent the actions of the characters featured from being assessed and judged.⁴⁴

In the absence of direct evidence, assessing historical reading practices remains a difficult challenge. Considering the nineteenth-century woman's response to the short story 'The Glass of Gin', which appeared in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, a cheap Victorian periodical, Kay Boardman argues that while the original readership cannot be constructed, a model of generic possibility may be provided.⁴⁵ Boardman proposes a 'renegade reader' who does not just reject the dominant reading of a text but actually creates an alternative, more enabling, position from which to view the story. The opportunity to appropriate the story for the interests of women is located within the structure of the work itself. Boardman acknowledges from the outset, however, that it is unlikely that any nineteenth-century women actually adopted the radical reading which she proposes. James Machor also notes that the immasculation of the female reader described by Fetterley probably did not hold true for the original audience of many of the works she assesses.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Pearce appeals for the feminist rehabilitation of works to take into account the condition of their production, doubting the validity or value of texts appropriated for feminism through radical re-readings which ignore the obvious, dominant discourse.⁴⁷ In speculating about the

⁴⁴ I am clearly in disagreement with Pearce who argues that "'engagement" and "interpretation" may be thought of as mutually exclusive' (Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, p. 249).

⁴⁵ Kay Boardman, "'The Glass of Gin": Renegade Reading Possibilities in the Classic Realist Text' in Sara Mills (ed), *Gendering the Reader* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994)

⁴⁶ James L Machor, 'Historical Hermeneutics and Antebellum Fiction: Gender, Response Theory, and Interpretive Contexts' in James L Machor (ed), *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1993) pp. 56-58.

⁴⁷ Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, p. 63.

reading habits of eighteenth-century women I am keen to avoid anachronistic interpretations which project backwards in time modern feminist values.

In contrast to the largely ahistorical approach of reader-response theory, histories of books and reading are concerned with what texts were actually available to the historical reader, what they looked like and who could afford them. As William St Clair notes ‘although it is always likely to be extremely difficult to judge the extent to which the readers of a particular text may have been influenced by it, we can be certain that those persons who had no access to the text cannot have been directly influenced by it at all’.⁴⁸ However, St Clair makes pessimistic assumptions about the eighteenth-century reader’s access to texts which are disputed by other scholars. Richard B Sher notes that ‘no matter what the format and price, new books were increasingly accessible to large numbers of readers through the various kinds of libraries that were rapidly springing up throughout Britain’.⁴⁹ In the face of questions about access to texts, constructing the reading history of individuals becomes particularly complicated. Of course the affordability of a text was no guarantee that it would be purchased, and even ownership did not necessarily indicate that the item would be read. As James Raven notes, ‘the information available tells us frustratingly little about the motives which led people to buy or borrow specific texts and it tells us nothing at all about how those texts were read’.⁵⁰ Recent histories of reading which combine the study of the materiality and availability of texts with case histories of individual readers have used marginalia, commonplace books and anecdotal evidence from letters and diaries, each accompanied by their own particular difficulties of interpretation.⁵¹ What these various sources reveal is the diverse nature of reading practices which cannot be easily classified. Robert DeMaria’s study of Samuel Johnson’s reading indicates that the author was aware that there were many ways to approach a text, and that different

⁴⁸ St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Richard B Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) p. 28; See also James Raven, *The Business of Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) pp. 231-2.

⁵⁰ James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor, ‘Introduction: The Practice and Representation of Reading in England’ in James Raven et al (eds), *Practice and Representation of Reading*, p. 9.

⁵¹ See David Allan on the difficulties of interpreting annotations left by readers (*Making British Culture*, pp. 111-12); See St Clair on the reliability of anecdotal evidence (*Reading Nation*, p. 400).

types of reading were appropriate for different occasions.⁵² Similarly, Anna Larpent's record of her reading indicates that she made a clear distinction between study and reading for pleasure. Other case studies reveal the extent to which reading was fitted around household duties, and the continuing practice of reading aloud as an important aspect of socialisation.⁵³

While these case studies help build a picture of the different approaches to reading adopted at certain periods, these are the responses of specific individuals to particular texts. In the absence of marginalia or other anecdotal evidence for my chosen texts, an alternative approach is required to speculate in an informed manner about the eighteenth-century female reader's response. I believe it is possible to locate the potential for female agency within the structure of a text while taking into account the mindset and values of the eighteenth-century female reader. However, possible female readers for my chosen texts would include young girls just starting out in life and older women with significant experience, those on the margins of middle-class society and those with significant wealth. I do not mean to disregard these differences or imply a single universal model of the female reader. On the contrary, I presume that individuals would have responded in different ways to the same text. However, I also assume that women's magazines and novels invite judgment and that various points in the structure and content of these works enable critical thought. While I do suggest that it is likely that many women of this time, in some form or another, negotiated between the extreme views of conservative or radical writers, speculating further about a non-specific reader is highly problematic. Nevertheless, the kind of judgments available to eighteenth-century women in relation to certain texts may be extrapolated from private letters and journals. I wish at this point to emphasise the transactional nature of reading. I am not suggesting that women merely slotted new information into an unchanging knowledge structure. As readers transact with a text it changes them, affecting the knowledge and assumptions with

⁵² Robert DeMaria, *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) pp. 4, 14,

⁵³ John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent's Reading' and Naomi Tadmor, "'In the Even My Wife Read to Me": Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth-Century' in James Raven et al (eds), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*.

which they approach later reading experiences. A central component of my argument is that the eighteenth-century woman could engage in critical thought and advance her ideas without this inevitably leading to a rejection of her traditional role in society.

Although I have no substantial evidence to support my supposition that in the process of negotiating conservative and radical content in their reading material eighteenth-century women made independent judgments, the letters and journals of women of this period often assess the uses and consequences of reading.⁵⁴ Writing in 1810, Ellen Weeton, although unprepared to condemn the reading of novels completely, voices concern that such works often ‘destroy all relish for useful, instructive studies’.⁵⁵ Most eighteenth-century women, including Weeton, read for both entertainment and improvement. But while reading for pleasure alone was not entirely approved of, serious study brought its own anxieties. Writing to her daughter in 1753 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu advised that if her eldest granddaughter was ‘desirous of learning’ she should ‘be indulged in it’. Yet, appearing to be learned was a different matter altogether, for Montagu recommends that her grand-daughter ‘conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness’.⁵⁶ Similarly, Fanny Burney enjoyed studying the classics but found it necessary to hide her reading material. Even a woman like Weeton, who argued that more intellectually challenging reading should be available to women made it clear that study had to be combined with traditional duties:

I always feel a degree of disgust at the men who can say, when speaking of female attainments, ‘If she can make a shirt and a good pudding, it is enough’. – What a narrow minded epicure he must

⁵⁴ The diaries of eighteenth-century women do reveal, however, an awareness of the commonalities and shared assumptions of conservative and radical writers. Mary Berry, for example, notes after reading More’s *Strictures* and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* that ‘it is amazing, or rather it is not amazing, but impossible, they should do otherwise than agree on all the great points of female education. H. More will, I dare say, be very angry when she hears this, though I would lay a wager that she never read the book’ (Lady Theresa Lewis [ed] *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the year 1783 to 1852* [London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1865] p. 91).

⁵⁵ J J Bagley (ed), *Miss Weeton’s Journal of a Governess* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles Reprints, 1969) p. 275.

⁵⁶ Olga Kenyon (ed), *800 Years of Women’s Letters* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1995) pp. 11, 57.

be! She must be of very narrow capacity indeed who cannot both attend to domestic affairs with a competent knowledge and care, and to the more exalted attainments of the mind.⁵⁷

Despite her disgust at those who attempt to limit female learning, Weeton concurred with the general belief that the improvement of the mind was not to be achieved at the expense of domestic duties. Women had to maintain a difficult balance, where they improved their minds without neglecting husbands, and were intelligent companions while avoiding pedantry. The way in which this could be achieved was endlessly debated across a range of literature. The diary entries and private letters of eighteenth-century women can offer insight into the mindset of the female sex of this time, and approaching the subject from this perspective enables the historical specificity of female reading practices to be acknowledged.

Throughout this work I will be focusing upon a moderate position in the female education debate and will show that this was constructed by avoiding or negotiating the extreme views of conservative and radical writers. Chapter one, 'Conservative and Radical Voices in Conduct Literature', begins with a consideration of these more extreme views. We will see that conservative conduct-book writers assume that the part to be played by women in society is defined by their gender, and that their education should consist of cultivating specifically feminine virtues. In contrast, radical writers insist that there are no inherent differences in the abilities of the sexes. They further argue that as the main objective of education is to produce virtuous individuals, and as virtue is universal, the education of men and women should be the same. Yet, writers from both these positions are influenced by the new understanding of the middle-class woman's role in society articulated in Enlightenment writings, particularly conjectural histories.

In chapter two, 'Practicalities and Moderation in Eighteenth-Century Women's Magazines', we see how female periodicals in a range of ways staked out a middle ground in the education debate. These works claimed a moral authority for women

⁵⁷ Bagley, *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, p. 306.

to rule the home, and justified access to a range of information on the basis that this was essential if domestic duties were to be properly fulfilled. Adopting these strategies enabled the role of the middle-class woman to be gradually redefined, thus changing the parameters of what was considered acceptable and respectable. Integrating both conservative and radical assumptions, eighteenth-century women's magazines were often inherently contradictory, particularly the multi-authored miscellany, but I will be arguing that it was through this representation of diverging views that the middle ground in the female education debate was constructed.

The main focus of eighteenth-century female education was on how women conducted themselves in society. Conduct books disseminated an ideology of femininity which limited female experience in the wider world and attempted to silence women in public. Conforming to such expectations had serious implications for women's development as individuals. In chapters three and four I will focus upon the way these issues are played out in the novels of Burney and Austen. Both authors comment indirectly on the education available to women at this time, and show that their heroines' ability to function in society is related to their opportunities to speak and gain direct experience. While not dismissing the importance of academic study, this is shown to be insufficient to arm women with the skills required to participate in society. The education which prepares women for the wider world has to be gained through direct experience of that world. Nevertheless, I will be suggesting that these novels, like the many anecdotal stories contained in eighteenth-century magazines, had the potential to offer a vicarious experience which could partly compensate young ladies denied the opportunity to participate directly in society.

These chapters demonstrate that during the eighteenth century a direct link was perceived between the moral health of the nation and female education. For many women of this time, this was considered to be a welcome development, which accorded new respect to the domestic role. Rejecting the assumption that this period witnessed an unambiguous narrowing of options for women, this work shows that the female sex were not passive victims of a male-oriented ideology. We will see that

both female professional writers and amateur contributors to magazines were actively involved in constructing positive images of intelligent women working for the greater good of society by fulfilling traditional duties in the home

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONDUCT BOOKS AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN THE DEBATE ON FEMALE EDUCATION

As the middle classes emerged in eighteenth-century Britain as a powerful social group, the theory that men and women each had distinct but important parts to play in life gained increasing influence. Identifying the unique contribution to be made by women towards the smooth running of society became the focus of a range of educational writings which recommended the cultivation of particular skills and knowledge to aid this process. By the latter half of the century, conduct books and periodicals were being directly addressed to a female audience and constituted a prime forum in which the middle-class woman's education could be debated. Although largely focusing upon behaviour and conduct, rather than the cultivation of the intellect, these works did not present a single coherent image of the ideal middle-class woman. A complex and contradictory debate takes place in these multi-faceted writings which offer readers a variety of opinions about what women should be learning, and, indeed, what they were capable of learning.

This work acknowledges that an amalgam of influences, both enabling and restricting, interact with one another in conduct books and periodicals, often producing contradictory ideas about women and their education. We will see that by negotiating between radical and conservative attitudes, many texts addressed to eighteenth-century women, particularly the female periodicals that appear in the latter half of the century, not only adopt, but help construct a moderate pragmatic position in relation to questions about female education. Neither willing to acquiesce in notions of female inferiority, nor to claim gender equality, women's magazines of this time proclaimed the importance of the domestic role within the newly forming middle classes. Yet, within this moderate position there is enormous scope for diverging views and the balance of radical and conservative sentiments offered to readers may differ noticeably from one publication to the next while remaining within the boundaries of respectability. Throughout this work I will be expanding

upon how this position, often neglected in favour of the simplicities of more extreme arguments, is brought into being.

As this introduction will show, the ideas about female education articulated in conduct books and women's magazines developed during the eighteenth century in conjunction with wider, political, economic and social changes. Of particular significance was the emergence of the middle classes as a powerful social group with economic and political resources. Eighteenth-century conduct books and periodicals should be understood in relation to a larger body of literature, including moral philosophy and Enlightenment writings, which promoted the interests of a genteel audience, setting out for the 'middling sort' an honoured place in the wider social structures of society. Across these works the middle-class woman was awarded a special role and ideas about the part she was to play within this specific social group governed the educational recommendations to which she was subject. Yet, as I have noted, women did not simply fulfil a role defined and created by men. They played an active part in deciding their own fate and ingeniously exploited opportunities to extend their sphere of influence and widen their knowledge of the world. Although women's 'worldly' education tends to take precedence in conduct books and magazines, these writings also contain elements of subject-based education. Furthermore, as their readership was comprised of mothers and teachers of the next generation, questions about educational methods and cognitive processes were considered to have particular relevance. As we will see, these works were influenced by the same educational theories which figured in male education, notably those of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The famous educational texts of these men, Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) and Locke's *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), rarely make a straightforward distinction between an education which focuses on behaviour in society and that which advises on appropriate areas of study. Many aspects of these educational theories are therefore easily incorporated into texts advising women about their role in the home and, as will become apparent, women could and did utilise their knowledge of these works to justify further learning for their sex.

Although the term ‘middle class’ is anachronistic, eighteenth-century writings consistently address the ‘middle ranks’ or ‘middling sort’ and show awareness of a new tier on the social structure. The consumer and financial revolution under way at this time created groups of people with similar interests and aspirations, which did not merely copy the aristocracy but created a specifically middle-class identity in which respectability played an important part. New sources of wealth provided a range of employment opportunities in the professions and service trades which allowed men to differentiate themselves from the working class on the basis that they earned their living by using their intelligence rather than their physical labour. While conduct literature defining an ideal of behaviour for the aristocratic man had existed since the Middle Ages, over time these works increasingly focused on domestic matters, such as how to choose a wife and friends, and how to avoid quarrels and extravagance in both fashion and alcohol.¹ As the middle classes grew in power, conduct writers turned their attention to positioning them in a place of moral superiority over both the aristocracy and the labouring masses. Expanding in number and influence, doctors, bankers, lawyers, merchants and clergymen of the eighteenth century could read a new literature on conduct which did not merely assert that they could become gentlemen but reoriented the meaning of this title to refer, not to the aristocracy, but to the honest, hardworking and genteel middle-class man.²

Periodicals emerging at the end of the seventeenth century were in an ideal position to slot themselves into this debate. Appearing on a regular basis, they could debate, modify and promulgate ideas about class and conduct. Although Renaissance conduct books, such as Castiglione’s *Courtier* (1528) and Peacham’s *Compleat Gentleman* (1622), could still interest readers in the eighteenth century, there was desire for a new type of literature which could advise both men and women of the

¹ Examples of conduct literature focusing on aristocratic ideals include Baldassare Castiglione’s *Courtier* (1528), first translated into English by Thomas Hoby in 1561, and Henry Peacham’s *Compleat Gentleman* (1622). For more domesticated works see Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Instructions to his Son* (1622). For a comprehensive history of early conduct literature see Joan Wildeblood, *The Polite World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) and John E Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1935).

² See for example Richard Steele’s *Tatler* N^o 207 (*The Tatler* [Spectator Text Project: A Hypermedia Research Archive of Eighteenth-Century Periodicals] <http://meta.montclair.edu/spectator/tatler>, taken from George A Aitken 1899 edition [1709-10]).

middling sort how to conduct themselves in modern society. Addison and Steele's *Spectator* (1711-12), while belonging to a long tradition of conduct literature, was also very much a product of the age in which it was written and, appearing every day, was ideally situated to advise readers how to behave, and on the moral implications of that behaviour.³ Written under the assumed name of Mr Spectator and calling upon the experiences and opinions of four members of the fictional spectator club, this publication shows a clear allegiance with the interests of the middle-classes. While Sir Roger de Coverly represents the country gentry, Captain Sentry the army and Sir Andrew Freeport trade, Will Honeycomb is represented as a vain but good-natured fop. Between these gentlemen there is a constant but friendly opposition of opinions as they each try to protect their own interests; but the presence of these voices also shows the desire of middle-class society to accommodate the views of others in order to reach an amicable consensus, and, indeed, Addison and Steele make this a primary factor in the definition of the gentleman.

Nevertheless, great anxiety remained about employment in trade and the professions. Many feared that unregulated commerce would lead to underhanded dealings – lawyers creating legal entanglements for their own purposes, medical professionals treating non-existent illnesses, dishonest shopkeepers and so on.⁴ Writers on conduct responded to these anxieties by setting out a code of behaviour which prioritised honesty and moderation, while women, not directly involved in business and often perceived as being withdrawn from the daily commerce of life, were awarded pride of place as the guardians of morality. Identifying women with morals and the power to influence was not new to the eighteenth century. Evidence of this trend may be seen in Castiglione's *Courtier*, where the Duchess of Urbino directs and monitors the conversation of her male courtiers, ensuring a polite and civilised exchange of views. Yet, the Duchess herself rarely participates directly in these discussions, a fact which suggests that such power is more symbolic than real. Similarly, it was often difficult for the eighteenth-century middle-class woman to take direct action. Representing

³ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator* (Spectator Text Project) <http://meta.montclair.edu/spectator>, taken from Henry Morley's 1891 edition [1711-14]).

⁴ See Penelope J Corfield on the satire directed at many professions throughout the eighteenth century (*Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* [London: Routledge, 1995] pp. 42-69).

woman as the moral figurehead of the state provided many opportunities to curtail female freedom under the cover of protecting her virtue. Nevertheless, women's lives at this time cannot be characterised by reduced options alone. It is inevitable that over time, as society progresses and evolves, expectations of women change but this cannot be reduced to a simplistic narrative of either narrowing or expanding opportunities. During the eighteenth century, changes in the way women were viewed could simultaneously improve their status while restricting their sphere of influence, or open up new opportunities to participate in leisure activities whilst imposing limiting ideals of feminine behaviour.

This period witnessed a quest for polite refinement which extended to both sexes, as an expanding range of social venues became available to the middle classes. These spaces, such as coffee-houses and clubs and societies, did not simply cater to an existing group but, like conduct books and periodicals, disseminated an ideology that helped to bring into being a social group which hungered for cultural refinement. Educational literature had the potential, not only to guide individuals about their role in society but to indicate that self-improvement was morally desirable. Although access to formal education was limited for men and practically non-existent for women, there were nevertheless extensive opportunities for both sexes to participate in an educational process. From the late seventeenth century a growing demand for books and magazines and increased visitor numbers to museums, exhibitions and public lectures points to a blurring of the distinction between moral and intellectual education, social aspiration and entertainment. John Brewer notes that 'with the gradual profusion of Georgian assembly rooms, plays, picture galleries, libraries, museums and pleasure gardens a full range of cultural resources was now available for those who wished to be refined'.⁵ The eighteenth-century woman found that she had greater access than ever before to a range of leisure pursuits. But although Vickery notes that 'none of these arenas was off-limits to polite women', conduct books and periodicals were obsessed with the corrupting influence this world might have on young ladies and placed restrictive expectations upon their behaviour in the

⁵ John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination* (Bath: Harpercollins, 1997) p. 59.

public arena.⁶ Yet they continued to address women as the true representatives of the middle classes and sharply increasing female literacy further identified them as an ideal audience to whom an ideology of respectability could be disseminated. Many of the female sex embraced their role as guardians of morality and taste. Importantly, as we will see, the diaries and letters of eighteenth-century women reveal them to be not merely passive recipients, absorbing the views of others, but rather individuals involved in conscious acts of assessment and judgment.

So far I have been emphasising the connection between women's symbolic status in wider society and the emergence of the middle classes but, of course, conduct books and periodicals also dealt more directly with the practical question of the middle-class woman's private, domestic role. Since few opportunities existed for the female sex to gain economic independence, attracting a partner tended to be a priority. To attain this goal conservative conduct books recommended the cultivation of qualities such as modesty, delicacy and self-effacement. They assured their female audience of their intrinsic inferiority and that their dependence on men was 'natural'. According to this view, women had to gain the protection of the male sex by conducting themselves in a certain way. In these manuals of instruction, with their unstated design to raise women's visible attractions, the cultivation of feminine morals often translated into overt displays of 'virtuous' emotion. One of the most limiting aspects of conduct-book ideology for women was the inherent implication that feminine virtue should be cultivated as a source of sexual attraction. These texts did not just offer advice about how to act, but also what to think and feel, confounding the distinction between inner character and outward display.

As we shall find, nature is a commonly utilised term in the eighteenth-century debate on female education, to both identify the role to be played by women in society, and where the focus of her education ought to lie. Although both conservative and radical writers called upon the authorising power of nature to legitimise their own position, the 'natural' is more frequently invoked by conservative conduct-book writers who base their advice to women on assumptions that the female mind is

⁶ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 288.

innately different from that of men's and that their education must accommodate this.⁷ In contrast, radical writers insist that there is no difference between the intellectual capabilities of the sexes and remain more focused upon the cultivation of the rational faculties. However, these writers often appeal to nature in order to discredit the arguments of conservative conduct book writers who, they argue, have distorted this concept. I would like to clarify at this point that while my use of the term 'nature' revolves around ideas of innate propensities and the original constitution of humans in their primitive, untaught state, an ambiguity in distinguishing the 'natural' from the taught was prevalent across a range of writing at this time. For example, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), David Hume refers to 'natural virtues' which 'have no dependence on the artifice and contrivance of men'. Yet, it soon becomes apparent that while Hume believes that there may be some instinctive tendency towards 'meekness, beneficence, charity' and so on, the value attached to these qualities is dependent upon their ability to aid the smooth functioning of society, and the presence of these virtues is reinforced by social approval.⁸ Paradoxically, human nature is often represented as something which develops in conjunction with society or in relation to education. Blurring the distinction between what is customary and what is natural, John Locke argues that the objective of education should be the cultivation of good habits, in order that the correct response arises 'naturally' in adulthood, establishing 'habits woven into the very Principles of his Nature'.⁹ As we will see, in the education of women conservative conduct-book writers also suggest that innate qualities require cultivation: the correct education will lay the foundation for modesty, delicacy and sensibility to arise 'naturally' in the feminine character.

Our understanding of women's education in the eighteenth century has tended to be vastly oversimplified. It is well documented that conservative conduct-book writers

⁷ Roy Porter notes that 'for early Enlightenment thinkers like Shaftesbury, Nature linked the divine (eternal and transcendental) and the human; it pointed to the purification and perfection of mankind, and extended human sympathies beyond the narrow bounds of artifice. Orderly, objective, rational, grand and majestic, Nature enshrined both norms and ideals' (*Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* [London: Penguin, 2000] p. 295).

⁸ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978 [1740]) pp. 574, 578.

⁹ John Locke *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989 [1693]) p. 110.

were particularly influential in promoting a restrictive image of the ideal woman. Yet, as we have seen, the potential for self-improvement remains intrinsic to these works. Although it is often taken for granted that female learning at this time was restricted to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, with a smattering of foreign languages and a few polite accomplishments such as singing, playing a musical instrument or drawing, even the most conservative conduct books, which insisted on the inferior intellectual capacity of the female sex and their ‘natural’ dependence on men, argued that it was the duty of every woman to improve her mind.¹⁰ To this end they recommended studies as varied as natural history, astronomy, history, geography and moral philosophy. I am not arguing that there is a radical or enabling agenda hidden in these texts for women but rather that these contradictions require further investigation if we are to reach a true understanding of eighteenth-century attitudes to female learning. More challenging texts were not completely denied to women, nor was there anything like consistency in recommended reading lists for the female sex. As already noted, there was no easy division between moral and intellectual education for the eighteenth-century woman and, as we will see, the acquisition of fact-based knowledge was often justified on the basis that it taught morality. Moral philosophy, not surprisingly, was promoted as suitable for both sexes and Addison and Steele’s *Spectator*, which seemed to successfully bridge the gap between philosophy, conduct literature and periodicals, was unambiguously praised across the board.

Educational theory figured among the more challenging works available to the eighteenth-century woman, raising questions not only about the proper means of teaching the young but about how individuals acquired knowledge and personality traits. Frequently assuming that their readers are familiar with the works of Locke and Rousseau, conduct books and periodicals utilise the theories of these writers to investigate how education can best be used to produce virtuous adults. Although broadly agreeing that this should be the aim of education, Locke and Rousseau nevertheless differed greatly in their recommendation of how and when this teaching

¹⁰Anne K Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 36-7.

should take place.¹¹ The most fundamental divergence between their theories is the differing degrees of emphasis that they place on reason and nature. As I have noted, eighteenth-century writing often referred to nature in ambiguous ways which failed to make a clear distinction between the natural and the taught. This concept, contingent on context and contested in the period, was utilised by Locke and Rousseau to propose significantly different educational plans. It is imperative, according to Rousseau, that a child's development is not rushed. As he believes that children have not yet developed their reasoning capacity, their contact with society can only teach them how to simulate responses they do not feel or understand and encourage them to deceive and manipulate those in charge of them. To counter this, Rousseau advises that the body should be strengthened by exercise while the mind is left to develop in its own time. If a child's capacity to reason has not yet developed he will have no concept of why he should behave in a particular way, and the concepts of good and evil will be beyond his comprehension. Left to develop uninfluenced by society, Rousseau argues that man will gradually gain the ability to reason as part of his natural development. However, the distinct stages of learning imagined by Rousseau are applicable only to men. He envisages an entirely different plan for Sophy, the girl Emile is to marry. While Emile's actions are to be guided by inherent qualities, in contrast, it is assumed that Sophy's instinctive responses must be controlled by an artificially imposed code of behaviour.¹² According to Rousseau only the inculcation of modesty in the female sex restrained their 'unlimited desires', and he takes it for granted that 'a decent woman's life is a perpetual combat against herself'.¹³ Female authors following in Rousseau's and Locke's footsteps, particularly, as we will see in a later section, those writing educational dialogues for children, modified these theories to meet the needs of women. While Rousseau's propositions about the development of the body and the intrinsic characteristics of the mind were of great interest, the more extreme elements of Sophy's education were either ignored or ridiculed.¹⁴ Wollstonecraft assesses Rousseau's education

¹¹ Locke claims that 'Tis Vertue then, direct Vertue, which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in Education' (*Some Thoughts*, p. 132). Similarly Rousseau argues that 'there is only one science to teach children: it is that of the duties of man' (*Emile* [London: Everyman, 1993 [1762]] p. 21)

¹² Rousseau, *Emile* pp. 385-6.

¹³ Rousseau, *Emile* p. 369.

¹⁴ See Hilton on contemporary female responses to *Emile* (*Shaping of the Nation's Young*, pp. 79-81).

plan for women as nonsense but was nevertheless influenced by his wider theories. Macaulay, likewise, was fascinated by questions about innate propensities, but both writers were sure that the effect of these on the character were outweighed by the influences of society, and prioritised the cultivation of reason from an early age.¹⁵ However, it was not only radical writers who insisted upon the importance of cultivating reason. This was an essential component in a range of literature expressing more moderate views on the subject of sex equality. As we will see in the second half of this work, Austen demonstrates throughout her novels both the advantages gained by a reasoned consideration of the world, and the consequences when this is lacking.

Locke's educational theory also accorded great importance to innate characteristics, which he argued should be catered to in any educational plan.¹⁶ However, Locke insists that men must cultivate reason to correct inherent defects in their characters and I would argue that this aspect of his theories has a significant impact on the conduct books, educational dialogues and periodicals that I will be examining. He argues that

the great Principle and Foundation of all Vertue and Worth, is placed in this, That a Man is able to *deny himself* his own Desires, cross his own Inclinations, and purely follow what Reason directs as best, tho' the appetite lean the other way.¹⁷

Reason is essential to allow individuals to resist their own inclinations where appropriate. Children are born as 'blank slates', neither intrinsically good nor evil, but developing over time as a result of their experiences. As these experiences, according to Locke, would be inscribed permanently on a child's character, it was essential that they were educated in principles from the earliest age:

The great Mistake I have observed in People's breeding their Children has been, that this has not been taken care enough of in its

¹⁵ Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education* (London: William Pickering, 1996 [1790]) pp. 10-11.

¹⁶ Locke notes that 'we must not hope to wholly change their Original Tempers, nor make the Gay Pensive and Grave, nor the Melancholy Sportive, without spoiling them' (*Some Thoughts*, p. 122).

¹⁷ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 103.

*due season; That the Mind has not been made obedient to Discipline, and pliant to Reason, when at first it was most tender, most easy to be bowed.*¹⁸

Since a child's mind was so malleable, a diligent parent could mould a virtuous individual. This Lockean belief in the gentle correction of a child's foibles is perpetuated across a range of literature including conduct books, periodicals and novels. The naturally good natured child is a popular subject in short stories and 'true' histories in women's magazines at this time. However, often good nature alone is shown to be insufficient to make a virtuous and respectable individual; education is also essential.

I now wish to turn my attention to the format and content of eighteenth-century periodicals. While these works reiterate many of the opinions and recommendations of conservative conduct books on the subject of female education, their format enabled the incorporation of a wider range of diverging views. Although conduct books are fraught with contradictory expectations, they were written by a single hand, and generally published as single, complete volumes of work. In contrast, magazines were issued periodically, often multi-authored, and usually consisted of a number of sections. Because they were not single coherent pieces of work, they offered a much greater range of subject-matter and viewpoint, which I will be arguing encouraged readers to debate, evaluate and sometimes resist or modify overt messages encountered therein. Although eighteenth century women's magazines differ from each other in a number of ways, one common feature which distinguishes them from conduct books is an emphasis on practical lived experience. There is a shift away from ideological prescription towards helping women to negotiate obstacles in society. In contrast, conduct books, aimed increasingly at women from the 1760s onwards, were dominated by ideology and the theoretical concerns of society. Writers, such as James Fordyce and Hannah More may have viewed themselves as moderate but their works are focused on the extremes of the perfect and corrupt woman, rather than the mixed experience of women's actual lives. In

¹⁸ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 103

women's magazines there is less use of direct instruction, and more fictional representations of social situations which look forward to the novel of manners. Like the novel, the short stories and 'true' histories featured in these works may show women operating as rational individuals, rejecting traditional notions about women's irrationality without challenging the status quo and alienating elements of their audience. As I will show, the female periodical developed a number of strategies to negotiate between extremes and was able to voice both conservative and radical sentiments without necessarily endorsing either. Many of the features which allow this freedom evolved out of earlier periodicals and I will, therefore, now look briefly at a number of works which influenced the development of the woman's magazine.

As early as 1693 bookseller John Dunton created a magazine aimed specifically at women called the *Ladies' Mercury*. This publication took the form of questions and answers, confining its subject matter to topics thought suitable for women, notably, relationships with the opposite sex. Interestingly, the decision not to answer questions lying outwith the boundary of love, marriage and courtship may, in part, be why the *Ladies' Mercury* ran for only four issues. This magazine had emerged out of another much more successful publication of Dunton's. The *Athenian Mercury* published between 1690 and 1696 did not confine its subject matter to ladylike topics and by answering questions on a range of subjects as diverse as correct behaviour, popular science and religion, opened up opportunities for women to think critically about the world they lived in. Pioneering the question and answer format, the *Athenian Mercury* helped establish the immediacy and reader participation which characterised the magazines which followed it. While this publication's attitude towards women was by no means consistent, and answers to questions were often patronising, the importance of reader participation should not be underestimated.

One of the defining features of women's magazines is the representation of multiple voices, and the creation of communities where real debate and exchange of ideas took place, either through authentic readers' correspondence or fictional

representations of letters or conversation.¹⁹ With the growth in female literacy, women became particularly associated with the letter, an important form of communication for those trying to maintain contact and exchange information with friends and family at a distance.²⁰ By extending their letter writing skills to magazines women could engage in dialogue with people outwith their known social networks. Unfortunately, as we will see, questions remain over the authenticity of many readers' letters in eighteenth-century magazines. While some appear genuine others were almost certainly created by the authors and editors of these works. Whatever the case, I believe that it must have been enabling for a female readership to find topics that were of interest to them discussed in a feminine voice. However, it must also be acknowledged that male voices disguised as female do have a greater opportunity to filter through patriarchal assumptions about women's roles and restrict their choices in an underhand manner. For example, it may be more difficult to resist a female voice supposedly offering the benefit of her own experience than a male voice trying to impose restrictions on the opposite sex.

Richard Steele's *Tatler*, published between April 1709 and January 1710, was one of the earliest publications to directly and consistently address a female audience. Although generally written under the name of its fictional writer and editor, Isaac Bickerstaff, significantly for the genesis of the woman's magazine, a number of issues were expounded under a female persona. Bickerstaff's much younger half-sister, Jenny Distaff, called upon her own experiences when addressing topics which were of specific concern to women, and in doing so revealed that the female character could change and adapt to circumstances. Yet, although she is allowed to acknowledge mistakes, such as falling in love with an unscrupulous man, which would become less acceptable later in the century, it should nonetheless be noted that Jenny often seems disconnected from the big decisions in her own life and later issues of the *Tatler* see her not reforming herself, but rather being reformed by

¹⁹ Raven notes that the inclusion of reader's letters and amateur poetry in eighteenth-century magazines 'sustained reader commitment, even at the cost of critical respect' (*Business of Books*, p. 280).

²⁰ See Vickery on women's letter-writing skills in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries (*Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 287).

others.²¹ In later women's magazines the range of issues regarded as acceptable for discussion is more confined, but we find that women themselves play a more prominent role. This may mean a representation of what they are feeling, or a debate about morals rather than direct action, but importantly we increasingly hear women articulating their own interests. Jenny Distaff, imperfect as she is, demonstrates that women can engage in debate and think for themselves. While the acceptance of female inferiority offered by male writers masquerading as women may have had a detrimental impact on the way women viewed themselves, these fictional representations also show the importance of lived experience. Where women were prevented from directly encountering the world for themselves, magazines could offer a vicarious alternative. This may have encouraged women to think about the potential of female communities, which could be created through letter networks either with friends and family or through publication in periodicals, where they could learn from each other and not just from their male relatives.

The *Female Tatler*, published between July 1709 and March 1710, was the first periodical to be entirely written under a female persona – initially Mrs Crackenthorpe, 'a lady who knows everything', and latterly by a 'society of ladies'.²² Following in the footsteps of the *Tatler* this publication promises to provide reports from 'White's', 'Will's' and the 'Grecian', but, significantly, Mrs Crackenthorpe gathers some of her best information from the assemblies of company which she hosts in her own home, undermining the idea of a separation between the public and private spheres.²³ There is an interpenetration of the public and private worlds here that actually mirrors women's true experience. Far from being confined to an enclosed, restricted private sphere, Mrs Crackenthorpe has access to a range of knowledge and experiences which she can pass on to her readers. As we will see, the desire to pass on a surrogate form of experience to women is a constant feature of the women's magazines I will be looking at.

²¹ Steele, *Tatler*, N^o 143.

²² For an account of the dispute over authorship of the *Female Tatler* see Paul Bunyan Anderson, 'The History and Authorship of Mrs Crackenthorpe's *Female Tatler*', *Modern Philology*, 28 (1930-31): 354-360.

²³ Mrs Crackenthorpe, *Female Tatler* (London: Everyman, 1992 [1709]), p. 2.

Conversation features as an important element in the *Female Tatler*, with the representation of dialogues allowing readers to assess the benefits of rational discussion for themselves. As we shall see in Part Two of this work, attitudes towards women and conversation in the eighteenth century were neither simple nor consistent. While on the one hand silence was deemed to be in keeping with feminine modesty and shyness, on the other, polite conversation was considered a feminine skill to be used in the exertion of their civilising influence. The *Female Tatler* insists that the ability of women to communicate well is an asset to society, allowing them to debate the topics which had a relevancy for them. Conversation in action is illustrated particularly well in some of the later issues by the society of ladies, for instance when Eudoxa, Emilia, Rosella and Lucinda discuss where the balance of power should lie within marriage.²⁴ Although some of the views expressed about a wife's ability to control her husband are deliberately scandalous, the exchange of opinions between these ladies provided opportunity for genuine debate. Ironically, as later eighteenth-century periodicals get increasingly conservative in content, debate through conversation becomes a more important part of these publications. I will be arguing that the relatively open format of some of these later works offsets some of the more confining elements of their content.

While a heterogeneous format was a defining feature of periodicals from their inception, this becomes increasingly evident. By the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of women's magazines consisted of a range of discreet articles, letters and short stories, remarkably similar to modern publications, which I will be referring to as female miscellanies. Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, first published in 1731, provided an influential model for this design.²⁵ The stated purpose of this work was not to provide a publication of original material but rather to give a summary of the best of the weekly journals then available. By 1731 the print industry in London was flourishing despite attempts to curb political commentary. Cave notes that there were 'no less than 200 half-sheets per month,'

²⁴ *Female Tatler*, pp. 119, 122-24.

²⁵ The term magazine, to mean a periodical, first came into use with this publication. In the eighteenth century a magazine was a storehouse for goods and merchandise. The *Gentleman's Magazine* was 'to treasure up, as in a magazine', the most remarkable pieces 'from other weekly publications' (Edward Cave, *Gentleman's Magazine* [London: R Newton] Advertisement within January 1731 issue).

making it impossible for any normal person to read them all. As a result ‘many things deserving attention’ were overlooked. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* was founded on the principle that the best of these essays could be abstracted and summarised for ‘universal benefit and information’.²⁶ In addition to an overview of the weekly essays there was also a poetry section, foreign and domestic news, prices of goods and stocks, and a register of books published - forty-eight pages in total - for only six pence per month. Clearly guided by the success of earlier periodicals, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* combined all the popular and desirable elements of other serials in an effort to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. It is this remarkable diversity which characterises not only the *Gentleman’s Magazine* but popular eighteenth-century women’s magazines, from Eliza Haywood’s *Female Spectator* (1744-46) to the *Lady’s Magazine* (1770-17832) and *Lady’s Monthly Museum* (1798-1832).

I have been arguing that the eighteenth-century periodical had a peculiar relevance for women. Such is the case that even a publication with a name like the *Gentleman’s Magazine* included topics of interest to women and proved itself willing to accept reader contributions from their female audience.²⁷ Of course, one explanation for this is that the title’s emphasis is not so much on gender as on class. The magazine was addressed to the middle classes, and as a storehouse of information, would have been a valuable educational tool for both sexes. In common with the *Athenian Mercury*, a wide range of information on different subjects, some suitable for women, others not, sat side-by-side. While many of the essays on conduct, would have been considered women’s natural territory, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* also contained religious and political debates. There may have been an assumption that women were not interested in essays from journals with overt party affiliations, and in the absence of direct accounts from women, it is possible only to say that through the *Gentleman’s Magazine* women had access to this material.

²⁶ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, January 1731 advertisement.

²⁷ See for example January 1737 where a letter is included from a ‘Sharlot Wealthy’ who complains of the poor education given to women and the importance attached to beauty rather than common sense and intelligence (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, p. 5).

It is not until 1735 that original correspondence becomes a regular feature of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Much of this takes the form of essays and dissertations on religious or political controversy. Of these original letters, few are from women. Nevertheless we do find occasional items of interest, such as a young lady writing in embarrassment about excessive sweating and looking for practical advice. In answering questions of this nature, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, like Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*, could make a difference not just to an individual's life but to the general availability of information.²⁸ Readers' contributions on a range of subjects become increasingly sophisticated in later women's magazines but early periodicals show the beginnings of a community where women could participate in the exchange of information and gain the confidence to express their own opinions. The *Gentleman's Magazine* took all the elements of existing publications and combined them to create the first miscellany for the middle classes. Although the lady's magazines at the end of the century did not include parliamentary debates, or reviews in the manner of Cave's, the *Gentleman's Magazine* is nevertheless the model for the basic format of the *Lady's Magazine* and the *Lady's Monthly Museum*.

In this introduction I have tried to indicate that questions about female education were not a marginal concern in eighteenth-century society. Featured prominently across a range of literature, the question of women's capacity to learn was entwined with the structure of society. In the following chapter I will focus more specifically on conduct books in order to show that the single dominating voice of these works tends to silence dissenting opinions. Concerned with ideology and theoretical concerns rather than the reality of women's lives, a binary representation of the female sex is offered to readers: on the one hand, the perfect wife and mother who fulfils expectations by adhering to the recommended educational plan and, on the other, the woman who ignores all advice and allows herself to be corrupted. Nevertheless, we will see that even conduct literature does not present a uniform picture of what or how the eighteenth-century woman should be taught. To understand the complication and contradiction in these works we must look to the

²⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1740, p. 245.

influences of wider society, and we will see that close links may be made with Enlightenment writing of this time, particularly the common-sense school of thought.

In contrast to the extreme views expressed in conduct literature about female abilities, we will see, in the second chapter, a more moderate and pragmatic approach being adopted in women's magazines of this time. I have divided these works into three categories: Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, the first major magazine for women; juvenile magazines, aimed at both a child to be educated and a female teacher who will be responsible for the educational process; and lastly the female miscellany which develops in the second half of the eighteenth century. While there are many differences between these publications, they share a heterogeneity of format which includes letters, poetry and short stories composed by a range of fictional personae. Comprising a range of material and authors, these magazines offered contradictory viewpoints which did not just vary from month to month but often within a single issue. I would argue that, in many ways, the representation of multiple voices makes these works more akin to the novel of manners, where the incorporation of various characters, each with their own distinctive outlook on life, similarly acknowledges that there are many ways of looking at the world. As we will see, in common with the novel, eighteenth-century women's magazines could pass on a vicarious experience to readers, representing the everyday world as it existed, and prioritising the practical over the ideological.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL VOICES IN CONDUCT LITERATURE

To the unsuspecting reader, eighteenth-century conduct books addressed to women may appear to present a limiting but coherent educational plan for the female sex. Indeed, in contrast to the multiple viewpoints represented in the magazines and novels which I will be looking at in later chapters, conduct literature tends towards a single dominating voice which quashes dissent. Additionally, this body of work largely shares a focus, not on the cultivation of the intellect or the development of practical skills, but on the identification of ‘natural’ intrinsic qualities which, it is argued, equip women to fulfil specifically feminine roles within the domestic sphere and society at large. Over the course of this chapter we will see that while many of the opinions expressed about women in such works reflect long standing beliefs of western society, conduct literature also specifically responds to the needs of the time in which it was written. Notably, writings on conduct play a significant part in the feminisation of culture during the eighteenth century, helping to create, debate and modify a gender ideology which labelled women as inferior dependents but paradoxically awarded them moral superiority.

Although questions about the eighteenth-century, middle-class woman and her education were most overtly addressed in conduct literature, this was also an area of interest to Enlightenment writers producing new knowledge about the world and alternative ways of viewing humanity. Enlightened thought incorporated a variety of opinions and methods of investigation but there was widespread agreement that a greater understanding of human nature would allow people to better fulfil their role in society. After Newton proved that the workings of the physical world could be explained by a set of universal principles, a ‘science of man’ developed which sought

to uncover similar rules which would explain human behaviour.¹ By extension, there was also a project that sought to understand inherent differences between the sexes. Conduct books address many similar questions to those found in Enlightenment writings and as I will show, this common interest is particularly notable between conservative writers on conduct and philosophers from the common-sense school of thought. Indeed, John Gregory, as an influential Enlightenment figure and writer of conduct literature, blurs this distinction.

Both conduct books and Enlightenment writings on female education specifically focused upon the part to be played by women within the middle classes. Across this body of work questions about what and how women learned became inextricably linked with the wider anxieties of this social group, particularly the consequences of the significant increase in availability of material items and leisure pursuits.² Conduct books could help assuage fears about extravagant consumption by setting out appropriate standards of behaviour for both sexes but they awarded the female sex a particular significance, utilising Enlightenment arguments to insist that the position and respect accorded to women in society indicated the degree of civilisation reached. Enlightenment conjectural histories of civilisation had a particularly significant impact on conduct literature, which could use their argumentation and methodology to further justify the dissemination of middle-class gender values. These conjectural histories identified commerce, and by extension the middle classes, as achieving a level of material comfort which promoted useful industry and virtue, whilst avoiding the corrupting effects of luxury. According to these works, only when society had evolved to this level could women's unique contribution be appreciated. As we will see, these ideas about gender could be exploited by conduct-book writers to make more palatable the assumption that essential differences in ability existed between the sexes. Further, as a literature of sensibility developed, 'feminine' virtues, such as modesty and deference, were increasingly valued in men as a benefit to polite socialisation and as a signature of

¹ See, for example, David Hume who argued that when 'cautious observations of human life' are 'judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior to any other of human comprehension' (*Treatise*, p. xix).

² See Barker-Benfield on the middle-class anxiety about the accumulation of wealth (*Culture of Sensibility*, pp. xxxii-xxxiii).

taste.³ The value of the feminine could extend, then, beyond women but only within middle-class society.

One of the first significant pieces of literature to extol middle-class gender values was Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. Consistently addressed to both sexes, and showing a sustained interest in gender roles, this work argued that, although equal, men and women were fundamentally different and should each remain within their own sphere of influence. While identifying women with emotion and men with reason provided an ideological justification for a male monopoly of power, it also had implications for women's place within an ideal of socialisation. Although it promoted the benefits of men conversing with men, this periodical also encouraged social contact between the sexes, arguing that feminine qualities, such as modesty and delicacy would exercise a good influence on men: 'Women were formed to temper Mankind, and sooth them into Tenderness and Compassion.'⁴ Promoting similar gender values, James Forrester's *Polite Philosopher* (1738) points to the good influence of virtuous women on male behaviour: 'Men of true taste feel a natural complaisance for women when they converse with them and fall, without knowing it, upon every art of pleasing'.⁵ The insistence that women had distinct characteristics and qualities which complemented those of men helped legitimise the female right to enact change through the male figure of authority in their lives, and, as Roy Porter notes, this was considered to be a welcome development by many intelligent middle-class women who identified female influence as a way to make a useful contribution to society.⁶ Nevertheless, radical writers took issue with the concept of feminine influence, insisting on women's right to take direct action in their own lives. However, the diaries and journals of eighteenth-century women reveal their ability to negotiate between these ideas. While many embraced the notion that there were separate spheres of influence for the sexes, this did not

³ For a discussion of the connection between the novel of sensibility and moral philosophy in the eighteenth century, see John Mullan, 'The Language of Sentiment: Hume, Smith and Henry MacKenzie' in Andrew Hook (ed), *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol 2 1660-1800 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989).

⁴ Addison, *Spectator*, N^o 57.

⁵ James Forrester, *The Polite Philosopher: or, An Essay on that Art which Makes a Man Happy in Himself, and Agreeable to Others* (Edinburgh: eighth edition, 1776 [1738]) pp. 62-3.

⁶ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 331.

necessarily translate into a passive role for women. In particular, marriage was viewed as an equal partnership; Mary Berry, for instance, describes the duties of both husbands and wives as ‘mutually correcting, sustaining and strengthening each other...each finding a candid but severe judge in the understanding’.⁷ Such views on the importance of a wife’s active role were widely articulated in the women’s magazines which appeared later in the century, and indeed are imaginatively portrayed in many novels of the period.

Although Early Modern conduct literature often gave advice about how women should behave as daughters, wives, and mothers, it was largely assumed that they would not read this literature themselves, but rather have the appropriate information dispensed to them by the male head of household. However, as the eighteenth century progressed, conduct books were increasingly directly addressed to the female sex and developed a number of strategies for limiting women’s experience of the world as they created an ideological construction of domestic bliss. In contrast to the multiple viewpoints represented in women’s magazines, these works tended to consist of one-sided advice, from the author to his intended audience, which quashed dissent. We see, for example, that the voice of a potential protestor is barely heard in James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) before it is silenced.⁸ However, clearly not all women unquestioningly accepted the values promoted in these works. The memoirs of early female scientist Mary Somerville demonstrate that women who were concerned with respectability and propriety could still offer resistance to conduct literature. She expresses the view that

It was the fashion of a set of ladies such as Mrs Hannah More, Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton and Mrs Grant of Laggan to write on education. I detested their books for they imposed such restraints and duties that they seemed to have been written to please men.⁹

Somerville clearly recognised that the ideology promoted in these works was not to her benefit, indeed the very fact that the same message was being continually

⁷ Lewis, *Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry*, vol 2, p. 4

⁸ James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (London: William Pickering, 1996 [1766]) pp. 89, 287.

⁹ Mary Somerville, *Queen of Science* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001 [1873]) p. 74.

reiterated in conduct books suggests that there were many who were not complying with these expectations. Even those who expressed approval for conservative conduct books did not necessarily follow their teachings. In his study of the eighteenth-century reading habits of Anna Larpent, John Brewer notes that although she read a range of prescriptive literature which condemned novel reading this did not prevent her from pursuing and enjoying such material.¹⁰

Conduct literature appeared in a range of formats during the eighteenth century, including letters, treatises, essays, dialogues, religious sermons and even poetical admonitions, all of which could be addressed to a specific individual. While the publication of these works indicates that they were intended for a wider audience of middle-class women, the pretence of an authentic communication from a concerned individual was a useful ploy. The right to advise, for the most part, was based, not on social superiority, but on the authors' persona as anxious mothers, fathers, brothers, friends or simply concerned citizens wishing to pass on the benefits of their experience. Often a tone of cloying intimacy could be affected by those claiming genuine concern and affection for their readers. This is particularly notable in the works of Fordyce. Although one of the most popular conduct-book writers of the eighteenth century, the way in which his works address themselves solely to the emotions and sensibility of the female sex, offering little in the way of intellectual challenge, makes them particularly distasteful to the modern eye.¹¹ Nevertheless, the claim to be motivated by an interest in either the individual to whom the text is addressed, or regarding middle-class women in general, did not necessarily translate into sentimentality or the triumph of emotion over reason. As we will see, both Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1792) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* show consistent concern about the fate of middle-class women but use the language of rationality and reason to engage with the question of female education. Macaulay's *Letters*, consisting of a one-sided correspondence to a younger woman, is particularly notable for transforming many of the traditional elements of the conduct book into a vehicle for radical dissent in

¹⁰ John Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader', pp. 233-4.

¹¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 606.

relation to gender inequality. A more moderate position is adopted by Hester Chapone, who addresses her conduct book *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) to her niece. However, she similarly shows that the promotion of reason is compatible with expressing emotion and affection. As we will see, writers holding a variety of opinions about female conduct and education could mould the format of conduct books to suit their own value system. I will therefore now examine the differing ideological agendas behind a range of texts which on the surface share a surprising number of similarities.

Conservative and radical voices on woman's 'natural' character

Questions about innate differences between the sexes were central to both conservative conduct literature and radical proto-feminist writing. As we will see, the positions adopted on this subject determined the way woman's character was understood, and the part she was expected to play in society. Repeatedly referring to nature as a way to legitimise their attitude towards the gender hierarchy, conservative writers insisted that innate weakness and modesty made women's restricted lives inevitable. In contrast, radical proto-feminists claimed that nature was being thwarted by the imposition of these cultural values. In this section I shall focus upon a number of these works in detail and consider the way in which these gender ideologies interacted with a range of wider eighteenth-century influences.

Associating women with emotion and men with logic was one strategy through which a male dominance over the second sex could be justified: the assumption being that women required male guidance if they were not to be led astray by their fine sensibilities. Yet, not only do conservative conduct-book writers assume that women are susceptible to a range of sensations, they also celebrate the ability of the female sex to arouse these feelings in men. James Fordyce adopts a tone of pent-up emotion which he is sure will appeal to the female sex. Despite claiming that his advice is motivated by disinterested friendship and brotherly affection, Fordyce is always aware of his own status as a man whose desire is aroused by the ideal young lady:

As for ourselves, indeed we do not think it requires much fortitude to confess our having felt an early predilection for Good and Amicable women. It proceeded from an early observation of the modesty which always adorns their deportment, of the elegance and vivacity which often distinguish their conversation, and of that delightful interest which the tender affections, and most valuable of the sex, are peculiarly adapted to create in hearts of the least feeling.¹²

Women are assured that although they are dependent on men they may still wield influence as they are ‘peculiarly adapted’ to stimulate a response in the opposite sex. It is not female intelligence which is valued but rather women’s ability to arouse emotion in men. Although his views are couched in the language of flattery, Fordyce is advising women that their chief role in life is to please and attract the male sex. Indeed he argues that women are emotionally and physically dependent on men for their survival:

That providence designed women for a state of dependence, and consequently of submission, I cannot doubt, when I consider their timidity of temper, their tenderness of make, the many comforts and even necessaries of life which they are unable to procure without our aid, their evident want of protection upon a thousand occasions, their incessant study, at every age, in every state, by every means, to engage our attention, and insure our regard.¹³

Convinced that the female fate lies in marriage, Fordyce is intent upon telling women which attractive qualities will gain them a husband. Chief among these attributes are the supposedly feminine qualities of innocence and modesty:

even the silliest, even the loosest men shall in a sober mood be taken with the bashful air, and reserved dress, of an amiable young woman, infinitely more than they ever were with all the open blaze of laboured beauty, and arrogant claims of undisguised allurements.¹⁴

¹² James Fordyce, *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex and the Advantages to be Derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women* (London: T Cadell, 1776) p. 36.

¹³ Fordyce, *Character and Conduct*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Fordyce, *Sermons*, pp. 17-18.

Young ladies are supposed to be innately reserved, but in recommending this behaviour Fordyce, perhaps unknowingly, advocates the affectation of bashfulness. A calculated display of innocence as a sexual charm is, of course, at odds with real naivety. A constant tension exists in conservative conduct literature between the claim that certain qualities are part of women's inherent disposition, and the need for these attributes to be taught. Even emotions, generally considered to be untaught responses arising out of circumstances, become something that women should cultivate. In Fordyce's work, women's tears are judged according to their aesthetic appeal to men:

Never, my fair auditory, never do your eyes shine with a more delightful effulgence, than when suffused with all the trembling softness of grief for virtue in distress, or of solicitude for friendship in danger.¹⁵

Fordyce is not suggesting that women's sensitivity to the plight of others will lead to virtuous action but rather that this emotion adds to their physical attractiveness. However, according to the mores of the time, it was deemed unacceptable for young ladies to solicit the attentions of the opposite sex, whatever the means. Women had to negotiate the contradictory notion that female sexuality was to be cultivated in order to attract a husband, but at the same time, paradoxically, negated and repressed to maintain respectability.

Dr Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), while still being conservative in its attitude, offers a slightly better outlook for women of the period. This conduct book still views woman's sensibility as an important and ingrained part of her nature but does not address itself solely to the emotions in the distasteful manner of Fordyce. Attempting to indicate his liberal and modern attitude towards the female sex, Gregory tells his daughters that he addresses members of their sex 'not as domestic drudges, or the slaves of our pleasures but as our companions and equals.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, in *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with those of the Animal World* (1764), he advises the reader that essential

¹⁵ Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 185.

¹⁶ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (Edinburgh: W Creech, 1774) p. 6.

differences exist between the sexes which allow men and women each to fulfil their own ‘respective duties in society’.¹⁷ While acknowledging that differences between the behaviour of the sexes may partly be related to education, Gregory claims that men have a ‘natural hardness’ of heart in comparison to women who are more susceptible to emotion. He maintains the view that the female sex have a ‘superior delicacy’, ‘natural softness’ and ‘sensibility’ which particularly suit them to ‘duties where the heart is chiefly concerned’, and that as these qualities provide women with a finer sense of morality, they should, therefore, exercise a superior standard of behaviour.¹⁸ Nature, rather than the pressure of social conventions and requirements, is held to be the guiding force in women’s lives. Addressing his daughters, Gregory claims ‘I do not want to *make* you anything: I want to know what Nature has made you and perfect you on her plan’.¹⁹ While acknowledging that nature must be supplemented by the cultivation of desirable social traits, Gregory’s prioritisation of the ‘natural’ still has serious consequences for female development. Women are advised, for instance, that they are defying nature if they pursue studies in the face of difficulties; that which is not immediately understandable is deemed unsuitable for the female character. Those persisting in more intellectual challenges, then, had to be prepared to cross ideological boundaries.

Yet, Gregory does not always consider woman’s natural propensities to be a suitable guide for behaviour. Paradoxically, the same emotional sensitivity which leads to expectations of a superior standard of behaviour also leads to fears that women will be unable to regulate their own desires:

The natural vivacity, and perhaps the natural vanity of your sex, is very apt to lead you into a dissipated state of life, that deceives you, under the appearance of innocent pleasure²⁰

According to Gregory, vanity and vivacity are natural in the female sex and as women are controlled by emotion, they will indulge such pleasures without restraint.

¹⁷ John Gregory, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with those of the Animal World* (London: J Dodsley, 1777 [1765]) p. 117.

¹⁸ Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁹ Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, pp. 54-5.

²⁰ Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, p. 12

Two images of woman emerge, both defined by her supposedly natural sensibility: the first, virtuous and domesticated, uses her sensitivity to serve the needs of her family, the other is a woman carried away by emotion and unable to regulate her own behaviour.

According to Gregory, the loss of a woman's reputation is not only 'indelicate' but 'dangerous'.²¹ The danger, of course, is that if a woman's reputation is under question she will be unable to make a suitable marriage match and may even find herself ostracised from society. Enlightenment writer, David Hume, spells out in blunt terms why the virtue of chastity is so important. He comments on the 'length and feebleness of human infancy' and the necessity of a 'union of male and female for the education of the young.'²² A faithful union with a woman and the effort of supporting a family places restraints on a man's behaviour and a burden of work; to induce men to such efforts, it is necessary for them to believe the children they raise are their own. Whereas a woman is assured that the children she carries are her own, men do not have the same guarantee, and therefore women's behaviour must be beyond suspicion:

In order, therefore, to impose a due restraint on the female sex, we must attach a peculiar degree of shame to their infidelity, above what arises merely from its injustice, and must bestow proportionable praises on their chastity.²³

Hume demystifies accounts of the supposedly natural origins of female modesty by attributing this to the desire to protect male authority and patrilineal succession, while nevertheless endorsing this course of action. It is not that modesty is inherent in women's weak nature but rather that a certain standard of behaviour is expected of women to reassure men that the children they provide for are their own.²⁴ Hume

²¹ Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, p. 44

²² Hume, *Treatise*, p. 570.

²³ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 571

²⁴ The serious consequences of this emphasis on appearances for eighteenth-century women is indicated in the last book of Rousseau's *Emile*: 'Thus it is not enough that a wife should be faithful; her husband, along with his friends and neighbours, must believe in her fidelity; she must be modest, devoted, retiring; she should have the witness not only of a good conscience, but of a good reputation' (p. 389).

notes that these expectations extend to women past the age of bearing children but offers an explanation for this:

Education takes possession of the ductile minds of the fair sex in their infancy. And when a general rule of this kind is once establish'd, men are apt to extend it beyond those principles, from which it first arose.²⁵

To recognise that woman's behaviour is socialised and learned for practical reasons, rather than part of her nature decreed by God, may have been empowering knowledge for many.

As has been noted above, Fordyce and Gregory argue that female education must take into account the different sexual character of men and women. In contrast proto-feminist writers dismissed notions of inherent differences in the abilities of the sexes. Nevertheless this did not mean that they discounted the importance of innate disposition. Despite suggesting near the beginning of her *Letters on Education* that the effects of nature have been much reduced by traits learned in society, Catharine Macaulay repeatedly refers to nature as a guide for appropriate behaviour and agrees with Gregory that natural propensities should not be thwarted. For instance, in describing the behaviour of children, she notes that

Our sons are suffered to enjoy with freedom that time which is not devoted to study, and may follow, unmolested, those strong impulses which Nature has wisely given for the furtherance of her benevolent purposes.²⁶

However, Macaulay indicates a concern that the consequences of a faulty education are frequently confounded with nature when she asks 'how much feebleness of constitution has been acquired, by forming a false idea of female excellence, and endeavouring, by our art, to bring Nature to the ply of our imagination.' She complains that those 'appointed to superintend' woman's conduct have imposed a 'false bias' on her mind, and as a result

²⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 572

²⁶ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 47.

every vigorous exertion is suppressed, the mind and body yield to the tyranny of error, and Nature is charged with all those imperfections which we alone owe to the blunders of art.²⁷

The charge is that women's physical health is put at risk by lack of activity, an artificial restraining of nature, and this in turn affects their minds. Macaulay acknowledges that women do not have the same bodily strength as men, and roots women's historical subservience in this cause. However, she is sure that mental and bodily health go together and points to the harmful consequences of encouraging physical delicacy as an attractive quality.

Macaulay directly attributes observable differences 'in the characters of the sexes' to education. Critical of learning aimed specifically at the female sex, she proposes an educational plan appropriate for both boys and girls.²⁸ It is noted that virtue is a universal quality and that since the education of children should be aimed at producing virtuous adults, boys and girls should receive exactly the same education:

there is but one rule of right for the conduct of all rational beings; consequently that true virtue in one sex must be equally so in the other, whenever a proper opportunity calls for its exertion; and vice versa, what is vice in one sex, cannot have a different property when found in the other.²⁹

Macaulay wants to encourage intelligence and virtue regardless of gender and insists that that which strengthens man's character will have the same effect on woman. This does not mean a complete rejection of traditional feminine qualities but rather that if modesty, for example, is to be considered a virtue in woman, it will serve man equally well.

In agreement with Macaulay, Wollstonecraft argues that if men and women behave differently it is not due to any natural difference in character but rather to their cultural conditioning. To prove this point she compares the female sex with military

²⁷ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 47.

²⁸ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 203

²⁹ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 201.

men who are ‘sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge, or fortified by principles.’ According to Wollstonecraft, the consequences are similar to those of middle-class women’s education:

soldiers acquire a little superficial knowledge, snatched from the muddy current of conversation, and from continually mixing with society, they gain what is termed a knowledge of the world; and this acquaintance with manners and customs has frequently been confounded with a knowledge of the human heart.³⁰

If men and women with similar experiences and opportunities behave in much the same way, then general differences in ability between the sexes must be the result of education and not nature. Although Wollstonecraft admits that women’s actions throughout history have shown them to be weaker than men, she does not accept this as an inevitable consequence of their sex, but rather investigates the root cause. The blame lies, she argues, with a social structure which denies women the opportunity and freedom to learn:

Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale.³¹

Women’s limited education may mean they are not currently men’s equals, but given the opportunity, they have the potential to be equal. Inspired by the democratic ambitions of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft expected similar rights to be extended to women as those contained within the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, which stated that all men were born equal with the right to ‘liberty, property, and safety from, and resistance to, oppression.’³² Elizabeth G Sledziewski notes that ‘the French Revolution was the historical moment when Western civilisation discovered that women could play a civic role.’³³ Although women were ultimately excluded from political rights in France, these events nevertheless opened up the

³⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1992 [1792]) pp. 143, 105.

³¹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, pp. 119, 120.

³² Norman Davies, *Europe* (London: Pimlico, 1996) p. 713.

³³ Elizabeth G Sledziewski, ‘The French Revolution as the Turning Point,’ in *A History of Women* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1993) vol 4, p. 34.

opportunity to re-evaluate their position in society. Often the result of this was a conservative confirmation of woman's place in the home, serving the needs of her family. But it also opened up debate about the need for women to be educated, not as dependent beings, but as responsible citizens. As Sledziewski argues, the principle objective of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* 'was not to make women participants in the political process on an equal footing with men but to win recognition of their civic responsibilities.'³⁴

Although Hannah More was one of Macaulay and Wollstonecraft's staunchest critics, her conduct book, *Strictures on Female Education* (1798), also focuses upon the poor education received by middle-class women and at a practical level advocates similar changes in women's lives. Despite the disparity between the ideological positions of these writers, they shared the desire to claim respect for traditional domestic duties and recognised that an appropriate education was essential if these were to be properly fulfilled. Yet, More's views about essential differences between the capabilities of the sexes put her at the opposite end of the spectrum from both Macaulay and Wollstonecraft in the debate about women's place in society. More, strongly influenced by her evangelical religion, believed that individuals were placed in a hierarchy by God and had no right to question their position in life. She awarded women a place of moral superiority in society, but this, paradoxically, depended upon them remaining subordinate and dependent on the male figure in their lives. More did not merely acquiesce in assumptions about female inferiority but perpetuated an image of woman as lacking in reason and self-control. Writing to the Earl of Orford in 1793, she expresses the opinion that

To be unstable and capricious, I really think, is but too characteristic of our sex; and there is perhaps no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman.³⁵

According to More, the subject matter of Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* was enough to ensure she would never read it: 'there is something fantastic and absurd in

³⁴ Sledziewski, 'French Revolution', p. 45.

³⁵ William Roberts (ed), *The Memoirs of Hannah More*, (London: R B Seeley & W Burnside, 1834) vol 2, p. 371.

the very title.³⁶ She feared that the political radicalism of figures like Wollstonecraft would upset what she saw as the hierarchical order of nature and treated the notion of women's rights as ridiculous.

In agreement with Fordyce and Gregory, More argues that men and women have different natural characters and that women should cultivate specifically feminine virtues. However, she differs from these conduct-book writers in insisting that women must be correctly educated to allow these positive feminine qualities to develop. Again we find an obvious tension here between the belief that these gender characteristics are natural, and the need for them to be implanted. According to More, if female education were to 'cultivate intellect, implant religion, and cherish modesty' this would allow feminine virtues to arise naturally in the female character:³⁷

Whatever is engaging in manners would be the natural result of whatever is just in sentiment, and correct in principle; softness would grow out of humility, and external delicacy would spring from purity of heart. Then the decorums, the proprieties, the elegancies, and even the graces, as far as they are simple, pure, and honest, would follow as an almost inevitable consequence³⁸

Although More is indicating that it is important that women be able to exert their rational faculties in order to judge what is 'just' and 'correct in principle', it is clear that she believes emotion has the dominant part to play in cultivating qualities of 'softness', 'delicacy' and 'elegance'. It is because the latter attributes were associated with the 'natural' feminine disposition that women were thought to be superior judges of taste and morality. However, by emphasising these qualities at the expense of reason, More reiterates the message of writers like Fordyce and Gregory that women require male guidance.

³⁶ Roberts, *Memoirs of Hannah More*, vol 2, p. 371.

³⁷ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, in *The Works of Hannah More* (London: T Cadell and W Davies, 1801) vol 7, pp. 81-2.

³⁸ More, *Strictures*, vol 7, p. 82.

Writing a decade later, Jane West encourages a similar view of women in her *Letters to a Young Lady* (1810). While envisaging an important role for women in society, this work remains seriously restricted by assumptions about women's 'natural' sexual character. Despite insisting that women are 'rational creatures,' West allots them a subordinate role in life. She advises her female readers that 'we may rest assured that we are endowed with powers adequate to the design of our creation', namely to be 'helpmate of man'.³⁹ In common with More, she argues that the female sex should define itself in relation to men, as daughters, sisters, mothers or wives, and assures her readers that these were the 'designs of our creator.'⁴⁰ The diaries and letters of eighteenth-century women indicate that for many these were compelling arguments.⁴¹ However, I am not suggesting a straightforward acquiescence in the teachings of conduct books. The exact nature of power relations between husbands and wives were open to the interpretation of individuals, as Ellen Weeton's correspondence reveals. Disagreeing with her friend Mrs Price, Weeton rejects the suggestion that a successful marriage is the consequence of one person giving way to the 'wayward humours of the other'. Instead she insists that it is the duty of either partner to provide '*firm, judicious* opposition'.⁴² Clearly such opposition would be impossible if women handed complete control over to their husbands. The eighteenth-century middle-class woman might legitimately claim an authority from within the domestic sphere, not only to regulate her children's behaviour, but also that of male members of the household where necessary.

As I have shown, nature is a key concept for both conservative and radical conduct-book writers. The disagreement is not about whether the natural is an appropriate guide, but over what *is* natural. In the following section we will see that conservative writers argue that woman's 'natural' role is to complement man, and that she should

³⁹ Jane West, *Letter to a Young Lady* (London: William Pickering, 1996 reprint of 1811 4th edition [1806]), vol 1, p. 43.

⁴⁰ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 1, pp. 50-51.

⁴¹ See, for example, Agnes Porter's comments to a young pupil that God made men stronger than women so that they could 'protect them' and 'make life more comfortable to them', whereas 'women made the *inside* of the house pleasant, and always took care to be good-natured and agreeable in their conversation, to amuse their husbands and papas when they came home fatigued with business' (Martin, *Governess*, p. 203).

⁴² Edward Hall (ed), *Miss Weeton Journal of a Governess 1811-1825* [London: Oxford University Press, 1939] pp. 145-146.

use her influence to effect change through the male figures in her life. In contrast, radical writers claim the imposition of these values has distorted nature and identify feminine influence as an evil in society. While these extreme positions do not reflect the reality of eighteenth-century women's lives, they do define the parameters of the debate on female education, and reveal many of the ideas negotiated by women when considering their position in society.

Female influence

Over the previous sections I have shown that conservative conduct-book writers associated women with the gentler emotions which, they argued, ideally complemented the male character. The idea that female sensibility could moderate men's behaviour is pursued with enthusiasm. Gregory argues that

among other obvious advantages of an easy intercourse between the two sexes, it occasions an emulation and exertion in each to excel and be agreeable: hence their respective excellencies are mutually communicated and blended.⁴³

Notably, Gregory claims that both men and women benefit from this mixed company. Man and woman have an inherent need to please one another and consequently their best qualities rub off on each another. Such views were widespread in eighteenth-century society.⁴⁴ Enlightenment writer David Hume expresses a similar belief in the positive influence of woman's nature on male society. In his essay 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' he asks:

What better school for manners than the company of virtuous women, where the mutual endeavour to please must insensibly polish the mind, where the example of the female softness and modesty must communicate itself to their admirers, and where the delicacy of that sex puts everyone on his guard, lest he give offence by any breach of decency.⁴⁵

⁴³ Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, p. 74.

⁴⁴ See Philip Carter on women's perceived role as refiners of male conduct (*Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* [Essex: Longman, 2001] pp. 67-70).

⁴⁵ David Hume, *Selected Essays* (Oxford, Oxford World's Classics, 1993 [1777]) p. 74.

In the ‘company of virtuous women’ men become much more aware of the faults of their own behaviour and their desire to please makes them regulate their behaviour. Although not explicitly stated by Gregory or Hume, this desire to please is obviously, at least partly, based on sexual attraction. This is made much more obvious by Fordyce who claims female influence is the natural result of man’s attraction to woman:

Another and a principle source of your importance is the very great and extensive influence which you, in general, have with Our sex. There is in female youth, an attraction, which every man of the least sensibility must perceive. If assisted by beauty, it becomes in the first impression irresistible. Your power so far we do not affect to conceal. That HE who made us meant it thus, is manifest from his having attempered our hearts to such emotions.⁴⁶

Fordyce attaches much importance to youth and beauty; these qualities attract men, and through this attraction women may influence male behaviour. Women’s influence works on two levels: at one level, just being exposed to virtuous female conduct encourages men to moderate their own behaviour. Under these circumstances women are not trying to influence the behaviour of others and may be unaware that they are having any such effect. However, conduct book writers also advise their readers how to deliberately exercise influence over men. Attempts to control male figures of authority usually attracted disapproval, but, perhaps this is rendered more acceptable by the suggestion that female influence is divinely ordained.

Although this positive view of women’s complementary role was widespread, it was not universal. Catharine Macaulay argued that traditionally feminine ‘virtues’ were the product of a deficient and corrupting education and consequently refused to accept that they could have a beneficial influence on the male character. In direct contrast with Fordyce and Gregory, she identifies women’s faults with female influence, and claims that ‘by the intrigues of women, and their rage for personal

⁴⁶ Fordyce, *Sermons*, pp. 17-18.

power and importance, the whole world has been filled with violence and injury.’⁴⁷
 The problem lies specifically with *indirect* influence, for Macaulay notes that to do the female sex justice

it must be confessed that history does not set forth more instances of positive power abused by women, than by men; and when the sex have been taught wisdom by education, they will be glad to give up indirect influence for rational privileges.⁴⁸

When wielding power through men, women cannot be reasonable and logical; they are taught instead to be manipulative. According to Macaulay, women can only fulfil their duties in life and have a beneficial impact on society if they utilise reason and logic. These qualities must be acquired through the experience of exercising the rational faculties in society, and as result of receiving the correct education.

Macaulay does agree that interaction between men and women, and boys and girls can be beneficial, but she suggests this on very different grounds from Fordyce and Gregory. In Macaulay’s plan girls do not insinuate themselves into male company and the benefit of this interaction is not based on sexual difference; in fact, exactly the opposite. Macaulay writes that ‘by the uninterrupted intercourse’ between girls and boys being educated together ‘both sexes will find, that friendship may be enjoyed between them without passion’.⁴⁹

Wollstonecraft also identifies indirect influence as a negative power in women’s lives. Excluded from direct action and denied reasonable opportunity to influence the world women use whatever leverage they can acquire to exercise control over their own lives. But Wollstonecraft is in no doubt that the gaining, and utilising of this power corrupts:

This exertion of cunning is only an instinct of nature to enable them to obtain indirectly a little of that power of which they are unjustly denied a share; for, if women are not permitted to enjoy

⁴⁷ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 113.

⁴⁸ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 215.

⁴⁹ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 50.

legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious to obtain illicit privileges⁵⁰

She views the tactics recommended by conservative conduct-book writers - a 'winning softness' which 'governs by obeying' - as sinister and deceitful.⁵¹ Convinced that this situation would persist until women were given reasonable rights, Wollstonecraft appeals to men throughout the *Rights of Woman* to treat women first as human beings, rather than as young ladies.

In contrast to Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, More argues that the female sex should cultivate specifically feminine virtues. She unquestioningly accepts that women are inferior to men but nonetheless assumes that they have important duties to fulfil in which feminine influence will play a significant part. The first chapter of *Strictures on Female Education* is devoted to this subject, where, More encourages her readers to use their female influence wisely for the good of their country:

I would call them to the best and most appropriate exertion of their power, to raise the depressed tone of public morals, and to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principle.⁵²

Although this may initially seem to allow women a role within the public sphere, it soon becomes clear that women's ability to influence morals is circumscribed by its confinement to the domestic sphere.⁵³ The power More refers to lies in the individual's private conduct and deliberate choice to avoid scandalous leisure pursuits, inappropriate reading material and so on. Direct action is out of the question. Women may only influence the behaviour of others through passive example.

⁵⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 101.

⁵² More, *Strictures*, vol 7, p. 4.

⁵³ For a more radical reading of More's contribution to political debates see Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 13-38.

Thus the conclusions of conservative and radical writers about women's role and responsibilities could not be more different. Conservative writers argued that women were designed to complement men and should cultivate feminine virtues to this end. While many women welcomed the idea that they should exert their influence to uphold religious and moral values, this nonetheless denied the possibility of direct action. Radical writers responded to this restriction by claiming that women must be treated as adults with rational rights and civic obligations and therefore identify feminine influence, as it was currently understood and practised, as a serious evil in society.

The middle classes

Throughout this chapter I have indicated that the conduct-book ideology of femininity was strongly influenced by the rise of the middle classes and I now want to look more specifically at this issue. Both conservative and radical writers believed that the middle classes were in the ideal position to define standards of behaviour and enact change in society. Domestic virtue was seen as a central feature of civilised societies, and as the middle classes emerged and greater numbers of women exited the workforce, they claimed an authority for themselves on the basis that their natural sphere of action was the home. A new emphasis upon female decorum demonstrated that, while a barbaric life of subsistence and struggle had been left behind, this social group had not yet descended into the corruption and scandal which inevitably accompanied luxury, associated with dissolute upper classes. But as we have seen, although this tier of society attached great value to female respectability, this did not always translate into expanding opportunities for women.

In the *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that middle-class life promotes virtue. However, she clearly believes that as a consequence of social custom and poor education women are denied the benefits of belonging to this social group. While the effort to support themselves and their families financially through work promoted virtue in middle-class men, women, in contrast, were denied the right to gainful

employment.⁵⁴ In fact, Wollstonecraft often compares the inactive state of middle-class women to that of the upper classes, claiming their restricted lifestyle and desire to please the male sex leads to the same weak constitution - physically and mentally:

The human character has ever been formed by the employment the individual, or class pursues; and if the faculties are not sharpened by necessity, they must remain obtuse. The argument may fairly be extended to women; for seldom occupied by serious business the pursuit of pleasure gives that insignificance to their character which renders the society of the great so insipid⁵⁵

Wollstonecraft suggests that it is only through necessity that the human character improves. It is for this reason that she claims the right of independence for women, since this will make them strive in the world to improve their own situation.

Although conservative conduct books define the specific role to be fulfilled by women in terms of 'natural' intrinsic qualities, the woman who conforms to this ideal of femininity is only imagined into being with the emergence of the middle classes. Appropriate gender conduct is represented as inextricably linked with the middle class claim to respectability and refinement. A common technique used by conservative conduct-book writers to impress upon readers their advantageous social position was to compare their situation favourably with that of women from other times or cultures. For example, More writes

it is humbling to reflect, that in those countries in which fondness for the mere persons of women is carried to the highest excess, *they are slaves*; and that their moral and intellectual degradation increases in direct proportion to the adoration which is paid to mere external charms⁵⁶

Such women, it is implied, have little opportunity to reform manners or raise moral standards. In contrast to the 'moral and intellectual degradation' of these women,

⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft notes that 'In the middle rank of life... men in their youth, are prepared for professions, and marriage is not considered as the grand feature in their lives; whilst women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties' (*Rights of Woman*, p. 152).

⁵⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 141.

⁵⁶ More, *Strictures*, vol 7, p. 3.

More argues that British women have every opportunity to engage in rational discourse:

But I turn to the bright reverse of this mortifying scene; to a country where our sex enjoys the blessings of liberal instruction, of reasonable laws, of a pure religion, and all the endearing pleasures of an equal, social, virtuous, and delightful intercourse.⁵⁷

West agrees that British women benefit from enlightened views in comparison to other nations and compares their position favourably to that of women in both less developed and more luxurious countries

Our country has long been eminently distinguished as the seat of pure religion and enlightened laws. It cannot, therefore, excite surprise that travellers should admire the enviable state of our country women, who appear to move in their natural sphere, and are neither treated with the phlegmatic neglect visible among our northern neighbours, nor with the ostentatious obsequiousness which the more polished nations of the continent practice to a degree of farcical affectation.⁵⁸

In using this kind of comparison to identify the advantages enjoyed by British women, More's and West's work can be seen to be drawing on the influence of Enlightenment conjectural histories. These accounts often draw correlations between less developed countries and the past history of more advanced nations.⁵⁹ For example in *The Origin and Distinction of Ranks*, Millar writes

When we survey the present state of the globe, we find that, in many parts of it, the inhabitants are so destitute of culture, as to appear little above the condition of brute animals; and even when we peruse the remote history of polished nations, we have seldom any difficulty in tracing them to a state of the same rudeness and barbarism.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ More, *Strictures*, vol 7, p. 3.

⁵⁸ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 1, p. 49.

⁵⁹ Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ John Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (London: Longman, Huest, Rees & Orme, 1806 [1771]) p. 2.

In tracing the history of the progress of civilisation, such historians were identifying the virtues of a middle-class existence in contrast to uncultured savagery or aristocratic life corrupted by luxury. Such histories usually defined the progress of civilisation through several stages. As Jane Rendall notes,

though the details varied, a common pattern of evolution was of four stages of progress, from savage hunting and gathering communities, to the barbarian pastoral stage, to a settled cultivation and finally to the stage of commercial civilisation.⁶¹

Commerce was the final stage of this progress. It was widely held that only in this advanced state of civilisation did the natural skills of women have a value in society. In his *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, Millar writes that

When men begin to disuse their ancient barbarous practices, when their attention is not wholly engrossed by the pursuit of military reputation, when they have made some progress in arts, and have attained to a proportional degree of refinement, they are necessarily led to set a value upon those female accomplishments and virtues which have so much influence upon every species of improvement, and which contribute in so many different ways to multiply the comforts of life. In this situation, the women become, neither the slaves, nor the idols of the other sex, but the friends and companions.⁶²

It is in this state of civilised society that woman becomes the arbiter of morals. For example, William Alexander's *History of Women* (1782) argues that as society becomes civilised women are increasingly invested with moral superiority. While their physical contribution becomes less important, concern about women's conduct deepens, and offers an opportunity to rationalise female subordination:

We are hurt when they behave improperly, and on the contrary, persuade ourselves that their good conduct adds a dignity to our character and reputation. In short we are so deeply interested in

⁶¹ Jane Rendall, "The Grand Causes which Combine to Carry Mankind Forward": Wollstonecraft, History and Revolution,' *Women's Writing*, 4:2 (1997): 157.

⁶² Millar, *Distinction of Ranks*, p. 89.

every thing that relates to them, that they may be considered as the arbiters of our fate.⁶³

Alexander argues that even if a country's history was 'entirely silent on every other subject, and only mentioned the manner in which they treated their women, we would from thence, be enabled to form a tolerable judgment of the barbarity, or culture of their manners.'⁶⁴ However, he has posited men, not women, as the judges of morality. It should be noted that what is at stake here in this measure of civilisation is men's appreciation of women, and consequent actions. Women themselves are given no active role. Yet eighteenth-century women writers and readers exploited these notions to claim authority to judge the issues which affected their lives, in many ways bringing the ideology closer to a reality.

More and West believed that women in Britain, provided they did not allow themselves to be corrupted by the commercialism they were surrounded by, occupied a better position than ever before. Yet commercialism was considered the final stage of society's progress towards civilisation, and only at this point were women awarded their advanced moral status by conservative conduct-book writers. Paradoxically, then, the superior morality attributed to the female sex went hand-in-hand with anxiety about feminine vulnerability to the pleasures of consumerism.⁶⁵ In the following section I will show that a fear about the effects of commercialism on the manners and education of women was also expressed by more radical figures, and that, despite ideological differences, a surprising amount of agreement exists between these writers.

⁶³ William Alexander, *History of Women* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1985 [1782]) vol 1, p. 317.

⁶⁴ Alexander, *History of Women*, vol 1, p. 151.

⁶⁵ As Harriet Guest notes 'the function of women as indices of civilized progress coincides with their alternative discursive significance as indices of decline or agents of corruption' (*Small Change*, p. 195).

Commercialisation

Hume was optimistic about the effects of commercialisation on society. He welcomed material benefits not just as an improvement to man's living conditions but as motivation to action.

In a nation where there is no demand for such superfluities, men sink into indolence, lose all enjoyment of life, and are useless to the public, which cannot maintain or support its fleets or armies from the industry of such slothful members.⁶⁶

According to Hume, men required motivation to exert themselves but when they did so gained great satisfaction. He argued that business helped the progress of civilisation and that the 'very habit of conversing' increased men's 'humanity.'⁶⁷ Millar similarly argued that commercialisation might bring benefits to society. In tracing man's history from savagery to civilisation, he notes that as men 'find less difficulty in the attainment of bare necessities,' they pursue manufacture, commerce, science and literature. These bring not only material advantages but the leisure to consider one's humanity.⁶⁸ However, Millar feels that there could be negative effects if luxury in society progresses too far. This has particularly bad consequences for women:

The love of pleasure, when carried to excess, is apt to weaken and destroy those passions which it endeavours to gratify, and to pervert those appetites which nature has bestowed upon mankind for the most beneficial purposes. The natural tendency, therefore, of great luxury and dissipation is to diminish the rank and dignity of the women, by preventing all refinement in their connection with the other sex, and rendering them only subservient to the purposes of animal enjoyment.⁶⁹

In a society where pleasure is 'carried to excess' women's important responsibility as arbitrator of morals would cease to matter, and they would become instead 'subservient to the purposes of animal enjoyment'. As we will see, both conservative

⁶⁶ Hume, *Selected Essays*, p. 170.

⁶⁷ Hume, *Selected Essays*, p. 169

⁶⁸ Millar, *Distinction of Ranks*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Millar, *Distinction of Ranks*, p. 102.

and radical conduct-book writers shared the fear that consumerism was a serious threat to women's virtue.

Vickery offers us some insight into the commercial pleasures which were available in London during the eighteenth century. She notes that 'London's superior shopping was renowned across Europe' and that 'shops offered pleasures for the eye, but also opportunities for refreshment and relaxation.'⁷⁰ John Brewer points out that this 'culture was characterised by an emphasis upon social display: cultural sites were places of self-presentation in which audiences made publicly visible their wealth, status, social and sexual charms.'⁷¹ As already noted, conservative conduct-book writers feared that women's natural sensitivity made them vulnerable to the seductive pleasures of this newly commercialised world. Public diversions, it was argued, excited women's emotions, making them incapable of serious thought; experience of commercial pleasures must, therefore, be constrained.

In common with conservative conduct-book writers, Macaulay laments the effects of commercialism on society and worries about unnecessary time and money being spent on fashion. However, her objections are largely based on her belief that women should be making better use of their time. It is not that she is against a moderate interest in fashion, or, for that matter, a little time learning accomplishments such as music, dancing or drawing. What Macaulay wants is the true value of these things to be considered in comparison with practical duties or more intellectual challenges. Importantly, she argues that women's tendency to spend too much time on these trivial matters is not related to any natural vulnerability in women:

All those vices and imperfections which have been generally regarded as inseparable from the female character, do not in any

⁷⁰ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 250, 251. Vickery is cautious, however, about accepting accounts of women's conspicuous consumption of this time, arguing that meaningful research in this area is 'conspicuous by its absence' (p. 163).

⁷¹ John Brewer, 'The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious: Attitudes towards Culture as a Commodity, 1660-1800' in Anne Bermingham and John Brewer (ed), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 348.

manner proceed from sexual causes, but are entirely the effects of situation and education.⁷²

Macaulay believes that the ill-effects of living in a commercialised society should be countered by rational education. Wollstonecraft also worries about the effects of commercialisation, condemning the ‘insipid’ conversation of women whose time is spent making ‘caps, bonnets, and the whole mischief of trimmings, not to mention shopping, bargain hunting etc., etc.’⁷³ However, she notes that as women are denied legitimate rights, cultivating the looks which allow them to influence men is one strategy for gaining some degree of control. This is not the results of nature, but of the confined lives women are forced to live.

Although conservative and radical writers had vastly different ideas about female abilities, they agreed that duties within the home were important and that the commercialisation of society was having a negative effect on middle-class women.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, they responded in different ways to this perceived threat. Fordyce and Gregory, who usually argue that natural propensities should be a guide for behaviour, fear the consequences of women’s attraction to a range of pleasures and try to limit their exposure to such amusements; similarly, More and West attempt to restrict female experience. In contrast, Macaulay and Wollstonecraft argue that an appropriate education would reveal the worthlessness of these activities.

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the important relationship between the rise of the middle classes and the gender ideology which dominated conduct books in the eighteenth century. The desire of men and women to fit into this social group created a market for works which could advise individuals how to conduct themselves in society, and in particular about gender appropriate behaviour.

⁷² Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 202.

⁷³ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 173.

⁷⁴ Guest notes, however, that although eighteenth-century women who indulged in excessive consumption were condemned, so too were those who did not consume enough. Moderate consumption was essential for a healthy economy (*Small Change*, pp. 76-77). This fact was recognised by many eighteenth-century women. Ellen Weeton, for example, notes that the livelihood of ordinary workers depended upon the wealthier employing help. She advises her daughter, if she can afford it, to employ others to do her sewing, for it is ‘a duty in the affluent female to let others live’ (Hall, *Miss Weeton Journal of a Governess 1811-1825*, p. 396).

Yet, conduct books, which were primarily concerned with ideology, could not represent the complexity of real women's lives. In fact, the desire of these works to confine women to the home, and restrict their access to leisure pursuits may be an indication that large numbers of women were actively participating in the new pleasures on offer. So far I have been largely concentrating upon the extreme positions of conservative and radical in the debate about female education but we will see that a wide literature existed at this time which expressed more moderate attitudes which are fraught with complications. I would like to suggest that where opportunities for women closed down in one area, they often opened up in another. This point is made clearer in the next chapter on women's magazines. We will see, for example, that while the range of subject matter deemed suitable for female periodicals becomes more restricted over time, the opportunity for debate and representation of female voices increases.

CHAPTER TWO

PRACTICALITIES AND MODERATION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

While early eighteenth-century periodicals aimed at a mixed sex audience had catered for women in significant ways, the advent of the woman's magazine marked an important development in legitimising the right of the female sex to discuss and direct their own education. In contrast to publications like the *Spectator* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* which often prioritized topics which were exclusionary for women lacking the classical education and political awareness common in their male contemporaries, from the 1740s onwards an increasing number and range of magazines were specifically devoted to the interests of the female sex. I will be arguing that even where these works were dominated by an essentially conservative ideology of femininity, traditional notions about the inferiority of women were disrupted by the utilisation of intelligent, articulate female voices to educate their own sex. While the women's magazines which I will be considering in this chapter vary in both format and content, one feature which connects them is a sense of communities of women, voicing and exchanging opinions. The readership of eighteenth-century magazines could constitute communities in their own right and reader correspondence, whether authentic or feigned, had an important part to play in this. In addition to enabling the exchange of information and opinion through reader contributions, women's magazines of this time place groups of vocal women centre-stage in advice columns, short stories, essays and educational dialogues. The presence of these distinctly female voices helps validate the right of women to assess the world for themselves and participate in debate about the issues which affect their lives. Many of the questions addressed in these works are similar to those found in conduct books, and often the conclusions ultimately reached are the same but women's magazines prioritise debate and exchange over simplistic monological, answers.

In the previous chapter, we saw that conduct books, for the most part, focused upon ideology and consequently painted a dual image of woman, either at the extremes of perfection or corruption. While the educational aspirations of these works imply that their intent is to enact change in the reader, the images of women which they represent tend to be static. In contrast, women's magazines acknowledge their readers to be individuals who are constantly evolving. These works are less concerned with ideology than with practical considerations and focus upon helping women negotiate behavioural extremes in order to plot a moderate course through life. We will see, for instance, that rather than engage in debate about equality between the sexes, female periodicals instead recommend strategies of self-improvement for women, regardless of their position in the gender hierarchy. Without insisting that women have the same inherent abilities as men, women's magazines attribute many faults in the female character to their education. One significant deficiency which they identify in female education is the inability of sheltered young women to gain and learn through direct experience. Readers' letters, short stories and 'true' histories could offer a vicarious experience which would partly compensate for this.

Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* is the first significant magazine for women. Adopting an essay periodical format similar to that of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, it directly addresses the reader, not only advising, but engaging eighteenth-century women in an evaluative assessment of their environment. The juvenile educational magazines, which we will consider in section two of this chapter, feature a range of voices engaging in debate and learning through rational conversation. By the latter half of the century the female miscellany had emerged as the dominant format for the woman's magazine, offering a range of articles featuring female voices exchanging views. All of these works prioritise conversation over instruction and invite readers to consider their place in the world.

Although providing a 'worldly' education which would help women function in society as it existed was an important objective of these periodicals, they additionally offer a surprising amount of subject-based knowledge and engage self-referentially

with questions about the cognitive processes of learning. This is particularly notable in the juvenile magazines which, aimed at both pupils and teachers, manage not only to offer advice about how to learn and what to teach, but through the representation of dialogues re-enact this process for the reader. Yet, as we will see, all of the magazines that I will be looking at in this chapter feature an amalgam of ‘worldly’ knowledge and subject-based learning. One of the questions I will be addressing throughout is how the appropriateness of knowledge for eighteenth-century women was judged. As we will see, the answers are fraught with complication and contradiction.

SECTION ONE

ELIZA HAYWOOD

Before moving on to consider Eliza Haywood’s *Female Spectator*, the first magazine of importance to prioritise women, I wish briefly to acknowledge an earlier periodical produced by this ingenious author. The *Tea-Table*, published every Monday and Friday for thirty-six issues from 21st February to 21st June 1724, is clearly influenced by the major essay periodicals which went before it. However, it has a particular relevance to my consideration of later eighteenth-century women’s magazines. We will see that many of the strategies utilised by these later works to negotiate extreme views and provide useful vicarious experiences to readers are anticipated by the *Tea-Table*. Yet there are also significant differences between these periodicals, most notably that the *Tea-Table* does not presume contact with disreputable elements of society to be fatal, either to women’s reputations or their moral health. I will be characterising all of the magazines considered in this chapter as publications that attempt to steer a middle course between conservative and radical ideas, but the differing balance of sentiments they offer to readers indicates the range of diverging views which may be accommodated within this moderate position. It is particularly interesting to note that as the century progresses, magazines are increasingly offered to young ladies as an alternative to direct experience and that their emphasis upon the educational benefits of conversation aids

a process which encourages the accumulation of second-hand knowledge. In contrast, the *Tea-Table* brings together direct experience, second-hand vicarious knowledge and conversation in a way which blurs the distinctions between these concepts and demonstrates their continued importance in women's lives.

The unnamed female narrator of the *Tea-Table* remains in the background of this publication – in the manner of Mr Spectator, rather than Isaac Bickerstaff or Mrs Crackenthorpe – allowing the conversations of the other characters in the periodical to take centre stage. While conversation is utilised by the juvenile educational magazines, considered later in this chapter, to dispense information and demonstrate the educational potential of rational discussion, this takes place in a utopian, protected environment, where outside influences cannot impinge on the intended message. In contrast, Haywood's publication has more in common with Austen's novels which, as we will see in the second part of this thesis, show not only the benefits of conversation within a fictionalised version of the social world but its limitations, where the conflicting interests of individuals affect their ability to communicate effectively, or where conversations remain unfinished due to the uncontrollable interruptions which occur in life. The *Tea-Table* acknowledges that not all dialogue is meaningful or productive, while nonetheless showing the benefits to be gained from rational conversation. Five friends meet to engage in discussion about a range of issues - the unnamed female narrator, Amiana, the hostess, a young lady named Brilliante and two young gentlemen, Dorinthus and Philetus – but are continually interrupted by a series of absurd characters who insist upon indulging in idle gossip. First an aristocratic fop dominates the conversation and allows no one else to speak. He is stopped only by the arrival of a lady who affects illness in an effort to appear delicate, and her 'friend' who maliciously criticises her behind her back. Only after they have left can the company engage in sensible conversation. Such ridiculous characters, however, continue to penetrate their world, and at the periodical's end an important debate is cut short by the arrival of a lady whose whole conversation is dominated by fashion. Significantly, Haywood shows how the main characters of the periodical deal with these frustrations without moral contagion. A central message throughout this author's work is that women must be allowed to

experience the world for themselves, in order that they learn how to utilise judgment when assessing both their own behaviour and that of others. In the *Tea-Table*, Haywood shows that women's participation in society is compatible with respectability.

Despite interruptions, useful exchanges of knowledge and opinions do take place in this magazine. For instance, Philetus initiates a discussion about the difficulty of regulating emotions whilst under the influence of love and a variety of views are articulated about the importance of exerting reason in these circumstances. Another narrative shows the consequences of an inflamed temperament through the story of a heroine who develops a melancholy mood as a result of her fear that some dire event will steal her happiness. Her health consequently goes into decline and she dies. The conversation which follows this story allows the group to attribute Arabella's death, not to the consequences of natural female emotions, but rather to a selfish indulgence to which both men and women could be equally prone. Yet, the conclusions reached in these debates ultimately seem less important than the fact that women are represented engaging in rational conversation where they are free to express their own opinions. This, I will be arguing, is one of the defining features of the eighteenth-century woman's magazine.

Following the story of Arabella, we are introduced to a novel which stimulates a debate about the very nature of fiction. Haywood has the characters of the *Tea-Table* engage with the question of whether the intentions of fiction should be to promote ideal behaviour or represent real life. While Amiana argues that the novel's representation of character is too shocking for entertainment, Brillante and Philetus claim that as such base characters do exist in real life such works have an educational value and are not 'design'd, as some imagine, for amusement only, but for instruction also, most of them containing morals, which if well observed would be of no small service to those that read 'em.'¹ Throughout this chapter I will be demonstrating that one of the most important functions of women's magazines was,

¹ Eliza Haywood, *Tea-Table*, Alexander Pettit (ed), *Fantomina and other works* (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2004) pp. 104-5.

through its various constituent elements, to offer vicarious experience and a way to gain knowledge without endangering character. In this discussion about the nature of fiction, I would suggest that Haywood is launching a defence of her own amatory novels, and giving a clear indication of the part that could be played by magazines and novels in arming women with the tools necessary to negotiate the moral pitfalls encountered in society.

For eighteenth-century middle-class women the challenge was how to improve their understanding and increase their knowledge of the world without being exposed to painful experiences or endangering their reputations. The *Tea-Table* demonstrates not only that women may safely engage with a range of characters but that they could gain valuable insight as a consequence of this contact. Because the conversations featured in the *Tea-Table* do not take place within a protected environment, the distinction between ‘discussing’ and ‘experiencing’ the world is less clear than in later eighteenth-century magazines which increasingly utilise conversation as an alternative to directly lived experience. Nevertheless, information which could be passed on to young ladies through the conversation of older women of experience retained particular value in these later publications, indicating their acceptance of female contact with influences which were not always entirely respectable. The authors of eighteenth-century women’s magazines had the advantage of being able to write under fictional personae custom-designed to illustrate their point. Interestingly, while the experiences of these female editors often served as clear examples of behaviour either to be emulated or avoided, the women themselves were generally portrayed as mixed characters, with both faults and virtues, illustrating the willingness of such publications to engage with practical considerations rather than ideological models.

Female Spectator

I now want to turn to Haywood’s better known periodical, the *Female Spectator*. Marking an important watershed in the women’s magazine, this publication consistently focuses on the practical issues which had an impact on the lives of actual

eighteenth-century women, whilst educating them on a wide range of subjects at a level accessible to those without formal learning. Both the content and format of this work are heavily indebted to the *Spectator*, which it was, of course, named after. Haywood often acknowledges that she is continuing a topic already raised by Addison and Steele and retains the basic structure of the extended essay.² Nevertheless, while owing much to the style and format of her predecessor, there are also notable differences. The *Spectator* was a daily publication, while Haywood's work was issued in twenty-four monthly installments between 1744 and 1746. Each of the *Female Spectator* papers are considerably longer than those of the *Spectator*, and this allowed Haywood to move between a wide range of subject-matter and different styles of writing via a process of mental association where one thought naturally leads on to another. These monthly issues were specifically devoted to the interests of women, incorporating reader's letters, short stories, fables and poetry, in which the nature of marriage and the importance of education for women were discussed. Before looking in detail at some of these papers I would first like to note the similarity between how the *Female Spectator* begins, and the first two numbers of the *Spectator*.

The first paper of the *Spectator* introduces the fictional persona of Mr Spectator, who will observe life and report back for the reader's entertainment and education. That their audience will want to know something of Mr Spectator's history and personality before they give credence to his thoughts and opinions is assumed by Addison and Steele. Readers are assured that although shy and reserved, the narrator is an educated man, capable of the job at hand. Haywood begins her publication by acknowledging that she will follow the example of the *Spectator* by giving 'some Account of what I am.'³ But the similarity ends here, for Mr Spectator is offering to pass on the advantages he has as an observer not directly involved in the action of life. He claims that he can discern the 'Errors in the Oeconomy, Business, and Diversion of others, better than those who are engaged in them', despite never having

² Eliza Haywood, *Selections from the Female Spectator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1744-46]). See for example Haywood's opening comments on her paper on jealousy (p. 98).

³ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 7.

experienced the 'Practical Part in Life.'⁴ In contrast, the supposed author of the *Female Spectator* has actively participated in society, enjoying a range of opportunities to socialise and engage in leisure pursuits. Making the narrator a woman of the world is one way in which Haywood can counter the limited range of experience available to her readership. The *Female Spectator* acknowledges that as a young woman she spent too much time on frivolous pleasures, and not enough on improving her mind but now that she is older, she has had the leisure to consider her mistakes and wants to pass on the benefit of her experience to other women. Forthright, intelligent but conventional in her morality and advice, she proves that far from being a corrupting influence, the older woman who has led a less sheltered life has much to offer young ladies on the brink of entering society. Nevertheless, when this periodical, following in the footsteps of the *Spectator*, introduces a club of women whose opinions may be called upon, the respectability of each of its three members is greatly emphasised. Accepting that the sphere of activity for most eighteenth-century women would be circumscribed, Haywood sets out to represent experiences that would be recognisable and useful. Rather than setting out a feminist manifesto, she focuses upon the reality of her reader's lives, where women had a duty to safeguard their reputations. Consequently the range of members in Haywood's club seems limited when compared to the wide-array of middle-class interests represented in Addison and Steele's *spectator* club. The eighteenth-century middle-class man's defining characteristic was his form of employment but women were defined by whether or not they were married. Haywood's magazine reflects this: each member of her club has a different marital status - the narrator is an old maid, Mira is happily married, another is a widow, while Euphrosine is a young unmarried woman. With its continued focus on marriage and the relationship between the sexes, it may be argued that Haywood's publication is much narrower in scope than the *Spectator*, but this is a consequence of its unashamed concentration on female interests at a time when economic imperatives made marriage a top priority in most women's lives.

⁴ Addison, *Spectator*, N^o 1.

Haywood's emphasis on the practicalities of negotiating an unequal society, rather than with ideology, may be seen in her continued advice about how to work within a patriarchal system, instead of striving to break free from it. Her periodical tells women how they may gain the experience to understand the world and themselves, and, in doing so, find a little room for their own wants and desires. Arguing that education and entertainment are essential to all individuals, Haywood devotes much attention to identifying pursuits which degrade neither women's intelligence nor their respectability. The novel was one entertainment she felt free to recommend - within moderation. In reputation, at least, this form of fiction was already closely associated with a female audience. However, conservative conduct-book writers expressed great concern about the influence of romantic and sentimental literature on young women; they voiced their fear that women would look for the same kind of excitement in real life that they found in the pages of a novel and would therefore be vulnerable to the corrupting effects of their own desires. Haywood, in contrast, suggests that novels do little harm as long as they are balanced by more serious study: 'Music, Dancing and the reading of Poetry and Novels may sometimes come in by way of Relaxation, but ought not to be too much indulg'd.'⁵ In the eighteenth century there was little entertainment that women could take part in without facing censure of one kind or another. Even Haywood was critical of the popularity of masquerades, where hidden identities allowed people to act inappropriately. Yet, overall, in keeping with her recommendation that women should experience life, she argues that ladies should be allowed to exercise rational self-censorship and enjoy the pleasure of balls and assemblies, even going so far as to say that if the war with France did not prevent it, it would be beneficial for young women to visit this country to experience the variety of entertainment offered there.⁶ According to

⁵ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 132.

⁶ Haywood, for example, insists that most diversions may be safely enjoyed in moderation. 'Far be it from me to debar my Sex from going to those public Diversions, which, at present, make so much Noise in Town:- None of them but may be enjoyed without Prejudice, provided they are frequented in a reasonable Manner, and behaved at with Decency' (*Female Spectator*, p. 70). On the subject of diversions in France she notes that 'Did not Reasons of State, which the *Spectator* must not presume to fathom, engage us at present in a War with *France*, I should advise to send a young Lady, too much bigotted to any one Pleasure into that polite Country, where she would find so vast a Variety, as would give a quite different Turn to her Temper, and make her despise all that before seem'd so enchanting to her' (*Female Spectator*, p. 62).

Haywood, young ladies denied direct experience were most likely to have their heads turned when finally exposed to the influences of society.

Although balancing the needs of her female audience with an emphasis on respectability, I am arguing that the *Female Spectator* was primarily enabling for women of this time. It should be noted, however, that this publication was open to varying interpretations. While Clara Reeve celebrates the *Female Spectator* as a virtuous work which atones for the author's previous amatory fiction, Laetitia Pilkington, although not entirely approving of Haywood's earlier novels, mourns the loss of her 'former luscious style'. She describes the periodical as an 'insipid' 'collection of trite stories delivered to us in stale worn out phrases'.⁷ This is a timely reminder that the responses of female readers cannot be taken for granted despite the tendency of a range of eighteenth-century texts to instruct women not only about appropriate reading material but on how and where this reading should take place.⁸

Nevertheless, there is much in the format and content of the *Female Spectator* to suggest an ability to engage the eighteenth-century woman, offering her the opportunity for self-improvement without challenging the social mores of the time. Conservative conduct books arguing that women required a suitable education to fulfil their duties as wives and mothers tended to concentrate upon instructing their female readership about gender-specific behaviour. Haywood, in contrast, insisted that a woman's education must go beyond this. Her viewpoint is close to that expressed by Wollstonecraft and Macaulay later in the century, in as much as she believes that if women are educated in moral principles they will be able to fulfil any role required of them. Indeed, for these writers, the skills required within the home were not envisaged as greatly different from those utilised in the wider world. These potentially radical views, however, are tempered in Haywood's work by the

⁷ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930 [1785]) vol 1 p. 120; Laetitia Pilkington quoted in Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004) p. 267.

⁸ James Raven notes that eighteenth-century 'reports criticised readers for reading in unsuitable places or for reading badly, quickly, insensitively, or too much' ('From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries' in James Raven et al (eds), *Practice and Representation of Reading*, p. 180.

assumption that women's lives would continue to revolve around the domestic sphere and that female education must be justified on the basis of its use value within the home. She argues, for example, that while a good housekeeper can discharge duties of household economy, to be a rational and equal companion to a husband requires learning. As we have seen, eighteenth-century middle-class gender stereotypes awarded woman the part of moderating her husband's temperament. According to Haywood, however, good nature is not enough to qualify a woman to be the 'repository' of her husband's

dearest Secrets, the Moderator of his fiercer Passions, the Softner
of his most anxious Cares, and the constantly chearful and
entertaining Companion of his more unbended Moments.⁹

To fulfil such a role, even the most naturally talented women would 'still want many embellishments from Education'.¹⁰ While direct experience could aid women in the process of learning how to regulate their own passions in order to appear 'constantly chearful', the *Female Spectator* also suggests that intellectual study could offer similar benefits. As we will see, Haywood encourages women to strengthen their understanding through study and indicates a number of subject areas suitable for this purpose.

Haywood and her contemporaries on intellectual study

Throughout the eighteenth-century, the educational expectations imposed on women became increasingly complicated and contradictory. While accomplishments such as music and drawing had been the distinguishing characteristics of the seventeenth-century aristocratic lady, by the end of the eighteenth century this was also the education commonly received by the daughters of those on the lower edges of the middle classes. Such education had little practical value and complaints that women lacked both basic housekeeping skills and intellectual knowledge were

⁹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 126.

¹⁰ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 126.

commonplace.¹¹ Yet, no easy consensus emerged, for while the pedant was feared, ignorance was no longer satisfactory. Girls of this time rarely had access to tutors, unless it was for ornamental accomplishments such as music, dancing or drawing, consequently subject-based knowledge had to be gained through a self-directed course of reading. While the ability to study subjects such as history, geography and natural philosophy was often considered a valuable resource which could bring women much inner satisfaction, attitudes to intellectual study remained ambiguous. Agnes Porter, for example, writing to one of her former students in 1809, expresses the hope that her daughter will ‘*make merry* at dancing, playing, dolls etc. If she reads too much she will be called a book-worm — that will never do.’¹² On the other hand, a woman like Jane Griffin, who included among her favourite authors a number of conservative writers including Hannah More, could choose to actively pursue an intellectually challenging course of reading.¹³ Perhaps one of the reasons that such divergent and contradictory views existed concerning female education was because the eighteenth-century middle-class woman became a conduit through which the wider values of society could be debated.

Attitudes towards female education had often been hostile in the seventeenth century. Assumptions about inherent differences between the sexes were utilised to assure women that they were unsuited to serious study. In 1674 philosopher Nicholas Malebranche wrote that it was ‘the greater delicacy of the fibres in women’s brains that made them intellectually inferior to men.’¹⁴ John Dunton had been convinced that the ‘moisture’ of the female brain ‘hindereth solidity of judgment,’ while some studies of the time held that women’s brains were smaller than men’s, thereby indicating their unfitness for intellectual pursuits.¹⁵ These views lingered on in various ways but there were increased calls, even from conservative conduct-book writers, for women to engage in some form of academic-based study. In his

¹¹ Hilton, *Shaping of the Nation’s Young*, pp. 24-5.

¹² Martin, *Governess*, p. 287.

¹³ Penny Russell, ‘An Improper Education? Jane Griffin’s Pursuit of Self-Improvement and ‘Truth’’, *History of Education*, 33:3 (2004): 249-265.

¹⁴ Alice Renton, *Tyrant or Victim?* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991) p. 27; see also Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990) pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ John Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, (London: Walter Scott, 1892) p. 22; Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 328.

discussion of appropriate reading material for women, Fordyce recommends subjects as varied as history, geography and astronomy, arguing that any topic which led to self-improvement deserved consideration:

Whatever kinds of reading may contribute to your general improvement and satisfaction, as reasonable beings designed for society, virtue and religion will deserve your attentive regard.¹⁶

Similarly, Dr Gregory sees ‘no impropriety’ in his daughters ‘reading history or cultivating any art or science to which genius or accident leads.’ However, both writers qualify this message in keeping with their emphasis on the inferior mental powers of the female sex. Fordyce claims that women are unsuited to exacting study and that their aim should be to understand the human heart, which ‘does not require reasoning or accuracy so much as observation and discernment’.¹⁷ Gregory was even prepared to extend his argument that women should not pursue studies in the face of difficulty to religious reading. He advises his daughters to ‘embrace’ those scriptures which ‘you find clearly revealed. Never perplex yourselves about such as you do not understand, but treat them with silent and becoming reverence’.¹⁸ In contrast, Hannah More’s educational proposals held out the promise of improving women’s understanding. Although warning against the ‘smatterer’ who neglects her duties for intellectual study, she assumes that learning will make women more virtuous characters:

To woman, therefore, whatever be her rank, I would recommend a predominance of those more sober studies, which, not having display for their object, may make her wise without vanity, happy without witness, and content without panegyrist¹⁹

However, More recommends serious study to her readers on the basis that it will provide them with the strength of mind and the ability to be contented with their limited role in life; if correctly educated, the female sex will voluntarily restrict their

¹⁶ Fordyce, *Sermons*, pp. 273-4.

¹⁷ Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 273.

¹⁸ Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ More, *Strictures*, vol 8, p. 2.

own participation in the public sphere. While radicals educate for all circumstances, conservative writers educate only for the restricted environment of the home.

By contrast, the *Female Spectator* offers significant evidence to suggest that its author believes in the intellectual equality of the sexes.²⁰ However, the various elements of this magazine, supposedly written by different hands, share the flexibility of the female miscellanies which appear in the second half of the century and enable Haywood to successfully give voice to proto-feminist sentiments without necessarily endorsing such views. We see, for instance, the inclusion of a reader's letter, perhaps authentic but more likely to have been written by Haywood herself, which provides the opportunity to give voice to an intelligent, articulate woman who claims equality with men:

There is, undoubtedly, no Sexes in Souls, and we are as able to receive and practice the Impressions, not only of Virtue and Religion, but also of those Sciences which the Men engross to themselves, as they can be.²¹

Yet, Haywood disclaims any interest in ideology and refuses to be drawn on the subject. Rather than insisting that men and women have the same natural abilities, she admits 'I am not Anatomist enough to know whether there is really any such difference or not between the Male and Female Brain'.²² She is, however, convinced that if women do have any natural deficiency, then the answer is not to let the brain stagnate, but rather to exert it to its best effort:

If, by the Texture of the Brain, as some pretend to alledge, we are less capable of deep Meditations, and have a Multiplicity of volatile Ideas, which, continually wandering, naturally prevent our fixing on any one Thing; the more Care should be taken to improve such as may be of Service, and suppress those that have a contrary Tendency.²³

²⁰ For instance, see Haywood's examples of female contributions to science (*Female Spectator*, pp. 131-2).

²¹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 124.

²² Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 130.

²³ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 130.

Haywood argues that any deficiencies women have, whether they are innate or a result of the environment they live in, can be corrected by education. The study of subjects such as history, geography and natural philosophy may benefit women in a number of ways. In times of solitude they are a useful resource to entertain oneself and pass time pleasantly, while, in company they make a good source of intelligent conversation, but, most important of all, serious study improves an unsteady nature. Haywood advises that ‘the most subtil Spirits may be fixed by that Sovereign Chymist, solid Reflection’.²⁴ Rather than fearing the effects of education on young girls, she insists that

Knowledge is a light Burthen, and, I believe no one was ever the worse for being skilled in a great many Things, tho’ he might never have occasion for any of them.²⁵

Although accepting that women would largely be confined to domestic roles in life Haywood argues that this is not a justification for keeping them ignorant. By taking up serious study, the female sex could enlarge their minds and find fulfilment even within confined circumstances. The benefits of women’s accumulation of knowledge, she suggests, went far beyond practical use value.

Haywood and her contemporaries on the study of history

Although the *Female Spectator* refuses to concede the inferiority of the female intellect, it does note that education should not be so dull and difficult that women become disheartened and particularly recommends the subject of history on the grounds that it both educates and amuses. Haywood assures her readers that even women who are not naturally drawn to study will enjoy history. She advises those who have difficulty settling to intellectual pursuits to have a servant read ‘some

²⁴ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 131. This is a viewpoint shared with Hester Chapone, one of the less conservative conduct book writers of the 1770s, who also believed serious study would help women govern their tempers, ‘Those who are engaged in high and important pursuits, are very little affected by small inconveniences...I would therefore wish your mind to have always some objects in pursuit worthy of it, that it may not be engrossed by such as are in themselves scarce worth a moment’s anxiety’ (*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* [London: William Pickering 1996 [1773]] p. 131).

²⁵ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 128.

interesting Part of History' aloud in a spare moment; over time, the attention will be caught and a fondness for knowledge will grow.²⁶ Hester Chapone similarly promises the niece she addresses in her conduct book, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), that 'a taste for history will grow and improve by reading - that as you get acquainted with one period or nation, your curiosity cannot fail to be awakened for what concerns those immediately connected with it - and thus, you will insensibly be led on, from one degree of knowledge to another'.²⁷ Haywood draws her reader's attention to the 'great and wonderful Events which History presents us with'.²⁸ These events could both engage the mind and convey moral instruction:

The Rise and Fall of Monarchies; - the Fate of Princes, the Sources from which their good or ill Fortune may be deduc'd; - the various Events which the Struggles for Liberty against arbitrary Power have produc'd, and the wonderful Effects which the Heroism of particular Persons has obtained, both to curb Oppression in the Tyrant, and Sedition in the Subject, affords an ample Field for Contemplation, and at the same time too much Pleasure to leave room for any Amusements of a low and trifling Nature.²⁹

History, by this description, offers it all; a story full of heroes and tyrants conveying an important moral message. The magnitude and importance of these events, Haywood believed, would raise the minds of readers to higher things. She is recommending that her readers go beyond learning the bare facts about what has happened in history by attempting to understand why it has happened. In doing so, they would improve the critical function of their brain, not only for academic matters, but also in the wider society in which they operated. When David Hume writes on the subject of history he recommends this study to women on the basis that it will teach them two facts about the opposite sex:

That our sex, as well as their's, are far from being such perfect creatures as they are apt to imagine; and, that love is not the only passion that governs the male world, but is often overcome by avarice, ambition, vanity, and a thousand other passions.³⁰

²⁶ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 199.

²⁷ Chapone, *Improvement of the Mind*, pp. 251-2.

²⁸ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 186

²⁹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 132

³⁰ Reprinted in *Lady's Monthly Museum* (London: Vernor & Hood) August 1798, p. 103.

Obviously Hume was also arguing here that history could correct false notions given in novels and romances. However, the point is more far-reaching than this. If one assumes, as Hume did, that human nature is the same at all times, in all places, then women can learn much about the society in which they live from the study of history.

There is considerable evidence that ordinary people in the middle ranks appreciated the benefits of this study. Mary Sommerville's journals reveal that although her father was so concerned about her scientific pursuits as a child that he feared she would end up in a 'strait jacket', he was perfectly happy to recommend the study of history for her even at a very early age. When he returned from sea to find his daughter's reading skills were poor, he insisted that she read, among other things, Hume's *History of England*.³¹ In the teaching of the children in her charge, Agnes Porter makes continual reference to both reading history and playing a 'historical game'. There are also frequent mentions of history read for the governess's own amusement and education.³² Many women at this time took a delight in having a library full of books, and history was always a popular choice. One of Porter's former students, Mary Talbot, writes with delight after her marriage in 1794 about her collection of books. As well as Shakespeare and a collection of poetry, she had 'all sorts of history, ancient and modern.' History was also popular as a topic to be read aloud. In 1808 Mary's sister Louisa wrote to inform her that her husband had read to her all twelve volumes of Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.³³ In her memoirs, Elizabeth Grant notes that in 1812 their travelling library had consisted of 'Walter Scott's three first poems...the Seven Champions of Christendom, Goldsmith's History of England, and his Animated Nature, and in French, Adele et Theodore.'³⁴ The continued mention of history in the diaries and journals of women throughout this period shows that history was not only recommended to women, but also read and enjoyed. At least, in part, I think the pleasure derived from, and

³¹ Sommerville, *Queen of Science*, pp. 42, 17.

³² Martin, *Governess*, pp. 86, 88, 83.

³³ Joanna Martin, *Wives and Daughters* (London: Hambledon, 2004) pp. 240, 242.

³⁴ Elizabeth Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988 [1898]) vol 1, p203.

approval given to, this subject must be attributed to its ability to offer exemplary narratives, in which readers could find relevance to their own lived experience.

However, this enjoyment of history extended beyond reading. In the commercial age of the eighteenth century all sorts of new museums and collections were opening to allow both men and women to pursue their interest in this area. Agnes Porter mentions with much enjoyment her visits to the 'Historic Gallery' in London where she admired pictures of famous historical figures such as Boadicea and Mary Queen of Scots, as well as Louthenberg's dramatic painting of the Fire of London.³⁵ In 1810 Susan O'Brien admired the Parthenon marbles in a private museum in the garden of Lord Elgin's London house, and also visited 'Mr Hope's fine house' where she saw 'Many fine and Curious things - some rare busts and Egyptian statues more suitable to a museum than a drawing-room.' Joanna Martin notes that 'historical and genealogical studies, like botany were fields in which women were allowed to play an active part without being thought unfeminine.'³⁶ Interestingly, these pursuits did not necessarily confine women to a sedentary life, but encouraged them to visit museums and, where the opportunity existed, even to travel and visit some of the sites of their studies in countries such as Italy and Greece.

The study of history was considered to be a suitable source of instruction and amusement for women which demonstrated the complexity of human nature. It was also viewed as a highly respectable subject capable of conveying an important moral message. As a consequence of this emphasis, the historical narratives young ladies were exposed to were often filtered and inappropriate material removed. There was also a considerable blurring between fact and fiction which created concern among writers of the time. Haywood was concerned that in the study of history entertainment should not be prioritised over factual truth.³⁷ If women were to learn

³⁵ Martin, *Governess*, pp. 180-182.

³⁶ Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, pp. 256, 257.

³⁷ Haywood's concern may have been exacerbated by the changing nature of historical works. Karen O'Brien notes that women's 'presence as a significant proportion of the readership exerted a transformative pressure on the tone, subject matter and forms of historical narrative'. As more female readers were attracted to the genre 'inexorable, linear narratives were diversified or replaced by shorter formats, epistolary forms and biographical vignettes' ('The History Market in Eighteenth-

something about the society in which they lived from events that had occurred in the past, it was vital that history was not romanticised:

Fabulous Accounts of *real* Facts, instead of informing the Mind, are the most dangerous Corrupters of it, and are much worse than *Romances*, because *their* very Titles warn us from giving any Credit to *them*; and the *others* attempt to beguile our Understanding, and too often succeed by the Cloke of *Simplicity* and *Truth*.³⁸

While Haywood does not believe that the reading of novels should dominate a woman's time, she views them, for the most part, as a harmless entertainment. Young ladies should be aware that what they are reading is fiction, and therefore not suitable as a model for their own lives. On the other hand, fiction under the guise of historical events is much more dangerous. Women who believe romanticised versions of history will also have a distorted picture of the society they live in, and the people they mix with.

The consequences of inaccurate history were also of concern to Jane West. However, the concerns of these two writers are not entirely congruent. Haywood wants to arm women with knowledge and therefore believes that it is essential that readers are aware of whether they are being given reliable information which will improve their understanding of the world, or simply being entertained by a fictional story. In contrast, West is concerned about inappropriate knowledge:

Court gallantries are as uninformative as the memoirs of courtezans, and probably as exaggerated, if not as spurious. Readers who confine their knowledge of past times to these faint sketches, may become good gossips, but can never be historians.³⁹

The fear here is that women will be exposed to knowledge which will corrupt their minds. West's reference to the 'memoirs of courtezans' demonstrates an unlikely

Century England' in Isabel Rivers (ed), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001) pp. 125-6.

³⁸ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 201.

³⁹ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, p. 431.

similarity between history and gossip. While such a connection was unlikely to trouble Haywood - the *Female Spectator* is after all connected to a tradition of gossip which looks back to the *Female Tatler* where communities of women pass on useful information and knowledge to one another - this was clearly a worrying development for West, who condemns gossip as a purely prurient experience.

West's attitude to the importance of truth in history is somewhat ambivalent. She prioritises facts and figures over amusement and argues that students should be 'taught to prefer digested details of facts, to bundles of anecdotes'. However, the claim that 'historians should be too much devoted to the service of truth, to step out of his road for any embellishment foreign to his great design,' prompts the question: what is this design?⁴⁰ As noted in my previous chapter, writers such as Jane West and Hannah More followed the example of conjectural historians in painting a picture of women's improving position in society as it becomes more civilised. West recommends conjectural histories which trace 'the progress of society' as ideal reading for young ladies. She notes that 'it is delightful to observe how the individual nature of man has been modified by external circumstances'. Charting the progress of society through the various stages of 'barbarism, improvement, civilization, refinement, luxury, degradation, corruption, and decay' has a moral agenda. The stories of these other societies where luxury has led to decay stand as a warning. After reading these histories one should 'rise from the perusal with a virtuous determination not to accelerate the ruin of our country.'⁴¹ However, conjectural historians were in effect speculating about times of which they had no first-hand knowledge. Their conjectures were based on the assumption that human nature was the same in all times and all places; thus modern primitive societies could shed light on ancient primitive societies. But this was only supposition, not historical fact. As Alexander Broadie notes, the facts themselves were less important than being able to bring them under general principles in order to explain them. The point was not to pile 'on the details, giving a more and more complicated description of

⁴⁰ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, pp. 430-1.

⁴¹ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, p. 428.

something' but rather to 'contribute to historical understanding'.⁴² In the furtherance of this aim, certain elements or features may be omitted from history. While Enlightenment historians did this in order to foreground universal principles of human behaviour, details of history could also be left out for moral reasons. Thus a sanitised version of history suitable for young ladies could be made available for their perusal.

West identifies biography as a 'branch of history' with the potential to be an 'elegant and instructive entertainment,' but which is unfortunately often reduced to the level of 'tittle tattle.' While admitting that 'human nature is never free from errors or weaknesses', West argues that it is not the task of biography to reveal this. Instead, she appeals, 'let not an irreverent hand heedlessly tear away the sacred veil, which should cover the failings as well as the ruins of mortality.'⁴³ It is clear, then, that West's version of history will never reveal the complexity of the human character. The faults of the subject studied should be mitigated, or, if this is not possible, they should be presented in the worst possible light to stand as a warning to others: 'call not impiety by the name of singularity; ascribe not the praise of liberality to licentiousness.'⁴⁴ Of course, the idea that history can be presented as a series of neutral facts is a fiction in any age, but the ideological slanting is particularly overt in this genre at this time.

Thus, while history was recommended as a valuable resource which could teach young ladies about human nature and the motivation of individuals, respectability and the inculcation of moral values tended to be prioritised over factual truth. Yet, women often gained easy access to historical accounts of inhumane and barbarous behaviour. Chapone notes that 'the history of the world is little else than a shocking account of the wickedness and folly of the ambitious!' Despite this, she advises her niece 'let not the horror of such a scene put a stop to your curiosity'. However unsavoury, the study of such material is justified on the basis that it reveals greater truths about human nature. Chapone argues that 'it is important that you know

⁴² Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997) pp. 25-8.

⁴³ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, pp. 431, 435.

⁴⁴ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, p. 435.

mankind as they are'.⁴⁵ West similarly recommends history on the grounds that it can 'teach us what man *is* in private life, and how he *has* acted as an aggregate body'.⁴⁶ Respectability is not always compatible with this agenda, and is clearly not the only priority for more liberal advisors on female education. When West recommends a censored, filtered history to her readers, she reveals a desire to eradicate ambiguity from female studies. Women must absorb the correct message from their historical reading. Consequently, they cannot be allowed the luxury of interpreting events for themselves and possibly reaching the wrong conclusions. While the *Female Spectator* does not directly engage with the question of where the boundaries of suitable reading lie, her account of history as the stories of heroes and tyrants may suggest that she has a similar aim of presenting young ladies with unambiguous moral lessons. Yet Haywood insists that her readers should learn not only *what* has happened in the past but *why* and this would inevitably include mixed motivations and contradiction of the sort West tried to eradicate. As we have seen, then, although there is nearly universal agreement that history is a suitable topic for women, there are complexities surrounding questions about what kind of history they should be reading and what kind of knowledge they should be obtaining from this study.

Haywood and her contemporaries on the study of science

It is, perhaps, not surprising that history, modified for didactic purposes, was considered appropriate for Georgian women to read and study. However, their participation in mathematical and scientific studies is less expected. These subjects relied on abstract reasoning which many considered intrinsically unsuitable for women. Yet, in addition to recommending geography and natural philosophy as suitable pursuits for women, Haywood advises her readers that 'some Branches of the Mathematicks are also very agreeable and improving Amusements for young Ladies'.⁴⁷ Surprisingly, many eighteenth-century women did study mathematics. While few had the aspirations of Mary Somerville to advanced proficiency in this

⁴⁵ Chapone, *Improvement of the Mind*, p. 240.

⁴⁶ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, p. 427.

⁴⁷ Eliza Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 132.

subject, solving mathematical problems was viewed, as suggested by Haywood, as an ‘agreeable amusement’. In recent years a number of histories have been written about women’s participation in science.⁴⁸ These tend to take the form of a narrative of opposition to the female accumulation of knowledge, most often consisting of women having to overcome social disapproval in their pursuit of this subject. However, histories of women and science sometimes reveal a more complex picture, where opposition to female learning of the classics or to their participation in politics could lead to encouragement in the field of science. This subject’s association with experiments resulted in many viewing it as too manual to receive male attention, while for women a correlation could be seen with their duties in the kitchen, making it a suitable study for young ladies. Yet, I will be suggesting that a third narrative may be told about the eighteenth-century woman and science; one where ordinary middle-class women pursue this subject at a moderate level, receiving neither great encouragement nor opposition. They achieve this by recognising and abiding by ideological boundaries, confining their studies to respectable areas which were thought to offer advantages to the domestic woman. I will be considering where these boundaries of respectability lay and investigating the varied advice given to women about their studies in this area.

A brief account of Mary Somerville’s life can offer some insight into the contradictory attitudes women encountered in their study of science. As a child, Somerville experienced great difficulty in pursuing her mathematical and scientific interests, having to overcome both social disapproval and a lack of formal tuition. Margaret Alic notes that she ‘studied the mathematical puzzles included in women’s journals but she had never heard of algebra and had no idea what the ‘x’s and ‘y’s meant’.⁴⁹ Even after obtaining the name of a book which would have helped her in her studies – Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry* - Somerville felt it was socially unacceptable for her personally to enter a bookshop to purchase this item, and found it necessary to ask the tutor of her younger brother to bring her suitable material next

⁴⁸ See for example Margaret Alic, *Hyatia’s Heritage: A History of Women in Science From Antiquity to the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: The Woman’s Press, 1986); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989); Phillips, *Scientific Lady*.

⁴⁹ Alic, *Hyatia’s Heritage*, p. 183.

time he was in Edinburgh.⁵⁰ Yet Somerville was one of the few women to become a successful professional scientist without censure. She was given credit for her work and offered honorary membership of a number of respected societies and institutions. Clearly Somerville was an exceptional woman but the account she gives of her childhood suggests that the average middle-class woman would have had little knowledge of mathematics.

The actual evidence supplied by the women's magazines tell a rather different story. Many women did study maths as a challenging amusement. The demand which existed for this kind of entertainment is clearly illustrated by the scientific content of the *Ladies' Diary*, published from 1704 to 1841. Patricia Phillips describes this as 'a compact little volume of some twenty leaves, a convenient size to tuck away in a lady's reticule.'⁵¹ Early issues of the journal included mathematical problems, histories of famous women, recipes and marriage advice.⁵² However, it was the mathematical and scientific content which held women's interest and in 1709, editor, John Tipper announced that in response to the 'multitude of letters' he had received future editions would be devoted to this subject area. The *Ladies' Diary* aimed to improve women's scientific education but the large numbers answering the sophisticated 'Enigmas and Arithmetical Questions' set in each volume indicate that many must have already acquired an in-depth knowledge of mathematics.⁵³ Each volume posed a number of problems, with the answers - sent in by readers - provided in the next year's issue. Typical questions included:

If three spheres of brass are in contact, and their diameters are 8, 9 and 10 inches respectively, and they support a fourth sphere weighing 12 lb, what quantity of weight does each supporting sphere sustain?⁵⁴

Walking through Cheapside, London, on the first day of May, 1709, the sun shining brightly, I was desirous to know the height of Bow steeple. I accordingly measured its shadow just as the clock

⁵⁰ Somerville, *Queen of Science*, pp. 38-9, 41.

⁵¹ Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 98.

⁵² Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, p. 41.

⁵³ Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Question from 1760 quoted in Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson's London*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2000), p. 177.

was striking twelve, and found its length to be $253\frac{1}{8}$ feet; it is required from thence to find the steeple's height.⁵⁵

As Phillips notes, to complete these exercises, some knowledge of 'geometry, algebra and trigonometry was essential'.⁵⁶ The women reading the *Ladies Diary* did not find it necessary to hide their aptitude for mathematics; and those who provided solutions were, for the most part, quite happy to have their names printed. By the 1790's, the *Ladies' Diary* began to attract a male readership as well. Phillips interestingly notes that one woman's contributions were so frequent that the editor dropped the 'miss' from her name so that she became 'N. Mason' and merged with male contributors.⁵⁷

From the outset Haywood insists that women are capable of scientific thought. She points to the existence of the famous scientist Hypatia who lectured in Alexandria in the fifth century but notes that there is

no need of searching Antiquity for that which the present age gives any unquestionable proof of in the celebrated Donna *Lawra*, who has not only disputed with, but also confuted the most learned Doctors in *Italy*, in those Points on which they happened to differ from her.⁵⁸

Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that Donna Lawra is probably Laura Bassi who was professor of anatomy at the university of Bologna in the eighteenth century.⁵⁹

Although Haywood only cites these two examples of female scientists, they are important because they prove that women are not inherently incapable of studying science. Yet no further details of these women's lives are given. This may be because Haywood did not wish to hold them up as role models. Although I am

⁵⁵ Question from 1709, quoted in Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 100.

⁵⁶ Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 102. Benjamin Martin's *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (1755), also has a section of mathematical questions and answers where there is a notable absence of female titles. Phillips's example from the *Ladies' Diary* casts doubt on any conclusions which may be drawn from this. This may not be the result of women's lack of participation, or desire to hide their identity. It may simply be that it is so common for women to send in answers to such questions that the title is no longer necessary.

⁵⁸ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, pp. 131-2.

⁵⁹ See p. 131, n.5 of Haywood's *Female Spectator*.

suggesting that Haywood's mention of these women is further evidence of her proto-feminist sentiments and her belief that, given the right circumstances, women are capable of intellectual rigour, she nevertheless assumes that women's future roles will be as wives and mothers, not professional scientists. To recommend the study of science to ordinary middle-class women, then, it had to offer some useful skill or didactic purpose. In the following section I will look at natural history and the justification for women pursuing this study

Eliza Haywood and her contemporaries on the study of natural history

What we call science today was commonly called natural philosophy during the eighteenth century. Writers advising women to take up the study of natural history at this time consistently refer to it as a branch of natural philosophy. However, Thomas L Hankins warns that significant differences existed between natural philosophy and natural history, arguing that 'the editors of the *Encyclopédie* ascribed natural history to the faculty of memory, and natural philosophy to the mental faculty of reason'.⁶⁰ The study of the natural world was divided in what now seems a strange fashion, but which can help our understanding of what was, and was not, deemed appropriate for women to study. Hankins notes that during the Enlightenment, natural history covered the 'entire range of observable forms from minerals to man, excluding only those objects crafted by human hands and intelligence' but 'in spite of its enormous scope, natural history did not treat all questions about living things. The purpose of natural history was to describe and classify the forms of nature; it did not include a search for causes'. In contrast, 'plant and animal physiology...were still part of physics'.⁶¹ Physics was not considered suitable for women on account of its reliance on abstract reasoning and they received little encouragement to participate in this area. Although Haywood consistently refers to natural philosophy throughout the *Female Spectator*, it is clear that the subject she is recommending to her readers is in fact, natural history. In the non-specialist era of the Enlightenment, the same scientists tended to work in both these fields, and it is, therefore, perhaps not

⁶⁰ Thomas L Hankins, *Science and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 11.

⁶¹ Hankins, *Science and the Enlightenment*, p. 113.

surprising that some slippage between terms occurs. It seems likely that, used within this context, young ladies would have been aware of the boundaries of the area of study to which they were being directed. Opinions about women's intellectual capabilities varied but there was common acceptance that observing, describing and classifying were tasks they were well-placed to carry out. The idea that women's scientific studies could be confined in this way, avoiding investigation into deeper causes, which was considered the province of man, gives us some understanding of why some, but not all of the various branches of natural philosophy seem so unexpectedly open to women.

Additionally, as we will see, the study of natural philosophy could be recommended to women on the grounds that it was useful to them within the private, domestic sphere. I will be looking at three issues of the *Female Spectator* to illustrate this point. Natural philosophy is initially mentioned in detail in Book X, where Haywood urges women to take up this study. In Book XV a reader's letter is printed which details various insects which may be observed with interest. Lastly, in Book XIX Haywood looks at the pleasure to be derived from the garden.

Women's increasing literacy and pursuit of knowledge in the eighteenth century raised questions about the overall aims of female education and the uses to which their new-found knowledge could be put. As with the study of history, Haywood argues that natural philosophy may help improve woman's nature and inspire virtue: 'It corrects all the vicious Humours of the Mind, and inspires the noblest Virtues'.⁶² In the *Female Spectator's* first endorsement of the subject there is no emphasis on specific knowledge, but rather on the overall didactic purpose it will achieve. The observation of the natural world was believed to contain powerful examples of virtuous behaviour worthy of emulation:

From the Brute Creation we may learn Industry, Patience,
Tenderness, and a thousand Qualities, which tho' the Human Soul
possesses in an infinitely larger degree, yet the Observation how
exercis'd by Creatures of inferior Specie, will oblige us to look into

⁶² Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 128.

ourselves, and blush at the Remembrance, that for want of Reflection we have sometimes forgot what we are, and perhaps acted beneath those very Animals we despise, and think on as no more than the Dust from which they sprung.⁶³

This anthropomorphic perspective clearly has a moral agenda. Women are advised to observe nature but Haywood is surprisingly short of concrete details. This paper is not about accumulating facts on insects, animals, plants etc, but rather it is about how certain kinds of study may improve a woman's disposition. The emphasis is upon nature inspiring awe. These feelings should in turn lead women to deeper reflection about themselves and their environment by reminding the observer of her moral and social duties. The *Female Spectator* was not, of course, a text book, and a lack of detailed scientific information is, perhaps, not therefore surprising. My real point is that in order to justify the female study of science, it was often necessary for the moral element to dominate.

By gaining an appreciation for the works of nature, it was assumed that women also improved their understanding of the importance of religion; the observation of the 'Brute Creation' was the observation of God's work. Jeremy Gregory points out that 'most of the "science" practised in this period ought to be seen not as natural philosophy but rather as natural theology, since the conclusions were usually related to a wider theological context'. He further notes that at this time it was 'held that the existence of a purposeful creator responsible for the world could be gleaned from the evidence of order and harmony in the universe'.⁶⁴ The idea that the study of nature would bring one closer to God was a commonplace. Haywood uses this in her appeal for women not to be excluded from this subject area:

Whether our Speculations extend to the greatest and most tremendous Objects, or pry into the smallest Works of the Creation, new Scenes of Wonder every Moment open to our Eyes; and as Love and Reverence to the Deity is by every one allowed to be the Ground-Work of all Virtues and Religions, it is methinks, no less

⁶³ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 129.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Gregory 'Christianity and Culture: Religion, the Arts and the Sciences in England, 1660-1800' in Jeremy Black (ed), *Culture and Society in Britain 1660-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 113.

impolitick than unjust to deny us the Means of becoming more good as well as more wise.⁶⁵

The wonders of nature will make women more appreciative of the God who created them. On these grounds, Fordyce similarly advises women to gain the ‘principal facts, or great outlines of Astronomy’ as well as ‘natural history’. This is the study of God’s creation and women are told that their ‘admiration’ should ‘be consecrated chiefly to the works of your all-perfect creator’.⁶⁶

Book XV of the *Female Spectator* contains a reader’s letter, signed ‘Philo-naturæ’, which highlights the religious character of natural history at this time. The main subject of this letter is entomology and the study of various insects becomes a vehicle for religious fervour. For example, the behaviour of bees, it suggests, should be imitated, for ‘what we call Instinct in them is, in Fact, the immediate Direction of Divine Providence’. The moral message hinted at in the earlier paper, is spelt out in detail. The common goal of the bees should inspire the individual studying them to think of how they too may work for the good of their society. While overt didactic messages often dominate Haywood’s discussions on natural history, I would like to note that interesting observations are made that may well have inspired women to look more closely at their environment. The account of the caterpillar building its cocoon before emerging as a butterfly is fascinating. Different varieties of caterpillars build these cocoons in different ways, the reader is told, but

all in general compleat it by a certain Glue out of their own Bowels, which, by their Manner of spinning and winding it round their Bodies, becomes a hard Consistence, and the Head, Paws, and hairy Skin, being work’d into it, form a Kind of Shell, which incloses the Embryo of the Butterfly⁶⁷

Although this is simply a detailed description of a process, in the sense that it does not look for deeper meaning or causes, it nevertheless opens up the opportunity for women to think about the intricacies of nature. It is also true that the large numbers

⁶⁵ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 129.

⁶⁶ Fordyce, *Sermons*, pp. 276, 285.

⁶⁷ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 190.

of amateur female scientists, spending their leisure hours studying the natural world, had a good likelihood of observing the new and unique.⁶⁸ Being able to discern minute differences would have been essential to this task. Philo-naturæ's description of the ant, designed by nature for its task, is equally full of this kind of detail. They have a 'coat perfectly resembling that of Mail' to defend their bodies from harm, and their claws are so sharp 'that they will fasten into any thing'. The account details 'two Horns before, and as many behind' which 'serve as Ears to give them Intelligence of every thing'.⁶⁹ I am suggesting that this kind of physical description would improve women's discerning eye, encouraging them to observe greater detail. In the history of science female skills of painting and drawing have often been valuable.⁷⁰ Observing and painting insects and plants in scientific detail was one way ordinary middle-class women could respectably engage with this subject. Yet, the respectability of this type of study reminds us that such descriptive and observational skills are not as neutral as they seem, in that they reinforce the ideology that women were incapable of more abstract reasoning.

In the eighteenth century magnifying glasses and microscopes became available to help women observe the natural world. Philo-naturæ's letter describes in detail the wonders revealed when a common fly is looked at through a microscope. The 'Structure of its Frame, the curious Glazing of its transparent Wings, or the Workmanship round the Edges of them' are all admired, but it is the eyes which receive most attention:

They are like two Half-Moons encompassing the Head, both which are full of an infinite Number of small Eyes, which at once penetrate above, below, on each Side, and behind, thereby fully gratifying the Curiosity of the Creature if that Term may be allowed to Insects, and enabling it to defend itself from any threatening Danger.⁷¹

⁶⁸ See Philo-naturæ's letter where he suggests there could be a 'pretty Emulation' among women to 'make fresh Discoveries' (Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 195).

⁶⁹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 192.

⁷⁰ For example entomologist, Maria Merian, born in Frankfurt in 1647 illustrated her own work on European insects and Marie Lavoisier illustrated her husband, Antoine's many publications on chemistry (Alic, *Hypatia's Heritage*, pp. 109, 96).

⁷¹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 191.

The microscope opened an entirely new world up to young ladies, revealing beauties previously hidden to them. The large numbers of women studying natural sciences created a new and significant market for various instruments. This is apparent in Benjamin Martin's *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (1755). Martin was himself an instrument maker and lecturer. In the most well known part of his magazine, *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Philosophy*, an older brother teaches his sister about various aspects of natural science. Martin illustrates his teachings with pictures of the various instruments used by the brother and sister; instruments available to buy from his shop. Phillips notes that 'at one time the ladies' microscope, neatly packaged in an exquisitely crafted case...was a highly desirable fashion accessory'.⁷² It is interesting to note that while concern about eighteenth-century commercialism contributed to a climate which concentrated female education on questions of conduct, contrarily, the consumerism of the day also aided young ladies' pursuit of wider spheres of knowledge.

Botany was considered to be an ideal study for young ladies and many texts, such as Rousseau's *Letters on the Elements of Botany Addressed to a Lady* (1785) and Priscilla Wakefield's *Introduction to Botany* (1796) encouraged them to think more deeply about this subject.⁷³ Recommended to women on the basis that they could use their observational skills to stimulate the senses, contrarily, botany was also believed to help regulate the emotions.⁷⁴ In Book XIX Haywood expresses her belief, in almost proto-Romantic terms, that the wonders of the garden can stimulate feelings of awe in the divine creation. But, although there is an emphasis on feeling, this assault on the senses has a higher purpose. According to Haywood, the emotions inspired by nature lead to serious thought and reflection. While detailing the visual and olfactory pleasures of a flower progressing from bud to bloom, Haywood appeals to her readers not to let the 'senses' alone 'ingross so glorious a Benefit'. The mind

⁷² Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, pp. 148-9.

⁷³ Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Letters on the Elements of Botany Addressed to a Lady* was translated into English by Thomas Martyn in 1785.

⁷⁴ Sam George notes that the study of botany was often viewed as a source of self-regulation for the eighteenth-century woman ('Linnaeus in Letters and the Cultivation of the Female Mind: "Botany in an English Dress"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28:1[2005]: 1-18.

too should be used to ‘explore these wonders’. Yet, even in her description of the mind Haywood uses inflammatory language, advising that nature ‘cannot fail of ravishing all its Faculties’.⁷⁵ The brain and the senses are not separated by different responses; both are enchanted by the natural world. Haywood insists that the pleasures of taste, smell and sight provided by the plants and animals of the countryside were designed so as ‘to convey Instruction through the Canal of Pleasure’.⁷⁶

However, I do not wish to suggest that the scientific detail of Haywood’s work was unimportant to her or her reader. While it was assumed that women would be initially attracted by the visual and olfactory pleasures of plants and flowers, they were also encouraged to think more deeply about their observations. In his letter to the *Female Spectator* Philo-naturæ suggests an appreciation of the beauty of plants should lead to further reflection:

Methinks, I would not have them, when the uncommon Beauty of any Plant strikes the Eye, content themselves with admiring its superficial Perfection, but pass from thence to the Reflection with what wonderful Fertility it is endowed, and what Number in another Season will be produced from its prolific and Self-generating Seed:- Even the most common, which springs beneath the Feet as they are walking, has in it some particular Vertue, which it would not be unbecoming them to be acquainted with; if they do not all contribute immediately to our Nourishment, or to the Cure of those Diseases to which Mankind is incident, they at least serve for Subsistence to many Animals, and even Insects to whom we owe a great deal.⁷⁷

There is much evidence to suggest that women did not just take pleasure in the ephemeral beauty of their gardens, but felt great curiosity about the items growing there. They wanted to understand the relations plants bore to one another, and be able to recognise different species. Mary Talbot’s sister wrote to her in 1811 with a list of questions:

⁷⁵ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 249.

⁷⁶ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 250.

⁷⁷ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, p. 189.

In the first place, what class of flowers the fuchsia belongs to? Can two species of the same flower be, the one perennial, the other biennial or annual? What is the English name for the cancorous, that beautiful broad-leaved thing, in full berry now in the hedges round here, and which we conclude to be a yellow flag?⁷⁸

Mary also experimented with trying to cultivate different seeds in her garden. Her nephew wrote to her in 1814 to say he was sending her ‘forty-seven little packets of seeds from different parts of the world’.⁷⁹ When Elizabeth Shackleton moved to Pasture House ‘she sent away to a Pontefract nursery for moss, Provence and Portland roses, honeysuckles, gessamine and myrtles to establish her new garden’.⁸⁰ Cultivating new plants was a popular interest with commercial appeal. Martin notes that ‘a flourishing mail order business in plants and seeds had developed by the second half of the eighteenth century. Nursery gardens produced detailed catalogues, and sent items to the country by the public coaches’.⁸¹ Although gardening may appear to be a world away from the commercialism of the city of London, we once again see that women’s ability to pursue and cultivate interests is reliant on a culture of consumerism.

Haywood recommends that women be knowledgeable enough to work with their gardeners, and suggests that the delicate process of grafting is a worthwhile skill for women to develop.⁸² Articles on gardening were a regular feature of many women’s magazines. The *Royal Female Magazine*, for instance, advises their female readers on the layering procedure for carnations.⁸³ Although I can find no mention of grafting or layering in women’s diaries, there are frequent references to gardening. Ellen Weeton took much pleasure in being outdoors, clearing weeds and planting vegetables, while Mary Talbot continued to garden for long hours even when pregnant.⁸⁴ The exercise was considered beneficial for women’s health, while the

⁷⁸ Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, p. 249.

⁷⁹ Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, p. 250.

⁸⁰ Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, p. 152.

⁸¹ Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, pp. 278-9.

⁸² Haywood, *Female Spectator*, pp. 247-8.

⁸³ *Royal Female Magazine* (London: Printed for G Kearsly) July 1760, pp. 33-35.

⁸⁴ Bagley, *Miss Weeton’s Journal of a Governess*, pp. 99, 141, 146-7, 151; Martin, *Wives and Daughters*, pp. 288-89.

subject matter was most suitable. Indeed by the mid-nineteenth century it was considered unmasculine to take an interest in the garden.⁸⁵

I have thus far given a complicated picture of which subjects were and were not considered appropriate for eighteenth-century women to pursue. As we have seen, a wide range of literature engaged with this question and opinions varied considerably. The editor of the *Ladies' Diary*, Henry Beighton, expressing his delight in 1718 at the number of women providing solutions to the mathematical questions posed in his publication, insisted that this proved that women have 'as clear judgments, as sprightly quick wit, as penetrating Genius, and as discerning and sagacious Faculties as ours'.⁸⁶ But many argued that mathematical and scientific pursuits were beyond the female mind, even suggesting that such study would damage women's health. Conduct-book writers, Fordyce and West, both contended that 'profound or abtruse learning' was not suited to women's capabilities.⁸⁷ Placing women's magazines within this spectrum of opinion is difficult. These publications differ not only from each other, but within themselves – expressing proto-feminist sentiments in one section, while reverting to traditionally conservative notions in another. Much of this diversity of opinion relates to a continual emphasis on the practical, rather than the ideological. Female periodicals tend to assume that women's lives will continue to revolve around the home and attempt to provide their readers with the skills they would require as wives and mothers. Nevertheless, these publications did not suggest that subjects such as astronomy, natural history, geography or history should be closed to women. Nor, indeed, did conduct-books completely deny their readers access to these areas, raising the question of what limitations women did face in their education. This is a complicated question but what is obvious is that the restrictions placed on women were often related to degrees of learning rather than to the choice of subject. Describing, classifying and memorising were all open to women but abstract reasoning was considered to be outwith their capabilities. Yet, it would be a mistake to presume that women unquestioningly complied with these expectations. As we have seen, a number of women did pursue scientific study to advanced

⁸⁵ George, 'Linnaeus in Letters', p. 15

⁸⁶ Quoted in Phillips, *Scientific Lady*, p. 100.

⁸⁷ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 2, pp. 422-423.

proficiency while maintaining their respectability and it seems likely that magazines, such as Haywood's, would have raised reader awareness of these subjects and encouraged many to pursue deeper investigations.

I have tried to indicate the potential which existed in the eighteenth-century female periodical to provide readers with access to a wide range of information. Despite an emphasis upon 'worldly' education, Haywood opened up a world of scientific and historical studies to women of this time. Her ability to introduce these topics was significantly aided by the eclectic format of her publication which allowed her to move easily between topics. In the sections which follow, I will show that other eighteenth-century women's magazines could similarly offer a surprising range of material. As we will see, the female miscellanies offered an impressive variety of historical anecdotes, biographies and practical information about the care of children. No editorial overview accompanied this material, and readers could dip in and out of these items according to their own taste. The juvenile magazines which I will look at in the next section, have a significantly different format but still offer an array of subject-based material and 'worldly' advice. These works were designed to meet the educational needs of a younger audience, but in common with Haywood's *Female Spectator*, they could stimulate interest in a range of topics.

SECTION TWO

JUVENILE EDUCATIONAL MAGAZINES

Although eighteenth-century women's magazines did not set out comprehensive and intricate educational philosophies in the manner of Locke and Rousseau, they nevertheless engaged in significant ways with questions about the aims and objectives of education and how best to achieve them. Contributing to a process which increasingly invested the teaching role of mothers with moral authority, these works identified women with the rearing of the young and, by extension, proclaimed the suitability of educational theory as a topic of interest. In the next section we will see that advising female readers about appropriate teaching methods for their

children was a recurring subject in the female miscellanies, but although an important feature, this was only one of a range of interests tackled in these works. In contrast, the two magazines I am now going to look at focus entirely on the education of children and young adults. Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's *Young Ladies Magazine* (1760), and the *Female Mentor* (1793), edited under the pseudonym of Honoria, portray an unfolding educational process in a classroom environment. These magazines demonstrate the educational potential of an eclectic range of material including, essays, poems, stories and fables. While many of these elements appear suited to the capacity of a very young audience, and one presumes that these works were read and enjoyed by children, they also had appeal for an older audience because they demonstrated methods through which the understanding could be cultivated. Consequently, they were of interest to anybody who had or was likely to have responsibility for teaching. This potential audience would have included mothers, older sisters, aunts, governesses and school teachers as well as those who simply had an interest in the educational process; in short, the same kind of women addressed in both Haywood's *Female Spectator* and the later female miscellanies.

Although many of the subjects tackled in the juvenile magazines are similar to those found in both Haywood's periodicals and the female miscellanies, the format is significantly different. While the term 'magazine' now tends to denote a publication which appears periodically at set intervals, the original meaning adopted by Edward Cave in naming his *Gentleman's Magazine* was a 'storehouse' of information. The *Young Ladies Magazine* first appeared in English as a four volume work in 1760, while the *Female Mentor*, consisted of three volumes, the first two of which were published in 1793, followed by a third in 1796.⁸⁸ Neither qualified as a serial publication, but these works, consisting of a range of material spanning a variety of genres, would have provided a 'storehouse' of useful information for the domestic middle-class woman. In addition, the size of these pocket-book items advertised not only that they were easily transported and suitable to be read in a variety of locations

⁸⁸ I am working from a 1780 edition of Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's text, which was published in two volumes (*The Young Ladies Magazine, or Dialogues between a Discreet Governess and Several Young Ladies of the First Rank under her Education* [London: printed for J Nourse in the Strand, 1780]).

but that they were ‘morally and practically instructive’.⁸⁹ Although closely associated with novels and romances, the octavo and duodecimo format also monopolised a modern class of practical book.⁹⁰

The heterogeneous format of the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* was a standard feature of the eighteenth-century periodical, yet it is notable that the different components of these texts do not exist as discreet sections, as they do in the monthly female miscellanies, but rather are embedded within a larger dialogue. The juvenile magazines are structured around numerous voices which debate and analyse the significance of the featured elements. Conversation is central to the educational objectives of these works which identify debate and exchange as an integral part of the learning experience. Young ladies are shown to develop their capacity for critical thought as a result of engaging in dialogue. Michèle Cohen convincingly argues that ‘social, familial conversations were an important mode of mental training for children’ and that authors were ‘knowingly invoking the conventions of the ideal eighteenth-century conversation precisely because it was so highly valued a means of “improvement” as well as sociability’.⁹¹ While a certain amount of ambiguity existed in the eighteenth-century over the right of women to express opinions, conversation had long been viewed as a feminine virtue. As I previously noted, women were central to an ideal of polite socialisation and conversation was identified as an important element of the civilising influence which gave them power to moderate the behaviour of others. I would contend that this made it easier for women’s magazines of this time to adopt a form of debate and exchange which could be transformed into a powerful educational tool.

⁸⁹ Raven, *Business of Books*, p. 273.

⁹⁰ Edward H Jacobs notes that differences ‘in the number and substance of the genres embodied by the different formats’ of folio, quartos, octavos and duodecimos ‘encouraged customers to assign a different status and different functions to different formats’. Thus ‘books in octavo and duodecimo appear more modern and useful than those in folio’ (‘Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:1 [1999]: 52).

⁹¹ Michèle Cohen, “‘Familiar Conversation’: The Role of the “Familiar Format” in Education in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England’ in Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (eds), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) pp. 102, 113. For evidence that conversation was recognised and utilised as a means of self-improvement, for men as well as women, see pp. 103-7.

Prioritising the educational benefits of conversation, the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* bear a striking similarity to each other, with both works organised into sections which consist of a conversation between numerous individuals. Yet there are significant differences between the breadth of material covered in these publications and the range of opinions they articulate. An average dialogue in the *Young Ladies Magazine* spans several subjects, with the young ladies taking it in turn to narrate short stories, fables, pieces of religious scripture and accounts of historical events and geographical areas. Bringing cohesion to these various items are the discussions between the pupils and their governess, where individuals may freely proffer their own opinions and dispute that of others. In contrast, each conversation in the *Female Mentor* focuses on a specific subject but approaches it from a variety of angles by making use of a range of material. Short stories, fables and letters are all commonly used in this fashion but, as we will see, memoirs of the famous are the most frequent feature. The sharing of these stories is central to this work, yet, the representation of debate does not play so important a part. For each subject featured, the opinions of one character tend to dominate and may continue for several pages only for the same person to narrate a story or memoir in order to drive the point home. Undoubtedly, the *Female Mentor* is the more conservative of the magazines, restricting, although not eradicating, the enabling effect of conversation by summarising dispute, rather than reproducing it verbatim as Beaumont does in the *Young Ladies Magazine*. We will also see that the *Female Mentor* more consistently proffers limiting views of woman's capabilities. Yet, both these works belong to a set of writing which prioritised the teaching role of the eighteenth-century women and helped validate the right of the female sex to engage with questions about the cognitive processes through which individuals learned.

Before moving on to examine the complexities of these two works in more detail, I wish to consider some important factors which they share in common. In the next section I will show that both the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* helped define the moderate position in relation to questions about female education by negotiating extreme views. The representation of conversation and multiple elements, which was integral to these publications, considerably facilitated this

process. I will additionally be arguing that the format of these works had the potential to enable independent thought in the reader, thereby compensating for some of the more conservative aspects of content.

Negotiating extremes in the juvenile magazines

While the stated aim of both the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* was to improve the education of the female sex, neither express overt proto-feminist sentiments and are often surprisingly conservative in their views about gender roles.⁹² By no means consistent in their attitudes, they could insist that it was the duty of every woman to assess the world for herself, while simultaneously upholding a conservative gender hierarchy. The ability to enable independent thought whilst curtailing it is built into the structure of these magazines. For instance, in contrast to the essay periodicals and the female miscellanies, neither work, with the exception of their prefaces, directly addresses the reader. Instead, they feature conversations which allow various characters to take centre stage and have their say. The female teachers who guide these discussions appear as just one of many characters whose thoughts may be considered and analysed. Consequently, these works lack the single dominating voice of the conduct book and this would appear to offer the reader greater potential for individual interpretation. Nevertheless, the portrayal of these teachers as strong women of unimpeachable morality imparts an authority to the views that they express; and their opinions and advice could at different times be both enabling and restricting for women. Similarly, the potential challenge offered to conduct-book ideology by the representation of intelligent, articulate women is qualified by the need to define their knowledge and learning in terms that were compatible with eighteenth-century notions of femininity. As we will see, these works integrate female learning into an ideology which prioritises respectability and

⁹² Beaumont opens the preface to her work with an implied criticism of the current female education system: 'The world is surprised at the increase of the number of so many despicable women; but under the favour of a moment of reflection, there is far greater reason to be much more surprised, that there are still so many virtuous' (*Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, pp. ix-x). Honoria notes in her preface to the *Female Mentor* that 'as many of our present females are young ladies just coming into life, we still principally adapt our conversations to their improvement' (*The Female Mentor, or, Select Conversations in Two Volumes* [London: Printed for T Cadell, in the Strand, 1793] vol 1, p. ix).

traditional feminine duties in the home. In effect, there is a continual check on any tendency towards radical sentiment.

The conversations which take place in these works provide opportunities for the participants to exercise their rational faculties, but it should be noted that this is not intended as a supplement to direct experience, as in Haywood's *Female Spectator*, but rather as a substitute for that experience. While eighteenth-century women undoubtedly participated in the growing range of available leisure pursuits, the representation of respectable young ladies learning through these experiences became increasingly problematic as the century progressed. Neither the *Young Ladies Magazine* nor the *Female Mentor* recommend that the female sex be accorded greater freedom, despite appearing to share Haywood's concern about women's lack of directly lived experience. The reader of these works is subject to a highly mediated, filtered experience because, unlike Haywood's *Tea-Table*, the young ladies in these juvenile magazines are not exposed to any inappropriate influences. Rather, these meetings take place in utopian environments where no distractions will detract from the intended message or the authority of the female teacher who directs the conversation. Aimed at a juvenile audience, these works utilise dialogue as a highly respectable teaching method which nonetheless had to maintain a careful balance between enforcing consensus and enabling debate.⁹³

Yet I will be arguing that by creating and portraying fictional female communities engaged in a process of debate and exchange, these works negotiated space in which their readers could learn and expand as individuals. I would contend that the format of women's magazines had the potential to enable independent thought and

⁹³ In his study of philosophical dialogues of the Enlightenment period, Michael Prince argues that 'throughout the eighteenth century, the primary difficulty confronting moral philosophers and theologians who composed dialogues was how to represent a credible transition from divided opinion to consensus by means of rational debate' (*Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996] pp. 16-17). I will be arguing that the educational dialogues and conversations featured in the juvenile magazines face a similar problem which is negotiated largely by removing inappropriate influences. See also Cohen who argues that the 'genre sets out to textually encode the existing practices and rules of polite sociability in ways that allow active participation in the construction of shared understanding while at the same time being structured and methodical so as to facilitate the integration of knowledge in the mind of the learner' ('Familiar Conversation', p. 108).

encourage readers to critically assess the information and opinions to which they were exposed. Jacqueline Pearson notes in her study of the *Lady's Magazine* that the juxtaposition of varying articles enables this work to construct sophisticated readers capable of embracing or resisting the meanings they encounter.⁹⁴ As a result of their heterogeneous format the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* had a similar potential to stimulate independent response in the historical reader.

Nevertheless, while contradictions often occur in these texts, as they negotiate between liberal and conservative ideas, I am not suggesting that this necessarily resulted in readers adopting a radical outlook on life. We will see that both the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* promote moderate views on the subject of female equality. I am therefore arguing that the format of these works offered greater potential for individuals to contextualise and interpret for themselves.

I now wish to demonstrate that investing mothers with a teaching role created a market in the eighteenth century for works which could simultaneously offer pragmatic advice to those who had responsibility for rearing the young, while demonstrating the relevance of the educational theories of Locke and Rousseau.

Female teachers and educational theory in the eighteenth century

Common agreement across conduct books, periodicals, political treatises and Enlightenment writings that women's most important duty in life was as teacher of their children opened up the possibility for women to claim a new authority. If, as writers like Fordyce and Millar argued, the skills required for the task of motherhood were inherent in women, this would make the female sex 'natural' teachers.⁹⁵ Yet, as works like the juvenile magazines demonstrated, the female sex had to learn how to be teachers to the next generation. Catering to this need, these publications portrayed strong female mentors who demonstrated good teaching methods in practice and

⁹⁴ Jacqueline Pearson, "'Books, My Greatest Joy': Constructing the Female Reader in *The Lady's Magazine*", *Women's Writing*, 3:1 (1996): 6-7.

⁹⁵ For example, Millar argues that 'Loaded by nature with the first and most immediate concern in rearing and maintaining the children,' woman is 'endowed with such dispositions as fit her for the discharge of this important duty' (*Distinction of Ranks*, p. 89).

indicated the range of skills and knowledge required by women to discharge these responsibilities.

By setting out to teach mothers to be teachers, the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* align themselves with Wollstonecraft's insistence that women must cultivate their rational faculties if they are to fulfil their duties in society. In contrast, Fordyce did not think women were suited to intellectual challenges but assumed that they had the necessary skills to fulfil their responsibility to the next generation.⁹⁶ Acknowledging the complexity of the parenting role he notes that as well as supplying the 'bodily wants' of children, mothers had to 'watch the gradual openings of their minds, and to study the turn of their various tempers.'⁹⁷ Moderating the temperament and teaching religious principles and virtuous behaviour was given at least equal priority with subject-based education and this may have appeared to make these parental responsibilities compatible with conduct-book ideals of femininity. Yet, there is an ironic inconsistency in the fact that women were believed to be capable of educating their children, but unfit to be properly educated themselves and, as Wollstonecraft notes, the fulfilment of responsibilities in the home required an emotional maturity that was at odds with the portrayal of women as illogical and controlled by feeling.⁹⁸ Arguing that poor education and economic dependence had resulted in many women focusing their attention upon gaining a husband rather than improving their minds or regulating their tempers, she particularly singles out sensibility for criticism:

Mankind seem to agree that children should be left under the management of women during their childhood. Now, from all the observation that I have been able to make, women of sensibility are the most unfit for this task, because they will, infallibly, carried away by their feelings, spoil a child's temper.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See, for example, Fordyce's description of the female teaching role: 'In graver hours, you insinuate knowledge and piety by your conversation and example, rather than by informal lectures and awful admonitions' (*Sermons*, p. 36).

⁹⁷ Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 35.

⁹⁸ Despite Fordyce's emphasis on the natural sensibility of the female sex, he too acknowledges the calm and moderate manner required in the rearing of children: 'You reprove only when you must, and then you do it to purpose with moderation and temper, but with solemnity and firmness, till you have carried your point'. (*Sermons*, p. 36).

⁹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 163.

Whereas conservative conduct-book writers argued that women's 'natural' susceptibility to emotion made them sensitive to the needs of their families and aided them in the discharge of their domestic responsibilities, Wollstonecraft insisted that it was impossible to expect women who had no control over their own feelings to teach their children in a steady or constant manner. Further, it is in the exercise of discipline that women demonstrate their true affection for their children:

Severity is frequently the most certain as well as the most sublime proof of affection; and the want of this power over, the feelings, and of that lofty, dignified affection which makes a person prefer the future good of the beloved object to a present gratification is the reason why so many fond mothers spoil their children and has made it questionable whether negligence or indulgence be most hurtful¹⁰⁰

Wollstonecraft could not be clearer. Women's weak education is damaging the next generation. Mothers cannot cultivate virtue in their children if they have none themselves, nor can they guide a child's temper if they have no control over their own feelings. However, if women were educated to think for themselves, every role they performed would improve and everybody they came into contact with would benefit. As we will see, the female teachers who stand at the centre of the two juvenile magazines examined here embody the qualities recommended by Wollstonecraft. These magazines, then, do not merely act as a check upon more conservative views, but also rehabilitate radical sentiments, making the views of figures like Wollstonecraft respectable.

The juvenile magazines had the potential to educate both the teacher and student, both the parent and child; and the increasing moral authority invested in the mother assisted the emergence of the strong female teacher who became a stock character in this literature.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the influential educational philosophies of Locke and

¹⁰⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ See Mitzi Myers, 'Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books', *Children's Literature*, 14 (1986): 31-59.

Rousseau stated that all children required an individual education adapted to his or her specific needs, and a teacher was essential to this process. Locke, for example argues that lessons should be modified according to a child's mood: 'Change of Temper should be carefully observed in them, and the favourable *Seasons of Aptitude and Inclination* be heedfully laid hold of'.¹⁰² Obviously an adult is required to observe children before deciding what should be taught at a specific moment in time. According to this theory, children would also require the help of a parent or teacher to gain understanding of their reading material.¹⁰³ In the introduction to her *Original Stories* (1788), a book in same tradition as Beaumont's magazine consisting of conversations between a governess and her two young charges, Wollstonecraft explains the part the teacher is to play in helping her children's reading:

The conversations are intended to assist the teacher as well as the pupil; and this will obviate an objection which some may start, that the sentiments are not quite on a level with the capacity of a child. Every child requires a different mode of treatment; but a writer can only choose one, and that must be modified by those who are actually engaged with young people in their studies.¹⁰⁴

In agreement with Locke, then, Wollstonecraft argues that education should be tailored to the needs of the individual. A large part of *Original Stories* revolves around the way in which the governess, Mrs Mason, gently corrects the bad habits of the two children in her care. Mothers and governesses were well placed to observe the foibles of their children from an early age and, in theory, could enact gradual change through rational conversation. In Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, Beaumont's *Young Ladies Magazine*, Honoria's *Female Mentor*, Sarah Fielding's *The Governess or little female academy* (1749) and Eleanor Fenn's *Female Guardian* (1787), to name but a few of the eighteenth-century educational texts in this tradition, this task is undertaken by admirable women characterised by Enlightenment qualities of reason, rationality and calmness of disposition. Importantly, by giving practical

¹⁰² Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 135.

¹⁰³ For evidence of adults overseeing children's reading and education see M O Grenby, 'Delightful Instruction? Assessing Children's Use of Educational Books in the Long Eighteenth Century' in Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (eds), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*, pp. 185-189.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Pickering, 1989[1788]) vol 4, p. 360.

examples of how to teach, as well as how to learn, these works addressed the interests of a mother or teacher, advising women how to discharge the important responsibilities which would elevate their value in eighteenth-century society.

The Young Ladies Magazine

The ‘discreet governess’ featured in Beaumont’s *Young Ladies Magazine* is Mrs Affable. Far from being a character of sensibility, this woman may be characterised as logical, rational and calm; and these are the qualities she attempts to instil into her students. Mrs Affable may have been modelled on the teacher from Fielding’s *Governess*, and indeed, there are striking resemblances between these two texts. First published in 1749, Fielding’s work is credited with being one of the earliest books for children. Her work, like Beaumont’s, is set in a schoolroom environment which illustrates learning and teaching in progress, under the watchful eye of an intelligent and logical governess. Both Fielding’s Mrs Teachum and Beaumont’s Mrs Affable respond to their pupils in a similar manner, standing back to observe and assess before taking appropriate action. This does not mean that their interest in, or response to, bad behaviour is lacklustre, but rather that it is driven by logic rather than emotion.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, while the reader is told that Mrs Teachum’s temper is ‘extremely calm and good’, Mrs Affable’s disposition must be revealed through her dialogue.¹⁰⁶ Beaumont’s text enacts the response of a cool and logical teacher to a range of issues, allowing the advantages of her temperament to speak for themselves.

Mrs Affable’s calm disposition is crucial because it challenges traditional assumptions about women being illogical. This admirable teacher conforms to wider eighteenth-century ideas about the essential qualities required in a teacher, regardless of gender. John Locke, for instance, notes that

as children should very seldom be corrected by Blows; so, I think,
frequent, and especially passionate *chiding*, of almost as ill

¹⁰⁵ Myers notes that these ‘mentorias of makebelieve possess the rationality to choose the good and the self-command to follow it’ (‘Impeccable Governesses’, p. 54).

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Fielding, *The Governess, or Little Female Academy*, (Peterborough: Broadview, 2005 [1749]) p. 50.

consequence. It lessons the Authority of the parents, and the Respect of the child.¹⁰⁷

Despite accepting that men and women should be educated to fulfil different roles, Fielding and Beaumont presume that the processes of learning are the same. Consequently both boys and girls require the same qualities in a teacher. Mrs Affable's composure allows her to maintain unquestioning authority throughout the *Young Ladies Magazine*. This unrelenting rationality had an additional importance as it was believed throughout the eighteenth-century that children should be taught through fact and logic. If, as Locke argued, the mind was a tabula rasa or blank sheet upon which the experiences of the world were written, then the impact of fanciful notions would be permanent. Locke insists that children should never be exposed to tales of goblins or sprites, and it is this hostile reaction to imaginative works which has led to the critical and dismissive attitude towards eighteenth century children's literature by current thinkers on education.¹⁰⁸ Although Beaumont shows no anxiety about the influences of fairy-tales, the format of her publication allows her to introduce short stories and discuss their practical, didactic message.¹⁰⁹ These are not stand-alone works which allow readers unlimited freedom to draw their own conclusions.¹¹⁰ The insistence upon teaching through logic accounts, in part, I would

¹⁰⁷ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, pp. 137-8. See also Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*: 'To be able to follow Mr Locke's system (and this may be said of almost all treatises on education) the parents must have subdued their own passions, which is not often the case in any considerable degree' (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995 [1787], p. 11).

¹⁰⁸ 'Such *Bug-bear* Thoughts once got into the tender Minds of Children, and being set on with a strong impression, from the Dread that accompanies such Apprehensions, sink deep, and fasten themselves so as not easily, if ever, to be got out again; and whilst they are there, frequently haunt them with strange Visions, making children dastards when alone, and afraid of their Shadows and Darkness all their Lives after' (Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 196). For a history of these negative attitudes and a defence of eighteenth-century children's literature, see Norma Clarke "'The Cursed Barbauld Crew": Women Writers and Writing in the Late Eighteenth Century', and Nicholas Tucker 'Fairy Tales and their Early Opponents: In Defence of Mrs Trimmer' in Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson (eds), *Opening the Nursery Door* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁰⁹ Beaumont is best known as the author of 'Beauty and the Beast' which originally featured in her *Young Misses Magazine*, a prequel to the *Young Ladies Magazine* considered here, which focused on the education of younger children.

¹¹⁰ cf Fielding's *Governess* where the teacher allows fairy-tales but advises caution. 'But here let me observe to you (which I would have you communicate to your little friends) that giants, magic, fairies, and all sorts of supernatural assistance in a story, are only introduced to amuse and divert...Therefore, by no means let the notion of giants or magic dwell upon your minds.': 'If you have any more stories of this kind with an equal good moral, when you are not better employed, I shall not be against you reading them; always remembering the cautions I have this evening been giving you' (*Governess*, pp. 84-5).

argue for the distinctly unsentimental tone in which the teacher addresses her pupils in works like the *Young Ladies Magazine* and Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*.

By the eighteenth century a greater awareness existed than ever before about what it meant to be a child, and a number of theories competed with one another about the inherent nature of children and the way they should be educated. It was widely argued at this time that if children were accorded appropriate physical freedom in play, the body would become more robust against sickness. This was particularly important because mental and physical health were considered to be inextricably linked. While writers on education from Locke onwards insisted upon the importance of strengthening the constitution in childhood, Rousseau took this to a new level, arguing that early education should concentrate solely upon exercising the body. He made this claim on the basis of his belief that children did not develop their reasoning capacity until about fifteen years of age, and as we will see, this puts him at odds with the teaching principles of both Beaumont's work and the *Female Mentor*. Rousseau contends that attempts to reason with children can only corrupt them as they learn to fake responses they cannot understand. This argument contrasts sharply with the unfolding educational process in the juvenile magazines, where reason is utilised by female teachers with great success, even with the youngest children. However, Rousseau's *Emile* should be regarded not as an educational plan which may be implemented, but rather as a philosophical work on the true nature of man. Although some women embraced his notions concerning the female sex, many seemed to base their interpretation of his work on selective reading.¹¹¹ Mary Berry, for instance, in comparing Rousseau's work to that of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, exclaims that Rousseau 'gives grace and dignity to every character he brings forward – choosing to represent scenes when every ennobling faculty of our mind is brought into action'.¹¹² Although few would recognise the characterisation of Sophy from this description, it is clear that eighteenth-century women read and enjoyed his work. Nevertheless, Rousseau's advice left few options

¹¹¹ See, for instance, Madame de Staël's conclusion that if Rousseau 'wished to deprive' women 'of some rights foreign to their sex, how has he forever restored to them all those to which it has a claim!' (quoted in Hilton, *Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 81).

¹¹² Lewis, *Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry*, vol 2, p. 80.

for the female sex and failed to offer a plan for self-improvement which could be implemented. In contrast, women's magazines were concerned with teaching methods which could be put into practice and therefore owe a far greater debt to the feasible educational theories of Locke.

Locke insisted that as experiences in childhood have a permanent impact on character, principles should be taught from the earliest age and assumed that this should be done through reasoned argument. Although he recognised that this process must be adapted so as to have relevance for children, he did not question their ability to respond appropriately:

It will perhaps be wondered that I mention *Reasoning* with children: And yet I cannot but think that the true way of Dealing with them. They understand it as early as they do Language; and, if I misobserve not, they love to be treated as Rational Creatures sooner than is imagined.¹¹³

The juvenile literature considered in this section likewise presumes that logic is the primary tool through which children should be taught and argues that society has been damaged where faulty female education has prevented this. Further, the range of educational writing addressed to middle-class women indicated that although the habit of cultivating sentiment rather than rationality might be more difficult to break in later years, with effort, this could still be achieved to the benefit of both the individual and society.

In the *Young Ladies Magazine*, Mrs Affable's students are taught the importance of developing analytical skills which will enable them to improve their understanding and take responsibility for their own actions. An analogy is made between logical thought and the skills of a geometrician:

A geometrician is always with a plummet and rule: he measures, he calculates, he draws lines, he gets a habit of doing all things by rule, he looks upon nothing as clear that he has not calculated; and

¹¹³ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 142.

in some measure proceeds with the same exactness in all sciences.¹¹⁴

Mrs Affable is not suggesting that her charges take up geometry, but rather uses this as a metaphor for the way she wants them to consider the world. She does not know geometry herself, so she cannot teach it. However, she can advise them how to ‘make use of that natural geometry, which God has placed in the minds of all men’; in other words, reason and independent thought. Miss Rural, for example, is encouraged to form her own opinions, even on quite difficult subject matter: ‘I have read some parts of Mr Locke and Mr Clarke’s writings; for some things I took to be true, but others I found contrary to my ideas’.¹¹⁵ Beaumont’s magazine insists that women should think for themselves. Difficult reading matter should be pursued, so that the reader may form her own opinion about its content. Mrs Affable tells her students:

You must not believe because you have heard or read, but because it is agreeable to reason to believe...I intend, ladies, that you shall discuss and examine everything I say, and contradict me when you think you have reason to do it.¹¹⁶

This willingness to encourage debate as a mean of acquiring knowledge and developing the understanding is central to Beaumont’s work. Additionally, it allows the representation of multiple voices and viewpoints, which I have been arguing was a defining feature of the eighteenth-century woman’s magazine.

Eighteenth-century women were often advised that the natural frivolity of youth could be gently corrected through the guidance of a more mature friend.¹¹⁷ While Mrs Affable’s friendship with her students seems to demonstrate the potential of such a relationship, in order for the girls in her care to profit they require rational self-awareness. Mrs Affable never shies away from pointing out faults, but

¹¹⁴ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 42.

¹¹⁵ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, pp. 43, 44.

¹¹⁶ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 44.

¹¹⁷ Hester Chapone advises her niece to ‘be very careful how you enter into confidences with girls of your own age’. She instead recommends striking up a friendship with a woman ‘eight or ten years older’ who ‘will be able to advise and improve you’ (*Improvement of the Mind*, p. 82).

importantly the girls in her charge consider her honesty a benefit which leads them to reconsider their behaviour in a logical manner. When one of the young ladies attending these meetings becomes the subject of gossip because of imprudent behaviour, Mrs Affable must inform her of this. She notes to Miss Frivolous:

among so many that wish you well, not one had the courage, not one had the heart to give you a friendly notice of the town-talk. I must in all likelihood have a greater friendship for you than the rest, since I take the disagreeable task upon me, and run the hazard of forfeiting your esteem, and love of me, by what really should make me more worthy of it.

Mrs Affable, however, has taught her pupils well, and Miss Frivolous responds in a rational manner:

No, Mrs *Affable*, you shall not lose my friendship; to be sure I have many faults, but I am not guilty of taking amiss the advice given me by friends with regard to my behaviour, when I have reason to believe, that it is done out of kindness and affection.¹¹⁸

This response demonstrates both that women are capable of valuing friendships, and that they can rationally consider their own actions.¹¹⁹ While it is important to note that Miss Frivolous recognises for herself the inadvisability of her behaviour, at this point I wish to emphasise the part conversation plays in enabling this insight. It is through debate and exchange that women learn to critically assess their own actions. Yet, the task of these dialogues seems to be to bring a range of views to a consensus. Not only does Mrs Affable retain the dominant voice of moral authority and experience, each of her students is brought, through conversation, to agree with her judgment.

Although Beaumont's text expresses a number of potentially radical views, it must also be acknowledged that this work often reproduces conduct-book values by

¹¹⁸ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 2, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Cf Gregory 'Another great obstacle to the sincerity as well as steadiness of your friendships is the great clashing of your interests in the pursuit of love, ambition or vanity' (*Father's Legacy*, pp. 73-4). Fordyce similarly argues that competition between women results in 'jealousy, envy, and all the unamiable effects of mutual rivalry' (*Sermons*, p. 167).

advising women that marriage would be the most important event in their lives.¹²⁰ At this time, the importance of finding the right partner was undeniable and for practical reasons much of the magazine revolved around how to get married, and how to fulfil the responsibilities of a wife. The qualities of the ideal partner were much debated in women's literature at this time, and Mrs Affable makes it clear that more than future income must be considered when making this important choice. When Lady Louisa describes an 'advantageous match' as 'a gentleman of very great fortune, and good family,' Mrs Affable responds, 'one may marry a very rich person, and of great rank, and withal be very poorly married.'¹²¹ While there is an acknowledgement of the difficulties women may face in an unhappy marriage, no advice is offered about how to deal with this situation. Once married, it is accepted that a woman is under the control of her husband:

A husband is certainly in the wrong, where he requires too much of a wife; but a woman is certainly to blame, who will not condescend to the oddities of a husband. When she marries she must be thoroughly persuaded that she gives herself up to a master, and must sacrifice to him all her humours, fancies and the most innocent inclinations, if he is brute enough to require it.¹²²

The *Young Ladies Magazine* offers confusing advice by counselling its readers in one place that they must assess and understand the world for themselves, while in another presuming that a wife's thoughts and inclinations would always be subordinate to those of her husband.

Contradictions continually appear in this magazine as it takes steps towards radical thinking before retreating into conventional conservative ideology. Women, for example are taught that they may read John Locke and assess his theories for themselves, but they should not attend dances or plays. Mrs Affable advises Lady Louisa that although a comedy may be pleasurable, this is outweighed by the 'trouble

¹²⁰ As Myers notes, 'mentorias never speak of women's rights, but they make large strategic claims for female nature and capacities and for woman's ability to make a difference in her social world' ('Impeccable Governesses', p. 54).

¹²¹ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 206.

¹²² Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 145.

of resisting dangerous thoughts.¹²³ Furthermore, a woman must always consider her reputation. If the play is inappropriate, even if she does not understand it, her presence there will damage her image. Dancing with young men is also dangerous, according to Mrs Affable. Such physical intimacy could lead to inappropriate conversation, as well as inflaming the imagination: ‘What must the conversation turn upon? Your charms, his happiness in such a partner, and your graceful manner of dancing? A fine conversation indeed!’ It could, of course, be argued that these restrictive expectations were based on a pragmatic assessment of the need to observe social conventions; but it is striking that a magazine which emphasises women’s rational capability, shows great concern that a gentleman may fix his eyes on a young lady ‘in the boldest manner’.¹²⁴ Yet, although these views are voiced by an authoritative figure whom the reader is clearly meant to respect, this publication is particularly interesting because through dialogue it can promote conservative values, while simultaneously voicing resistance to them. For example, when Mrs Affable expresses her disapproval of balls, Lady Louisa can dispute the point, declaring that this is where young people often meet future spouses; or Miss Sophia is able to express the view that ‘a young woman marries to be a servant or slave’ before this is countered by Mrs Affable.¹²⁵ I do not wish to deny the significant amount of conservative material which exists in this publication, but where debate exists it enables independent thought, not only in Beaumont’s characters, but in the reader. I have been arguing throughout this work that the majority of middle-class women were less interested in radically rewriting women’s place in society, than in simply negotiating a little more space for control over their own lives. The conversations which take place in the *Young Ladies Magazine* provide scope for negotiating this control within acceptable boundaries, and the moderate nature of the claims made by Mrs Affable and her students may have made it easier for young women to identify with this publication.

¹²³ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 158. Cf Gregory’s opinion that ‘there are few English comedies a lady can see, without a shock to delicacy’ (*Father’s Legacy*, p. 58).

¹²⁴ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 163.

¹²⁵ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, pp. 161-2, 55.

The Female Mentor

As we have seen, debate and exchange are intrinsic to the educational process which occurs in Beaumont's publication. Consisting entirely of dialogue, the reader hears the individual voices of those with dissenting opinions. Although ultimately consensus is arrived at within these conversations, I have been arguing that the representation of alternative views may nevertheless have been enabling for eighteenth-century women in terms of cultivating independence of thought and judgment. In contrast, the *Female Mentor* is written in the third person, allowing Honoria – the editor – to summarise proceedings without portraying resistance to received opinion. While the moral tales, fables and historical anecdotes which dominate this work are related by various characters, discussion and analysis of these elements is more muted than in Beaumont's work, if present at all. The *Female Mentor* is limited not only by the behaviour it is prepared to sanction, but by the views it is unwilling to articulate, even in order to quash. Yet, for all its inbuilt limitations, I will be characterising this work as a moderate publication which encouraged women to engage in rational debate. I do not wish to deny that the narratives in Honoria's magazine, are often dominated by an overt didacticism that steers the reader towards a given position. However, the format of the work manages, in part, to compensate for this by cutting from one element to another in a way that requires the reader to provide links between short stories, fables, memoirs and the opinions articulated by various characters. I am suggesting that this enabled a freedom of interpretation which had the potential to offset the more constricting aspects of content. Additionally, the conversations portrayed in the *Female Mentor* occur in a wider sphere than that usually represented in the woman's magazine. While publications specifically aimed at the female sex tended to prioritise the issues which were of relevance to women, they could also as a consequence restrict participation in the wider world. In the meetings portrayed in the *Female Mentor*, however, information is exchanged between a mixed sex group and the subjects discussed are considered of equal relevance to both men and women. Surprisingly, although men of senior years participate in these conversations, the ultimate voice of authority belongs to a woman. In this publication, discussions are led by Amanda, not a teacher or governess, but an intelligent woman who, we are told, engaged her

own children in rational conversation from an early age. According to the editor's preface, the benefits of this were so obvious, that her children's friends soon joined in these meetings. As the children grew up, the conversations continued and they were joined by 'men of genius and abilities' who throughout the publication show themselves to be prepared to defer to the judgment of a woman. Like Fielding's *Governess*, Beaumont's *Young Ladies Magazine* and Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, Honoria's *Female Mentor* shows conversation being guided by an articulate and rational female figure with the potential to exert an improving influence.

Yet, it is important to recognise the restrictive scope of conversation in the *Female Mentor*, when compared to Beaumont's publication. At various points in the *Female Mentor*, the reader is told that debate between members of the 'improving society' has occurred, but unlike Beaumont's publication, these diverging opinions are not directly represented.¹²⁶ Even when conversation between multiple characters is portrayed, the views expressed do not differ greatly. At points the *Female Mentor* appears to take steps towards proto-feminist thought but quickly retreats into traditional conservative ideology. For example, when Cleora, one of the young ladies of the group, questions the limits set on female education, she ultimately does not express views very different from the conservative sentiments articulated by the other characters. Conversation 10 – 'On learned Ladies' – opens with a letter, written by 'a Plain Dealer', who laments that his wife has neglected domestic duties to pursue more esoteric studies. The folly of the wife is condemned by the president of the club, while an old gentleman insists that 'a lady should appear to think well, rather than to speak well of books'.¹²⁷ The society members involved in debate tend to fine-tune points, rather than dispute them and often relate narratives which confirm each others' conclusions. Cleora makes her reply in a letter, and acquiesces in the old gentleman's opinion when she claims that a woman who makes it obvious

¹²⁶ For example, the first conversation begins with a narrative about a talented but badly behaved individual called Servin, after which we are told that 'debate ensued' about whether education could have improved his character. This debate is not portrayed; instead we are told that they turn to Amanda for guidance. Similarly conversation 8 opens with the reader being told that the merits of novel reading have been debated but only Amanda's opinions on the subject are provided.

¹²⁷ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, pp. 132-3, 134.

that she has more knowledge than her husband shows a complete lack of sense.¹²⁸

Although she asks why women should be prohibited from learning Greek or Latin, Cleora immediately withdraws from a potentially radical position by claiming that as men are unquestionably intellectually superior, they need not fear female competition:

They need not however be under the smallest apprehensions, lest we should become their rivals in the pursuit of literature; for as Swift justly observes, in a letter to a new-married lady, all the knowledge that a woman can attain, is little more than that of a school boy.¹²⁹

There is an obvious irony in the fact that women are told that they have important duties to fulfil in society, while being assured that they are incapable of learning more than a 'school boy'. Yet, perhaps, this should not be taken at face value. As well as providing assurance to men that they need not fear the consequences of female improvement, Cleora may have been challenging eighteenth-century women who were unwilling to acquiesce in notions of their intellectual inferiority to reject this assessment. I previously argued that one effect of the conversations contained within the juvenile magazines was to bring consensus to a range of diverging views; I now want to emphasise that this is by no means a simple process. While we have no record of the response of eighteenth-century women to these conversations, it is possible that many rejected the consensual view, while embracing the radical sentiments which were dismissed or even completely absent. Although no alternative view is contained within the pages of the *Female Mentor*, I am suggesting that even a limited representation of debate lends an ambiguity to the conservative content of conversations like these. In addition, such overtly conservative views may have been more likely to trigger resistance than the expression of more moderate sentiments.

Narratives dominated by a single voice may also enable reader resistance where obvious disparities exist between the characteristics of the speaker and the views

¹²⁸ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 139.

¹²⁹ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 139.

they express. Conversation 8 opens with the reader being told that the group have been debating whether novel-reading should be allowed but that they can reach no agreement on the subject. They turn to Amanda for guidance, and most of the conversation is taken up with her feelings on the subject. Expressing traditionally conservative fears about women's exposure to sentimental literature, Amanda insists that 'susceptible hearts' make the female sex vulnerable to the influence of this kind of fiction. Yet, the representation of Amanda, herself, as logical and in control may offset the suggestion that women are at the mercy of their feelings. While the *Female Mentor* expresses conservative sentiments when it discusses gender ideology, I am suggesting that this may invite resistance as well as acquiescence.

As well as trying to educate, the *Female Mentor* debates the value of education itself, the objective of which was presumed to be, not the successful accumulation of knowledge, but control of one's own temperament. To this end, the first conversation is opened by a woman who provides a narrative taken from Sully's memoirs on the 'extraordinary character' of Servin. Despite an extensive understanding of philosophy, mathematics, drawing and theology, as well as 'Greek, Latin and all the learned languages' this character undergoes a process of moral degeneration.¹³⁰ This sketch of Servin's qualities leads the group to discuss whether the correct education would have formed his character in a different manner. Amanda, the voice of authority, insists that while the cultivation of religious and moral principles may not completely eradicate inherent faults, it would significantly improve them. This claim is supported by another gentleman in the group who offers a second character sketch drawn from the Duke of St Simon's memoirs. The Duke of Burgundy is, like Servin, extraordinarily clever but 'severe in his disposition and fiery in this temper'. It is not fact-based knowledge which will correct these faults in character, but rather an improvement in temperament brought about by constant attention from a devoted teacher. Those around the Duke united 'to work upon this very eccentric and dangerous genius', to bring about change 'by gradual and

¹³⁰ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 3.

imperceptible degrees'.¹³¹ The education of the Duke has much in common with Locke's recommendation that a tutor

settle in his Pupil good Habits, and the Principles of Vertue and Wisdom; to give him by little and little a view of Mankind; and to work him into a love and imitation of what is Excellent and Praise-worthy¹³²

Cultivating good habits plays an important part in Locke's philosophy, for once the mind is set, it is difficult to change as an adult. He notes the importance of discipline from a young age, asking

if the Child must have Grapes or Sugar-plumbs, when he has a Mind to them, rather than make the poor Baby cry, or to be out of Humour; why, when he is grown up, must he not be satisfied too, if his Desires carry him to Wine or Women?¹³³

Prioritising the inculcation of good habits and moral principles, the education which rehabilitates the Duke of Burgundy may well be based on Locke's educational philosophy. The character sketches given in the *Female Mentor* demonstrate the differing effects in adulthood between a child who has had his faults gently corrected, and one who has been left entirely to his own resources. This work may be indicating to mothers and other teacher figures that while the correction of temperament requires diligent attention, the advantages to be gained from this are numerous.

Teaching methods in the juvenile magazines

The narratives of Servin and the Duke of Burgundy indicate what education was expected to accomplish, but the processes through which change could be enacted are left rather vague. I now want to focus more specifically upon the learning methods envisaged by the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor*. As

¹³¹ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, pp. 7-8, 9, 10.

¹³² Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 156

¹³³ Locke, *Some Thoughts*, p. 105.

previously noted, these works were strongly influenced by eighteenth-century educational theory and the necessity for practical experience was one element agreed on by all writers on this subject. In the education of Emile, Rousseau's tutor refuses to explain the relevance of subjects studied, insisting that his student work this out for himself. The significance, for example, of learning about 'the course of the sun and the way to find our bearings' becomes clear only when the tutor takes Emile for a walk into the forest and pretends to get lost. He then encourages his student to work out for himself that he has the skills to find his own way home 'by the direction of the shadows'.¹³⁴ Locke too, notes the importance of experience. He suggests the best way to teach children is by example:

But of all the Ways whereby Children are to be instructed, and their Manners formed, the plainest, easiest, and most efficacious, is to set before their Eyes, the *Examples* of those Things you would have them do, or avoid. Which when they are pointed out to them, in the Practice of Persons within their Knowledge, with some Reflection on their Beauty, or Unbecomingness, are of more force to draw or deter their Imitation than any Discourses which can be made to them.¹³⁵

While a parent or teacher could use examples of behaviour that children could see with their own eyes, juvenile literature worked towards the same ends by drawing examples from famous memoirs, short stories and fables.¹³⁶ Further, I would suggest that Beaumont portrays the bad behaviour and misjudgements of her young ladies in a way which would encourage her readers to recognise faults in their own behaviour. When Mrs Affable lectures Miss Frivolous on being 'extremely giddy' and 'a *coquet* of no small degree', these are obviously character traits to be guarded against. The warning is made more relevant when the details of Miss Frivolous's behaviour are expanded upon. Mrs Affable reports:

Last summer you happened to be, where a great many foreign officers were. They are sparks by profession; they vied with each

¹³⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 171, 173.

¹³⁵ Locke *Some Thoughts*, p. 143.

¹³⁶ Hilton notes that from the mid eighteenth-century, the works of Locke and his contemporaries argued that morals could be inculcated 'by building on the young child's natural tendency to play and by providing suitable stimuli and moral example' (*Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 46).

other, who should make you the finest and most amorous compliments; you believed, that profusion of sweet words from those gentlemen, was attended with the greatest sincerity.¹³⁷

The officers in question were simply amusing themselves, according to Mrs Affable, and Miss Frivolous's 'simplicity became a jest with them'. This example reminds young girls, not only about the necessity of carefully considering their own behaviour, but of the difficulty of interpreting the words and actions of those around them. The warning is to young ladies; the teaching method is by example and shared experience.

As noted before, hints to teachers are also contained within this literature. One of Mrs Affable's students suggests the success of stories tailored to meet the individual's needs. Lady Charlotte tells the other girls at the lesson:

But Ladies, Mrs Affable contrives tales on purpose for us. You did not come to our lessons two years ago. Mrs Affable made a tale about one Eliza, it was exactly my character. Perhaps no history could have furnished such another. I do assure you, that it has contributed much to my amendment.¹³⁸

Awareness that the story was written with the intention of improving her behaviour did not prevent Lady Charlotte recognising herself, or the character faults which required correction. This fictional tale, then, passed on benefits, similar to those provided in the historical anecdotes supposedly taken from real life. In Eleanor Fenn's *Female Guardian*, a juvenile magazine in the same tradition as the two works I have been looking at, the female teacher similarly creates tales with the intention of modifying the behaviour of the children in her charge. She tells the reader that

my pen is devoted to their service; and though it has nothing to boast, yet I derive much assistance from it. Ever watchful, I catch occasions of remarking upon errors which do not deserve a serious reproof. I have likewise observed that indirect admonition is often the most successful.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 2, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 60.

¹³⁹ Eleanor Fenn, *The Female Guardian* (London: John Marshall, 1787) pp. 9-10.

She advises that ‘a tale, a fable, a character, will often serve to reform a slight error in one of my young folk, whilst it spares her from the mortification of my reprehension’. This is a teaching method that parents could also make good use of, for ‘a judicious parent availing herself of these hints, will experience the benefit of novelty in lessons for youth’.¹⁴⁰

The *Female Mentor* also attempts to teach by example, offering histories, short stories and fables which may function as a vicarious experience for the reader. These varied components could convey a range of moral lessons but the control of the temperament was particularly prioritised.¹⁴¹ An entire conversation, for example, was devoted to the subject of anger, providing numerous character sketches which demonstrated the necessity for control over emotions. The president of the club, Ebulus, begins by noting that Peter the Great ‘committed, under the impulse of his fury, the most unwarrantable excesses’.¹⁴² Yet instead of condemning this man, admiration is shown when he withdraws from company in order to regain his control in private:

he walked bare-headed for some time, under the most violent agitation, in an intense frosty air, stamping on the ground, and beating his head with all the marks of the greatest fury and passion; and did not return to the company until he was quite composed.¹⁴³

While this degree of fury was obviously not desirable, the ability to master one’s own emotions is worthy of example. Similarly the character of Lord Sommers is complimented. Swift’s appraisal of this gentleman is quoted:

“Lord Sommers being sensible how subject he is to violent passions, avoids all incitements to them by teaching those, whom

¹⁴⁰ Fenn, *Female Guardian*, p. 9.

¹⁴¹ See Hilton on the increased emphasis on disposition and attitude rather than instruction and catechism in children’s education (*Shaping of the Nation’s Young*, p. 46).

¹⁴² Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 61.

¹⁴³ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, pp. 61-2.

he converses with, from his own example, to keep within the bounds of decency.”¹⁴⁴

Individuals with naturally good dispositions may be viewed affectionately, but it is those who learn to control faults that stand as examples worthy of emulation. Accounts of such events, which make up a significant proportion of women’s magazines, demonstrate to the reader that self-control elicits respect and should be the main aim of education for both men and women.

While it is easy to see how such stories could appeal to a mixed gender and wide-ranging age group, where these narratives have been based on historical events, facts have clearly been distorted for didactic purposes, and this occurs more frequently and overtly in works aimed at women or children. I have been arguing that freedom to interpret these narratives may have encouraged independent thought; yet, eighteenth-century women faced a significant difficulty in gaining access to neutral information. In the next section we will see that even where the reader is led to believe they are being provided with accurate histories, moral messages are embedded with these.

Subject-based learning in the juvenile magazines

I have already discussed extensively, in an earlier section, the varied and complex views which existed in the eighteenth century towards women’s study of subjects such as science and history. While history was often distorted in Beaumont’s *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* in order to illustrate a moral point, there was also an assumption that women were interested in accumulating factual knowledge about the wider world in which they lived. As I previously noted, many writers on female education advised that study could provide material for polite and agreeable conversation, and this is particularly well illustrated in Beaumont’s dialogues. Mrs Affable’s students give extended narratives on subjects as varied as the ‘province of Brittany’, the ‘Spartan commonwealth’ and the ‘land of the

¹⁴⁴ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p62.

amazons’.¹⁴⁵ Interested in learning from their fellow students, the young girls in this magazine show that they are capable of absorbing relevant points from these accounts, but in doing so, they demonstrate the impossibility of separating subject-based education from the inculcation of moral principle.

I now want briefly to show that this attitude towards fact-based knowledge continues to place the juvenile magazines at variance with Rousseau. According to this influential educational theorist, it was useless to try and teach children subjects such as history and geography, because their understanding had not yet developed to a stage which would allow them to make sense of such knowledge.¹⁴⁶ He believed that children perceived only unconnected outward images of objects which they were incapable of linking together to create ideas.¹⁴⁷ Once the age of reason was reached, single images would naturally begin to connect to form ideas, and one idea would naturally attract another, but before this stage of development in a child’s life subject-based teaching had no value. However, Rousseau argued, not only that history and geography could not be properly understood by children, but that under the age of fifteen, they were incapable of grasping the concept of good and evil. This is an essential point, for it places Rousseau’s work in an entirely different tradition, not only from the juvenile magazines, but all literature written for children since Newberry.¹⁴⁸

Even admirers of Rousseau could see the flaws in his educational philosophy. Macaulay, for example, recommends ‘every tutor to read his *Emilius* with care’ but ‘let him not be so charmed with the eloquence and plausibility of the author, as to adopt altogether the rules laid down in this work on the subject of instruction’.¹⁴⁹ The formation of good habits and principles in children was considered by most to be

¹⁴⁵ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, pp. 29, 99; vol 2, p. 17.

¹⁴⁶ In the study of geography, for example, Rousseau argues that ‘You think you are teaching him what the world is like; he is only learning the map; he is taught the names of towns, countries, rivers, which have no existence for him except on the paper before him’ (*Emile*, p. 87).

¹⁴⁷ Rousseau claims that ‘in any study whatsoever, the symbols are of no value without the idea of the things symbolised’ (*Emile*, p. 87).

¹⁴⁸ John Newberry is commonly agreed to be the first publisher for children - *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* appeared in 1744, and this was followed by the *Lilliputian Magazine*, issued in one volume in 1751.

¹⁴⁹ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 46.

essential for their future happiness. Macaulay is expressing a view widely held in the eighteenth century when she tells her readers:

As I have a great opinion of the power of early impressions, I cannot agree with Rousseau in the notion, that it is right to keep children in ignorance on the subject of truth and falsehood. I should, on the contrary, be very particular in the explaining to them the nature of this moral difference. I should endeavour to make them feel forcibly, the obligations of observing the strict rules of veracity, by such reflections as were best adapted to convince them of the value of this virtue, and the degradation of character which must attend every departure from it.¹⁵⁰

I would argue that this is the governing principle in the juvenile magazines I have been looking at. A central aim of these works was to show the importance of learning right from wrong at an early age. In this respect they more closely resemble Locke's educational plan which assumed that subject-based knowledge had a didactic function. While history was recommended as 'the great mistress of Prudence and Civil knowledge', geography and chronology were to be studied on the grounds that they made history understandable.¹⁵¹ In a previous section I argued that because moral messages could often be inferred from historical narratives, these were viewed as appropriate for young ladies to study. But it should be noted that Locke's work, which primarily addresses the education of young men, also recommends the study of history on these grounds. I would contend that the manipulation of facts for moral purpose occurred more frequently in women's education. Nevertheless, when looked at in detail, male and female education often differed, not on fundamental issues, but by degree of emphasis.¹⁵²

Biography is a particularly important component of history in eighteenth-century women's magazines. As we have noted, in the *Female Mentor* sketches of virtuous

¹⁵⁰ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ Locke argues that it is by geography and chronology that 'the actions of Mankind are ranked into their proper places of Times and Countries, under which circumstances, they are not only much easier kept in the Memory, but in that natural order, are only capable to afford those observations, which make a Man the better and the abler for reading them' (*Some Thoughts*, p. 237).

¹⁵² See Michele Cohen who argues that 'it is not access to any specific subject, even Latin, but access to a specific method that shaped gendered education' ('Gender and 'Method' in Eighteenth-Century English Education', *History of Education*, 33:5 [2004]: 595).

or corrupt characters are taken from historical memoirs to convey a moral message. Lessons may be learned from the examples, good and bad, set by famous people throughout history. In her study of the 'Queen Consorts of England', Amanda states her intention to set before the group some edifying examples of female conduct:

The pride of the sex is...gratified by accounts of females, who have behaved in trying situations with dignity, or who have inspired their husbands, brothers or sons with more humanity upon any particular occasion, than they would probably have displayed without their interference.¹⁵³

Despite this emphasis on influencing male behaviour, the Queen Consorts Amanda chooses to talk about show surprising courage and enact change independently. While the teaching of history may have been justified on the grounds of moral purpose, it could also encourage young ladies to exercise agency in their own right. In Amanda's account of Boadicea, for example, she notes that

Valour and spirit are the leading characteristics of this gallant queen; in the present age these virtues do not seem desirable in a female, but in such savage times it was a great mark of a superior soul in a woman to defend her kingdom against the conquerors of the world.¹⁵⁴

This is particularly interesting because it shows some degree of recognition that the qualities of modesty and meekness recommended as ideal in eighteenth-century women, are not 'natural', innate feminine characteristics, but rather reflect an awareness of historical relativity as regards attitudes to female conduct. According to Amanda, when the circumstances called for it, women could be strong and defiant. This representation of woman contrasts with the biographies contained within the female miscellanies. Viewing female virtue as an unchanging concept these publications describe and assess the behaviour of Roman and Greek women from the classical era in the same terms as eighteenth-century women.

¹⁵³ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 121.

¹⁵⁴ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 124.

Nevertheless, Amanda's accounts of the 'Queen Consorts of England' have much in common with the biographies contained in the female miscellanies. Notably, they navigate a difficult path in portraying women who managed to maintain their respectability while distinguishing themselves for some great public achievement. Queen Bertha, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, and wife to Aethelberht I, King of Kent who reigned 560-616, is given credit for bringing Christianity to England. Amanda tells the members of the group:

Every woman, therefore, who enjoys with gratitude the inestimable comforts of the gospel, must feel a noble pride on reflecting that Bertha, by her good sense, mildness and propriety of conduct, was the leading instrument of converting our ancestors to Christianity.¹⁵⁵

Such biographies show that throughout history women have enacted change but while this could be viewed as potentially enabling, the continual emphasis on respectability and 'propriety of conduct' could be understood to restrict opportunities. While Locke reveals in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* that men too, were meant to absorb didactic messages from the study of history, I would argue that they did not have to negotiate, to the same extent, between complex and contradictory notions of acceptable behaviour.

Not all the conversations featured in the *Female Mentor* were so overtly morally didactic. When Honoria shares the contents of a letter from her brother with the other members of the group it can be seen to touch upon travel, geography and science. As the eighteenth century progressed more women than ever before were experiencing the grand tour and travelling to new and interesting places.¹⁵⁶ Those who did not travel themselves, could gain some shadow of this experience through the letters of friends and family, or travel letters, whether authentic or not, published in women's magazines. The *Female Mentor* assumes that women will be interested in different countries and that they will benefit from hearing about new and strange places. Honoria's brother opens his letter by looking forward to a time when his

¹⁵⁵ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, p. 126.

¹⁵⁶ See Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London: Flamingo, 2001).

sister may join him on his travels, showing that he felt female travel to be not only acceptable, but desirable. However, the most interesting part of this correspondence is his inclusion of a letter from another friend travelling abroad. This friend provides a fascinating description of the disappearing ‘lake of Zirnitz’ in Carniola (then part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, now part of Slovenia). The reader is told that when the water is at its greatest height it occupies a circumference of around twenty miles, but that it can appear within a day, and recede again almost as quickly. As I showed in the previous section, the observation of natural phenomena was considered an appropriate study for young ladies, which could impress upon them the magnificence of God’s creation. One interesting element of this letter is that it does not just describe surface appearances, but attempts to explain the underlying processes which lead to this ‘operation of nature’. The letter explains that

These collected waters, which force their way through subterraneous passages, have worn in their course deep channels in different parts of the vale, and at length lose themselves in numerous caverns formed in the rocks. Whenever the quantity of water supplied is not more than sufficient to fill the subterraneous passages, the whole vale remains dry...But whenever the quantity is so large, that the subterraneous passages are full, or in other words, when the influx is superior to the outgoings, then the waters overflow the vale, and form a lake more or less large in proportion to the quantity of water retained.¹⁵⁷

This account opens up a rich world of fascinating material for young ladies. In the Haywood section, which looked in more detail at women’s study of science, I indicated that women’s participation in this area was often limited to observation. Although in the format of a travel letter, there is an attempt here to go further than merely describing Lake Zirntiz. To make sense of the underlying processes, as described above, young ladies would have had to exert their powers of reasoning. While many of the narratives provided in the *Female Mentor* appear to have been distorted in order to exhibit a clear moral message, this work also provides material which could encourage its readers to engage in rational thought. The letter about the Lake of Zirnitz deliberately sets out to dismiss superstition by providing logical

¹⁵⁷ Honoria, *Female Mentor*, vol 1, pp. 178-9.

explanations for the ‘surprising phenomenon’ witnessed there. Young ladies are invited, not only to admire God’s creation, but to understand underlying processes; about why the lake appears and disappears; about why, when the lake is dry, certain parts of the land are more fertile than others; about where the numerous birds come from when the lake is full. The *Female Mentor* assumes that the women it addresses are quite capable of understanding these explanations and that they have an interest in finding out more about the world in which they live.

While the juvenile magazines I have been looking at in this section often express conservative sentiments, assuming that women’s fate lies in marriage and promoting the importance of respectability, they also widen their readers’ knowledge of the world. Both the *Young Ladies Magazine* and the *Female Mentor* utilise strategies which allow them to construct a space in which their readers can learn and develop their understanding. When looked at in detail, these works are surprisingly sophisticated and ambiguous, expressing a range of contradictory notions about women and their duties in society. I have been arguing that the representation of varying views may ultimately have been enabling for eighteenth-century women by encouraging them to assess the facts for themselves. Yet, the juvenile magazines also appear to represent a moderate position that is unwilling to challenge the status quo directly. These publications function in such a way that any move towards radical sentiment is checked but, as we have seen, conservative opinions were also subject to scrutiny and debate. I would contend that this process helped to define the moderate position. Claiming a new authority for the female teacher, these works demonstrated the necessity for women to cultivate rationality in order to carry out traditional duties in the home. However, in their portrayal of admirable women, intelligence is equated with conformity to a limiting ideology of femininity. Respectability remains of utmost importance but to categorise these magazines as either conservative or radical, would ignore the considerable complexities which exist within their pages. While they largely seem to assume that men and women will operate in different spheres, we have seen that the educational methods they recommend are the same for both sexes. I wish at this point to emphasise the connection between a moderate viewpoint which reflected the complexities and

contradictions inherent in society, and the practical approach of the woman's magazine. These works do not deal with abstract or theoretical concepts which may be simplified but rather offer strategies to negotiate the world as it exists. While magazines addressed to women may often appear to disseminate conservative sentiments, as a body of work they validate the right of their readers to form their own opinions, and in the next section we will see that they created a discursive space in which these views could be articulated.

SECTION THREE

THE FEMALE MISCELLANIES

Eighteenth-century women's magazines rarely engage directly with questions concerning the gender hierarchy. Yet, as I have shown, by consistently elevating the importance of traditional domestic roles in the home, while negotiating within acceptable boundaries space for female readers to assess the wider world for themselves, these works helped to construct a moderate position in relation to issues of female equality. While a middle ground could be staked out by avoiding the extreme arguments of conservative and radical writers, as I have previously noted, this often emerged through a negotiation of these conflicting ideas. In this section I will develop these arguments more fully in relation to the monthly female miscellanies which contained a wide variety of material and articulated a range of views on the subject of female education. Although the female miscellanies appear to offer more consistently conservative sentiments than the other magazines considered in this chapter, these works are rife with contradiction, requiring the reader to participate in independent critical assessment to reach coherent conclusions. I will demonstrate that significant opportunities for the eighteenth-century reader to debate, contest and modify meaning may be located within these texts.

In contrast to the other women's magazines we have been considering, the female miscellanies were not produced by one person but rather consisted of numerous

items written by different authors, each expressing individual opinions. Separating their different elements into discreet sections, these magazines incorporated within their pages, biographies of famous women, essays on female education, essays on human nature, articles on history and science, short stories, poetry, music and reader's letters. Obvious tensions within the content and structure of these individual items could provide readers with openings for interpretation. In particular, I will be drawing attention to discrepancies between the images deliberately proclaimed for women and the, perhaps, unintentional implications which emerge from the narrative. For instance, there are recurring contradictions between the representation of strong women, intellectually and morally capable of taking responsibility for their own lives, and assumptions that the female sex are unable to cope without male guidance. Female miscellanies also contain numerous narratives which, although designed to convey specific messages, were open to alternative interpretations. The specific circumstances of women's lives were often depicted to indicate an ideal, or stand as a warning; however, female readers did not necessarily respond in expected ways and it is possible that many articles escaped authorial intention.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the various articles within a monthly issue could interact in ways which invited analytical comparisons, while the format and content had the potential to encourage readers to make links between past and future issues. Indeed the tendency to turn otherwise ephemeral monthly issues into bound six-monthly or yearly volumes must have further encouraged readers to view these works as coherent, permanent volumes.¹⁵⁹ I have characterised the female miscellanies as publications which promote moderate views and work to create a middle ground in the female education debate. However, what becomes clear in the course of this chapter is the important part the reader has to play in the construction of this middle ground, and the way in which this was enabled by the structure of these constantly evolving texts.

¹⁵⁸ Looking particularly at women's response to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vickery suggests that 'didactic lectures and venomous attacks were probably subject to multiple or selective readings' (*Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 6).

¹⁵⁹ Charles A Knight notes that different formats of the early eighteenth-century periodical suggested different ways of viewing the work, either as individual and ephemeral discreet essays or as coherent and permanent bound volumes ('Bibliography and the Shape of the Literary Periodical in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Library*, series 6, 8:3 [1986]: 236-7).

The variety of articles contained within the female miscellanies allowed questions about female education to be approached from different perspectives. Yet, while this amalgam of elements may appear to have offered the reader an unlimited range of disparate content, a fundamental feature of the female miscellanies was that each monthly issue had to make itself anew while simultaneously continuing on from what went before.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, although individual items could reflect a variety of ideological positions, within this material there were certain constants; most notably the prioritisation of respectability and domesticity. In addition, the miscellanies quickly established a number of regular articles, particularly advice columns and female biographies, genres with their own established conventions which cue the reader to interpret in particular ways. In his study of early nineteenth-century literary magazines, Mark Parker notes that ‘as one reads more numbers of a magazine, even in snatches, a set of expectations might take shape to give more determinate shape to response’.¹⁶¹ The reader’s interpretation would therefore be guided, although not determined, by previous issues.¹⁶² Of course, there was also a range of new material; single one-off articles which provided no obvious connection to a larger message. The eighteenth-century miscellany managed, therefore, to organise itself around a determined structure whilst still offering an openness of form.

To consider the discreet sections contained within the female miscellanies independently of each other, then, is to ignore the complexity contained within the magazine as a whole. In addition, the format of the miscellany encouraged women

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Beetham notes that ‘since the periodical depends on ensuring that the readers continue to buy each number as it comes out, there is a tendency in the form not only to keep reproducing elements which have been successful but also to link each number to the next. This can be done through running a series of articles, through constant reference to past and future issues, through advertising, through readers’ letters and through serialization’ (‘Open and Closed: the Periodical as a Publishing Genre’ *Victorian Periodical Review*, 22:3 [1989]: 97).

¹⁶¹ Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 15.

¹⁶² Reader response theorist, Hans Robert Jauss argues that even a completely new book predisposes its audience to specific kinds of expectation: ‘it awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the “middle and end”’ (*Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* [Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982] p. 23).

to read in the order which suited them best, selecting items which were of specific interest.¹⁶³ Beetham points out that

It is an unusual reader of any periodical who reads every word 'from cover to cover' let alone in the order in which they are printed. Most readers will not only construct their own order, they will select and read only some of the text.¹⁶⁴

These works lack the inbuilt coherence of the essay periodical which dominated the market in the first half of the eighteenth century. The diverse range of material offered by these works presupposes a sophisticated female reader capable of negotiating contradictory ideas. Pearson notes that virtually every issue of the *Lady's Magazine* throughout the 1770s and 1780s presented 'the female reader with multiple, shifting images of herself'. Consequently, 'the female reader constructed in the magazine is trained in techniques of resisting as well as compliant reading'.¹⁶⁵ I will be extending this argument to other female miscellanies of the eighteenth century to show that these works similarly required the reader to make coherent connections between apparently contradictory materials. It seems likely that the individual items found in the miscellanies would have created expectations which were not compatible with one another. As a site for the exchange of opinions reflecting a variety of ideological positions, but that is shaped primarily by practical concerns, the female miscellany strives to construct out of this diversity a moderate, pragmatic consensus about women's lives. But this moderate ground is by no means consistent and has to be continually recreated and modified; it could even be argued that although there are certain obvious constants, the miscellanies had to create anew each month their definition of what this meant. We see, for instance, liberal views being rehabilitated by incorporating them into material which was, for the most part, unquestionably conservative. Magazines engaging with the subject of female education could gradually redefine the parameters of what was considered acceptable. Thus the format of the miscellany allows a variety of views to be

¹⁶³ Phegley notes that 'during the nineteenth century magazines were generally believed to encourage skimming, skipping and leisurely enjoyment' (*Educating the Proper Woman Reader* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004) p. 10).

¹⁶⁴ Beetham, 'Opened and Closed', p. 98.

¹⁶⁵ Pearson, 'Books, My Greatest Joy', p. 13.

articulated in ways that allow a common ground to emerge, although they notably make no attempt formally to reconcile philosophical differences.¹⁶⁶ These magazines do not commit themselves, as a whole, to any one position and perhaps many eighteenth-century women followed suit.

All of the miscellanies articulated a variety of sentiments on questions of female abilities. Nevertheless, some of these works tend to be more narrowly conservative than others and two of the texts I will be concentrating upon in this section have been deliberately chosen because they differ noticeably in the balance of radical and conservative sentiments which they offer to the reader. The *Lady's Monthly Museum* (1798-1832) has a tendency to restrict women to the domestic sphere; in contrast, the *New Lady's Magazine* (1786-95) often represents women achieving success outwith the home and offers wide-ranging educational material which challenges assumptions that the female sex existed within an insular environment at this time.¹⁶⁷ The third and last periodical which I will be considering is the *Royal Female Magazine* which, first appearing in 1760, is one of the earliest female miscellanies I have been able to locate.¹⁶⁸ Lasting only a few months, but giving a clear indication of the form and content of later women's magazines, this is a fascinating publication. Despite advocating the cultivation of the female mind, and offering a wide variety of material which could aid this process, the *Royal Female Magazine* frequently focuses upon images of the feeling woman, ignoring artistic and political achievements in favour of promoting a limiting ideology of femininity. As we will see, all three of these magazines engage in significant ways with questions concerning female education, often negotiating extreme views in the process. Yet, great discrepancies remain between articles; even those sitting side-by-side may offer a different balance

¹⁶⁶ Parker argues that the magazine 'presents readers with a field of possibilities and leaves it in large part to them to decide what approach to take or what conclusions to take away' (*Literary Magazines*, p. 15).

¹⁶⁷ The *Lady's Monthly Museum* was in continuous print from 1798 until 1832, when it united in conjunction with the *Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, to become the *Lady's Magazine & Museum of Belles lettres*. This publication continued from 1832 until 1837 before uniting with the *Court Magazine* to become *The Court Magazine & Lady's Magazine & Museum of Belles Lettres*, running 1838-47. See Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972) pp. 210, 276-281.

¹⁶⁸ See also Charlotte Lennox's *Lady's Museum* published the same year.

of conservative and radical sentiments, constantly requiring the reader to position and re-position herself in relation to the conflicting information presented to her.

Undoubtedly, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* was the most conservative of these works, disseminating an ideology which promoted marriage as the most important event in a woman's life, but its emphasis upon domestic duties did not translate into a lack of interest in female education. A range of skills and knowledge was presumed to be essential to the woman fulfilling the role of mother and wife.¹⁶⁹ One of the most interesting elements of this work is that it combines 'worldly' and subject-based education in a way which blurs the distinction. I do not wish to deny the considerable amount of conservative material which exists in the *Lady's Monthly Museum* but it should be acknowledged that far from viewing women's traditional roles and intellectual accomplishments as conflicting with one another, this magazine often conflates the two. While this could restrict the intellectual pursuits deemed suitable for women to specific areas, prioritising the improvement of the female mind could also offer a new perspective on the world.

Although, as a physical item, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* is slightly smaller and consists of complete pages of text rather than the double column format of the *New Lady's Magazine* and the *Royal Female Magazine*, these works are visually similar to each other. It seems likely that resemblances between typefaces and illustrations, in addition to a shared emphasis on eighteenth-century women's lives, would have encouraged the female sex to view these works as comparable. While I wish to indicate that eighteenth-century female miscellanies are not indistinguishable from one another, I do not wish to exaggerate the extent of these differences. In both outward appearance and inner content, these works had much in common. In particular, women's magazines of this time share an ambiguity about female ability, neither willing to acquiesce to the notion of inherent inferiority, nor to demand equal gender rights. As a body of work they often seem to restrict the choices available to

¹⁶⁹ Vickery notes that at this time 'gentlemen and gentlewomen were seen to perform distinct work roles, with discreet areas of expertise and responsibility. Contemporaries stressed the momentous change in a woman's life when she became the "mistress of a family", while even conservative prescriptive literature emphasised female dominion indoors, and directed advice to women on "the government of servants"' (*Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 160).

their readers, but we will see that the conservative content of the miscellanies is, at least in part, offset by a heterogeneous format which facilitates comparative readings.

Although the *Lady's Monthly Museum* ran for thirty four years, I have restricted my consideration of this work to the first two years of its publication, so that I may show in detail the changes and continuities between monthly issues. I shall begin by focusing upon a complete issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* in order to demonstrate the way in which the varied components of the miscellany could interact and thereby facilitate independent thought. Each issue consisted of about eighty pages and incorporated, as I have noted, a wide range of content and genre. In particular I would like to suggest that the close proximity of narratives featuring a range of female characters responding in a variety of ways to diverse circumstances would have encouraged readers to engage in a self-reflexive evaluation of their own role and conduct in society. In a single issue of a miscellany we are introduced to women who conduct themselves in an exemplary fashion, and others who make mistakes. Various female characters are featured who fulfil traditional duties in the home, but some are also seen to achieve success outwith the domestic sphere. Many women are shown demonstrating extraordinary courage, but young ladies are also portrayed cultivating unwise sensibilities. Across short stories, histories, biographies, essays and readers' letters, women are represented in many different ways. I am suggesting that these different images of women would have enabled comparative readings and critical assessment.¹⁷⁰

The first issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, published in July 1798, opened with a biography of writer Hannah More.¹⁷¹ As I will show in a later section, representing the life stories of women who were in the public eye as a result of their achievements outwith the home was fraught with difficulty. While the inclusion of such material

¹⁷⁰ Laurel Brake has noted that in the Victorian magazine 'serials may be read more critically, as the bases for comparison are near to hand'; the 'parallel narratives' offered in these works may encourage readers to engage in a process of literary assessment. See 'Star Turn? Magazine, Part-Issue, and Book Serialisation' *Victorian Periodical Review*, 34: 3 [2001]: 225. I am extending this argument to suggest that the close proximity of different representations of women within the eighteenth-century miscellany may similarly have offered the potential for independent thought and critical consideration.

¹⁷¹ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 1-6.

tended to be justified on the basis that it would inspire emulation, in order to make famous personalities acceptable as role models for ordinary middle-class women these biographies had to prioritise domestic virtues over professional success. Nevertheless, it was More's literary accomplishments which raised her to public attention and, at least on the surface, this article recognises her achievements and claims respect for her skills and abilities. Within More's biography then, we see contradictory pressures, but the author's character is represented in an unambiguous fashion to the eighteenth-century reader as one of exemplary morality.

In contrast, only a few pages later, the magazine presents the fictional story of Frances Baddock, a young woman tempted by the gaming table and attracted to inadvisable friends.¹⁷² Yet, no decisive judgment is made on Frances; she is not presented as an evil character and, ending her life in poverty and misery, she gains the reader's sympathy. The most overt message contained within this story is a warning about the importance of prudence for women. Yet, the reader's interpretation of this narrative may be complicated retrospectively by the account which follows of an event taken from the 'Letters of Madame du Montier'. In the first story there are terrible consequences because Frances allows herself to be guided by her emotions but Madame du Montier's letters reveal a positive outcome when a friar takes a leap of faith and allows a prisoner, about to be executed, to escape.¹⁷³ Twenty years later, the friar again meets this man and discovers that he has turned his life around and became a model citizen. The characters in both these sections act according to their feelings but the outcomes are quite different and the reader, not provided with any coherent assessment, must judge their respective actions for herself.

The Old Woman, who headed the regular advice page in the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, provides another image of a respectable eighteenth-century woman. In this first issue she constructs a blameless history for herself and sets out her qualifications to advise readers, noting her success in running a girls' school and marrying her three

¹⁷² *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 11-17.

¹⁷³ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 18-20

daughters in an advantageous manner.¹⁷⁴ As I have noted in the previous sections, the gaining of direct experience was problematic for eighteenth-century women, and this advice writer seems to promote a limiting ideology of femininity which endorses these restrictions. Yet, interestingly, the Old Woman claims the right to guide readers on the basis of her experience. I am suggesting that her restrictive advice, which assumes female dependency, is at odds with the image she projects of herself as a woman capable of exercising control over her own life, and that this could stimulate independent thought in the reader. The portrayal of intelligent articulate women is a central component of the miscellany's moderate stance, which enables assertions of female inferiority to be checked without openly challenging them. As we will see, the persona of the speaker may, in part, negate what is being said.

The Old Woman's advice page is immediately followed by a biographical article providing the histories of two Roman women whom the reader is clearly meant to admire.¹⁷⁵ In both cases the women take the decision to die with their husbands, who are prisoners facing death sentences, rather than struggle on alone. Virtuous in their loyalty to their husbands, their self-sacrifice may be viewed as a form of heroism, albeit exercised on themselves rather than in the arena of war or politics.¹⁷⁶ Yet, at the same time their inability to live without their husbands also characterises them as weak and appropriately feminine. Female fortitude does not consist of women labouring against misfortune in these stories; rather they resign themselves to fate, and decide to die, rather than survive. Yet, I would argue that this article might encourage the reader to compare these ambivalent examples of female self-sacrifice with her own experience as an eighteenth-century middle-class woman.

Additionally, this account of female fortitude contrasts with the serialised story which begins in this issue, featuring a daughter who struggles on in the face of adversity, supporting her father and raising his flagging spirits.¹⁷⁷ I should emphasise at this point that these stories were meant to be entertaining, and not simply moral treatises. While the women portrayed in these works were undoubtedly

¹⁷⁴ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 25-30.

¹⁷⁵ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 30-33.

¹⁷⁶ Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, histories of women frequently cite the stories of Arria and Eponina as examples of ideal feminine conduct.

¹⁷⁷ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 20-25.

supposed to be admirable figures, the qualities which identified them as such were not static or consistent from article to article.

This issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* also features two essays on the subject of female education.¹⁷⁸ The first, an extract from Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, sets out a range of duties to be fulfilled by women, many of which fell outwith their own household.¹⁷⁹ To discharge duties and responsibilities to the poor in their neighbourhood, women should inspect 'work-houses, schools of industry, and cottages'.¹⁸⁰ In addition, they could help apprentice young girls to suitable positions and make regular checks on their progress.¹⁸¹ Although addressed to an abstract, non-specific reader, this work depicts the image of a woman effecting change in the wider world. The second essay on female education focuses far more on the private teaching role of women, and the education of girls in particular. Written in the first person, the author of this work constructs the persona of an intelligent, thoughtful woman, who is, perhaps, herself carrying out similar responsibilities in the home. Addressing questions of how and when children begin to learn, she claims the right for the female sex to be given an education which prioritises the cultivation of the rational faculties. No mention is made of the specific role women were to be educated to fulfil, but, as I have shown, the magazine is full of tales which communicate a vicarious experience, portraying women in a range of situations, enabling the reader to assess for herself what the priorities of female learning should be.

Featuring a range of female characters, functioning in a variety of circumstances and settings, the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, thus, demonstrated that, even within the limited boundaries of respectability, numerous choices were available to women at

¹⁷⁸ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, pp. 34-37, 51-56.

¹⁷⁹ Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* was first published in 1798.

¹⁸⁰ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, p. 35.

¹⁸¹ Hilton notes that 'many gentry and educated middle-ranking women were socially and culturally positioned in ways that meant they were responsible for the young. Not only were they expected to educate their own and related children at home, but also they were often held to account for the poor children of the parish, expected to oversee schooling and to advise on matters of family economy' (*Shaping of the Nation's Young*, p. 3).

this time. Focusing upon female education, but approaching the subject from a variety of angles, this magazine did not provide a simplistic or coherent image of the ideal eighteenth-century woman. Within the moderate viewpoint which the miscellany was actively involved in constructing, there was therefore significant scope for varying views, and the format of the magazines enabled complex and contradictory ideas to be communicated to the reader. We will see that as narratives unfold, potential claims to female equality are checked, but so too are assertions of inherent inferiority. As the individual items within the miscellanies interact with one another, and in so doing modify definitions of acceptable and respectable behaviour for middle-class women, a complicated picture emerges. Nevertheless, there is a consistent focus upon the practical, helping women to negotiate life as it exists. Regardless of the balance struck between radical and conservative sentiments in particular instances, the concept of communities of women sharing information is central to these works, and providing vicarious experience is a main objective of many of the different elements of the eighteenth-century miscellany. Short fictions, stories taken from history, the experiences and life stories shared by readers and the female biographies, which feature so prominently in these works, all provide examples of behaviour for women to either avoid or emulate. But this ideological complexity is contained by a unifying focus on the pragmatic and experiential aspects of life. In addition to portraying a range of acceptable models of womanhood, the female miscellanies helped validate the right of their readers to participate in the construction and evaluation of these images, and indeed to contribute to wider debates in society. As we will see in the next section, the regular inclusion of reader correspondence played an important role in providing the middle-class woman with a discursive and material space in which she could articulate her views on a range of subjects.

Readers' contributions

Far from being confined to a few short lines to ask a question or express an opinion, reader contributions to the eighteenth-century female miscellany could range in a single issue from thoughtful essays, to entertaining accounts of events, to critiques of

society. Yet, despite the range of topics covered, the female role is consistently defined in ways which stake out a middle ground in the female education debate. I would like to note at this point the difficulties which surround questions about the authenticity of this type of material. It is likely that at least some of these letters were produced by editors to fulfil a specific didactic purpose. However, these works also offer numerous essays which appear to be genuine correspondence from the public.¹⁸² It may seem strange to the modern eye that individuals took the time and effort to write extended papers with no hope of monetary reward but professional journalism was in its infancy at this time and I would suggest that eighteenth-century contributors had a different kind of ambition they wished to fulfil – the airing of their views to the wider public.

Throughout this section I will be arguing that, regardless of their authenticity, the readers' contributions which feature in the miscellanies were actively involved in the construction of moderate values.¹⁸³ Whether opinions expressed about society were illustrated through anecdotal evidence or based on theoretical assumptions, they tended to involve a process of balancing contradictory pressures on women's lives. Central to this process was the portrayal of intelligent eighteenth-century women rationally debating their place in the world, while ultimately upholding the importance of domestic roles. We will see that many readers' contributions express fear about women's vulnerability to seduction and the pleasures of the commercial world. Yet, this susceptibility is usually attributed to a faulty education and those writing on the subject often do so in a way which demonstrates their own immunity to these temptations. A variety of strategies could be employed for this purpose. For example, a humorous letter appears in the July 1760 issue of the *Royal Female*

¹⁸² This distinction is by no means straightforward. Parker notes that 'we have a range of modalities within periodicals, from relative authorial autonomy to collaborations between editor and contributor. In between we have elusive hybrids: collaborations before the fact in which the contributor tunes his remarks to the key of the magazine' (*Literary Magazines*, p. 5).

¹⁸³ Beetham notes that the reader of a magazine 'is addressed as an individual but is positioned as a member of certain overlapping sets of groups'. Consequently, although offering flexibility in reading patterns, these publications tend 'to close off alternative readings by creating a dominant position from which to read' ('Open and Closed', p. 99). I would argue that eighteenth-century contributors to the female miscellanies deliberately articulated views which were compatible with a 'dominant' moderately conservative position, while nonetheless finding opportunities to engage in debate and perhaps modify definitions of the acceptable and respectable.

Magazine, in which a young girl proclaims her own ingenuous character, while displaying considerable wit. Signing herself ‘A Ignorance’, she laments that she lacks a ‘knowledge of the *world*’ and provides an account of being mortified one afternoon as she was leaving church by two women who could not believe that she had failed to observe the details of a cap worn by the lady sitting next to her.¹⁸⁴

Through a tongue-in-cheek version of events, a familiar grievance is voiced about an over-emphasis on fashion in women’s lives and, by extension, a question is raised of what a valuable knowledge of the world should consist. Issues which were of relevance to women could be tackled in sophisticated ways within the reader contribution pages. Although containing a rather obvious messages about the need for women to cultivate their minds, this particular letter is both subversive and entertaining. In short, I am arguing that reader contributions could challenge notions of female inferiority, even as they upheld traditional domestic values.

Women could also voice grievances through more straightforward and sincere admonitions. For instance, a letter questioning women’s usual priorities when marrying appears in the August 1760 issue of the *Royal Female Magazine*. ‘Emma’ adopts a tone of self-righteous indignation as she shares her observations on female conduct and invites the editor to join her in condemning this behaviour. Her concern is that future marriage partners are being assessed entirely on the basis of fortunes, rather than qualities of character. She notes that when a young lady of her acquaintance recently married to her financial advantage, none of her friends could comment upon what kind of man her husband was. Articulating a fear that the female sex is being corrupted, she condemns a continued emphasis on material wealth at the expense of moral character:

Yet to think that among all my female acquaintance, not one should be able to remember more, than the cloaths, jewels, &c. and not know his character in such essential points, makes my sex appear in such a contemptible light, that I own I cannot bear it.¹⁸⁵

As we have seen, fear about women’s vulnerability to the influence of

¹⁸⁴ *Royal Female Magazine*, July 1760, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸⁵ *Royal Female Magazine*, August 1760, pp. 71-2.

commercialism was widespread in eighteenth-century society and there is certainly more than a suggestion of this in ‘Emma’s’ letter. Yet, far from dismissing the importance of financial security, her letter acknowledges a moderate income to be essential for a newly married couple. Taking a pragmatic view, similar to the one adopted in Austen’s novels, ‘Emma’ notes that ‘there is a medium between marrying *any man* for his estate, and running to Scotland with one who has none’.¹⁸⁶ This articulate letter writer utilises example and shares her observations in a way which enables her to point out difficulties she perceives in society. The course of action which she recommends to women negotiates extremes and is based on practicalities, rather than ideological considerations. As I have previously noted, eighteenth-century writing on female education often encouraged women to evaluate the behaviour of those around them and the reader correspondence pages of magazines provided important opportunities for young ladies to share their conclusions with others.¹⁸⁷ While marriage was generally accepted to be the best option available to women in the eighteenth century, clearly there was a desire to debate the nature of this institution. Importantly, contributors like ‘Emma’ are presented to the reader as average middle-class women. Consequently, their views have no special authority and this had the potential to encourage other women to develop their own opinions on this matter. By consistently placing groups of women centre-stage, whether in readers’ contributions, fictional stories or historical anecdotes, the magazines could promote the benefits of debate and exchange.¹⁸⁸ I would argue that by representing multiple voices articulating the opinions of specific individuals, the female miscellanies could foster independent judgment and critical thought in their readers.

I have already indicated that the line between fact and fiction was frequently blurred in reader correspondence. As we have seen in the juvenile educational magazines,

¹⁸⁶ *Royal Female Magazine*, August 1760, p. 72.

¹⁸⁷ Adburgham notes that ‘women living in country districts had few social contacts outside their family and immediate circle of acquaintances within carriage distance. In winter time their isolation could seem endless. The *Lady’s Magazine* arriving each month would give them a feeling of friendship with other women, all over the country, who had the same problems and preoccupations as they themselves’ (*Women in Print*, p. 148).

¹⁸⁸ Beetham describes the magazine as ‘a communal space in which the fair sex felt welcome. It extended the reader’s community beyond the domestic circle to which she was increasingly confined – not least, ironically by the discourses of the magazines itself’ (*A Magazine of her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine 1800-1914* [London & New York: Routledge, 1996] p. 20).

fictional stories and historical anecdotes were often utilised to teach by example. Readers' contributions could similarly offer women a vicarious experience through the knowledge gained by others. Yet, it should be noted that stories with overt moral messages often steer the reader towards a given position. This is particularly notable in an extended letter which appears in the September 1799 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*. A young man, signing himself 'Misebicus', provides an account of losing his fortune and health through dissipation, transforming a supposedly 'true' history into a didactic moral tale. At the beginning of this story, 'Misebicus' is innocent and has good principles. The problem arises with his participation in fashionable company.¹⁸⁹ In an enactment of conduct-book warnings about exposure to vice, outward compliance begins to corrupt principles. Although this story is outwardly about a male rake admitting his terrible actions, he neatly reflects part of the blame back at the female sex; it is only because women are entertained by coxcombs and rakes that the hero emulates such behaviour. The implication, then, is that women are responsible for the way men conduct themselves in society. This opinion mirrors More's claim that the state of society depends upon 'the prevailing sentiments and habits of women'.¹⁹⁰ The story becomes an appeal to women to think about the consequence of their actions on wider society. I have been arguing that the reader contribution pages of the female miscellanies provided a space in which women could engage in debate with each other but Misebicus's story shows that there were also significant opportunities for men to admonish women. Yet, we also see many contributions from women, making similar comments about female conduct, and I would suggest that these stories provided the female sex with images to which they could define themselves in opposition.

While it was not unusual for the female miscellanies to include contributions from men, readers' letters tended to focus on the observations and experiences of eighteenth-century women. For example, many women wrote to the miscellanies to express concern about the number of misguided females who have allowed themselves to be seduced. In November 1799 the editors of the *Lady's Monthly*

¹⁸⁹ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, September 1799, p. 212.

¹⁹⁰ More, *Strictures*, vol 7, p. 2.

Museum include a letter from a female writer, who signs herself only 'P.H.F.'. Having just witnessed a poor girl, who had been seduced and abandoned, commit suicide, she wishes to point out the terrible consequences faced by women in such circumstances.¹⁹¹ Yet, while sympathy is expressed for the girl's misery there is no request for increased tolerance from society. Much of the letter is spent detailing the ruined character of the seduced woman but no attempt is made to locate the root problem of this situation in a faulty female education. As I have previously noted, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* is the most overtly conservative of the female miscellanies which I am considering, and seems to align itself with the traditional conduct-book assumption that the seduced woman can never regain her place in society. In her *Letters to a Young Lady*, West similarly argues that only fear of the consequences of transgression prevents many women from indulging in this behaviour. Anxiety about being ostracised from society has 'preserved thousands of thoughtless impassioned victims from the allurements of guilty pleasure, by the consciousness that they could not endure a life of reproach'.¹⁹² The initial stimulus which appeared to motivate 'P.H.F.'s' contribution collapses into a moralising judgment, but it should not be presumed that all eighteenth-century magazines, or eighteenth-century female readers adopted such simplistic convictions.

The message that women must safeguard their virtues and reputations at all times is widespread in the eighteenth-century miscellany, but the February 1788 issue of the *New Lady's Magazine* includes a letter on the subject of flattery which expresses more liberal sentiments towards the seduced woman. Here 'J Clarke' writes to the editor to condemn the behaviour of men who, setting out to ruin innocent women, specifically target young ladies who are 'unhackneyed in the ways of the world, and judge of all mankind by themselves'. Although she implores the female sex to be more sensible and discriminate between true affection and meaningless compliments, the writer acknowledges that many seduced women 'instead of falling under the lash of censure, deserve the greatest pity'.¹⁹³ Noting that women avoided by their own sex and abandoned by parents have little choice but to embark upon a life of

¹⁹¹ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, November 1799, pp. 307-8.

¹⁹² West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 1, p. 239.

¹⁹³ *New Lady's Magazine* (London: Alex. Hogg) February 1788, p. 77.

prostitution, this letter mirrors Wollstonecraft's concern that

Many young girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are, as it may emphatically be termed, ruined before they know the difference between virtue and vice, and thus prepared by their education for infamy, they become infamous.¹⁹⁴

While I do not wish to over-emphasise the proto-feminist content of this letter, there is a surprising similarity between the arguments made by 'J Clarke', and those expressed by Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published four years later. This could be seen as indicative of the miscellanies' ability to accommodate what might elsewhere be regarded as radically opposed ideological stances. Refusing to condemn the seduced woman, and attributing any weakness in her character to faulty education, 'J Clarke' attempts to provide the knowledge required by the female sex to arm themselves against this fate. As I have previously noted, a central feature of the female periodical was the representation of eighteenth-century women advising their own sex. By rendering more liberal views as acceptable and respectable, these women could gradually redefine the parameters of the moderate position. Radical stances could be rehabilitated and assimilated into a point of view that no longer seemed threatening to the existing social order. Yet, crucial to this transformation is that change is effected by moderate, respectable women, who would disassociate themselves from radical claims.

The surprisingly liberal views on seduced women contained within 'J Clarke's' letter are used in the furtherance of a familiar and more acceptable claim concerning the importance of women assessing the world for themselves. This is a theme which dominates the work of radical writers like Wollstonecraft and Macaulay but I have shown that this is also an essential element of more moderate works such as Haywood's *Female Spectator* and Beaumont's *Young Ladies Magazine*. I would contend that together these works construct a large area of consensus about such matters that actually calls into question the value of categorical distinctions between conservative and liberal.

¹⁹⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 167.

As these examples demonstrate, eighteenth-century women's magazines often express ambiguous and complicated views on the female role, making it impossible to categorise them as either conservative or radical. While conservative advice is frequently proffered, this clashes noticeably with the representation of women as intelligent and capable individuals. In the next section we will see a similar ambiguity of outlook in the women who head the advice pages in the female miscellanies. Adopting an authoritative tone and claiming the right to direct their own sex, these women articulate an interesting range of sentiments.

Advice writers in the female miscellanies

In the first half of the eighteenth century, writers like Haywood had claimed that they could inform young ladies about the pitfalls to be avoided in society by passing on the benefits of their own mistakes and less than ideal experience. However, as the social expectations imposed upon women became increasingly restrictive, this was considered less acceptable, and, in contrast, the advice writers featured in the female miscellanies emphasise their respectability. Nevertheless, these women continued to demonstrate their own intelligence and mental independence in ways which challenge notions of female inferiority and consequently further the miscellanies' construction of a moderate ground. I will be looking at two of these figures – the Matron from the *New Lady's Magazine* and the Old Woman from the *Lady's Monthly Museum* – who each approach their articles in different ways, despite a shared focus upon women in the domestic sphere.

Reader correspondence directly soliciting advice was an important element of these advice columns. We will see that the representation of various voices did much to transform instruction into conversation. However, it should be noted that readers' letters did not appear in every article written by the Old Woman, while the Matron tended to feature her corresponding public as a small part of a wider argument; a resource to be utilised to illustrate a more general point. Additionally, the authenticity of these letters is questionable; it seems most likely that they were

produced by the advice columnist or editor. Yet irrespective of who wrote them, these letters were intended to raise issues of relevance to the eighteenth-century middle-class woman.

Written under the assumed name of Martha Grey, the Matron articles appeared regularly each month in the *New Lady's Magazine*, combining conduct-book advice, personal history, reader contributions and reported conversations. Earlier in the century it had been assumed that readers of the essay periodical would want to know something about the character of the writer before they were willing to credit the opinions proffered. Similarly, the advice writer in the female miscellany had to emphasise her personal qualifications for the job at hand. Mrs Grey's authority to direct her own sex is based not simply on an exemplary moral character but a lively and intelligent disposition. Calling upon her own experiences, she shares her observations of society, drawing important conclusions for her readers. This fictional advice writer frequently utilises tales about various family members in order to illustrate her thoughts, particularly about gender roles in society. Additionally, extended narratives from friends and relatives are embedded in these articles, to which Mrs Grey adds her own opinions. For instance, in January 1791, she relates her niece's amusement about the behaviour of a fifty-five year old woman at a party she has just attended. Attempting to prove that she is young and adopting a ridiculous affectation of behaviour, this woman attracts the contempt of those around her, leading Mrs Grey to comment upon the desirability of aging gracefully and the necessity of appropriate conduct. Adopting the authoritative tone of the conduct-book writer, Mrs Grey condemns a range of behaviour where women fail to fulfil their duties in life. In June 1791 a correspondent writes to complain that her husband objects to her following the latest fashions.¹⁹⁵ Far from supporting her reader, Mrs Grey takes the opportunity to criticise the ridiculous amount of time and money spent on fashion by many women. Each of these narratives provides the reader with a vicarious experience, standing as examples of behaviour to be avoided. Yet, one interesting element of these accounts is that the reader is often exposed to another character's version of events, on which she must herself adopt a position, before

¹⁹⁵ *New Lady's Magazine*, January 1791, pp. 21-4; June 1791, p. 267.

hearing Mrs Grey's opinions, and I would argue that, like the representation of various opinions in the reader correspondence pages, this would encourage independent thought and critical interpretation. This is a familiar teaching method, then, where women are encouraged to critically assess the behaviour of others for themselves.

While Mrs Grey's representation of women as both giddy and thoughtless seems to portray the female sex in a negative light, embedded within her narrative is an appeal to women to exercise their rational faculties and indeed she also provides correspondence from female readers who have important and intelligent messages they wish to communicate to the wider public. A correspondent signing herself 'S_C_', for example, laments that after meeting a young man who received her father's approval, she allowed herself to fall in love; unfortunately, when it became apparent she had no dowry, he withdrew his addresses. As the man in question had enough fortune to live comfortably, he is condemned as a mercenary. Interestingly, this leads Mrs Grey to reflect upon the root cause of many disastrous marriages and even to suggest that if dowries were limited to a certain sum, both sexes would benefit: 'the men in consequence of it, would undoubtedly chuse the women whom they like best, and the women would not be marked out for wives merely for their money.' In another letter a young lady, signing herself 'J.L.', tells Mrs Grey that having offended a young man by laughing at his ridiculous behaviour, he extracted revenge by slandering her character and spreading 'scandalous falsehoods'.¹⁹⁶ The Matron notes that such an attack could have serious consequences for a woman, damaging both her reputation and chances of making a future marriage match. While the young man's behaviour is condemned, there is also a reminder to women that there are practical reasons why deference should be affected in male company.

It is worth noting that the thoughts and opinions of men often take centre stage in the Matron articles. Particularly valuing the opinion of her friend, Mr Stanley, Mrs Grey relates his advice as a moral standard on subjects as diverse as the damaging effects

¹⁹⁶ *New Lady's Magazine*, March 1791, p. 111; January 1791, p. 20.

of gossip and the rational use of charity.¹⁹⁷ In the conduct-book chapter, I demonstrated that it was widely believed in eighteenth-century society that men and women each had unique qualities and that both sexes benefited from social interaction with each other. Yet, in this view of separate roles, men were associated with logic and women with the ability to moderate manners. While the Matron is portrayed as an intelligent and rational individual, there is an implicit reinforcement of a gender hierarchy which confers authority on Mr Stanley by virtue of his sex. The scope of Mrs Grey's articles is undoubtedly the wider of the two advice pages I am considering, offering readers a broader range of vicarious experience and opportunities to debate a greater variety of subject-matter. However, this work was not unambiguously enabling for women.

The Old Woman made a regular appearance in each issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* from its inception in July 1798. As I have previously noted, her introductory article emphasises both her exemplary character and qualifications to offer advice on matters of love and courtship. The limited range of topics tackled by the Old Woman, and the overtly conservative opinions she expresses, may appear to contribute to a process which was restricting female participation in the public sphere. However, her advice page shows an intelligent eighteenth-century woman claiming the right to share her thoughts and advise her own sex.

Her first correspondent, Biddy Willing, creates a feeling of familiarity between advice writer and reader by affectionately addressing her letter to 'Dear Goody'. Requesting advice about how she may make a good marriage match, Biddy relates the details of a situation which would have been recognisable to most of her contemporaries. Yet although the difficulties communicated to the Old Woman from her readership were often directly attributable to a limiting gender ideology, she rarely investigates root causes. Biddy tells the Old Woman that her parents, desperate to marry their daughter off, have dragged her across the country, putting her on public display, in order to attract a husband, but their overt enthusiasm has only succeeded in scaring off potential admirers. Her description of her mother's

¹⁹⁷ *New Lady's Magazine*, Feb 1791, p. 83; March 1791, pp. 108-9.

behaviour is reminiscent of Mrs Bennet's desire to marry off her daughters in *Pride and Prejudice*:

no sooner had we taken up our residence in town, than my mamma hinted to all our female acquaintances the object of our journey, as if to bespeak their assistance, and no sooner did a man to their mind pay me the least attention, than, in their over-anxiety to engage him, they give such broad hints, as left him nothing to fear as to their approbation, and therefore made him more indifferent about mine.¹⁹⁸

The Old Woman offers conservative conduct-book style advice about the importance of discretion for a young lady hoping to get married and notes that inappropriate behaviour by their families may be equally damaging to their reputation, but she does not question the economic dependence which often lay at the base of such desperate match-making attempts. Instead, the Old Woman warns young ladies that frequent appearances at public gatherings have consequences for their ability to attract a husband and advises that 'jewels are not worn every day, nor should beauty be too much exposed to the vulgar eye' for 'men will ever be most enamoured of the flower which they have found in the shade'.¹⁹⁹ In contrast to Haywood's appeal that women be allowed to participate in public gatherings, this is clearly aimed at circumscribing female experience. I have argued throughout this work that the representation of women as authority figures capable of directing their own sex was broadly enabling for eighteenth-century women. However, it is difficult to view the advice offered to Biddy Willing in this article as anything other than limiting. Nevertheless, in contrast to the single dominating voice and viewpoint of the conduct book, the Old Woman's opinions sit side-by-side with articles representing a range of alternative views and this must have encouraged readers to reach their own conclusions.

But while the Old Woman presumes that her readers will have few opportunities to take direct action in their own lives and recommends the cultivation of passivity and

¹⁹⁸ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, October 1798, p. 290.

¹⁹⁹ This is standard conduct-book advice. cf Fordyce, 'I must remind you, that a face hackneyed in the public eye, how striking soever when first seen, or how handsome soever it may yet remain, loses much of its power to please' (*Sermons*, p. 111).

acceptance, it should be noted that she does not question the ability of the female sex to assess their choices, or their right to articulate preferences. In January 1799 a letter is printed from Jenny Manifold, who tells the Old Woman that her difficulty is too many suitors, rather than a lack of them.²⁰⁰ Jenny wants to know how to secure a proposal from the man of her choice before ridding herself of the rest. While her right to reject potential suitors is not challenged, the Old Woman advises that positive choice may be exercised only through non-action.²⁰¹ Despite acknowledging her readers as intelligent, sentient beings, the Old Woman's articles are dominated by conservative notions of female passivity. In February 1799 another letter is published asking for advice on marriage. Ellen Hopeful has two proposals of marriage, both from men of good fortune and character whom she respects but there is a third man whom she loves.²⁰² Unfortunately, he has not proposed, although his behaviour indicates he might have done so if his financial circumstances were better. Ellen, therefore, seeks the old woman's opinion. Interestingly, no advice follows this letter. The reader is left to make up her own mind and, arguably, this is more enabling than any response the Old Woman could offer.

Although both the Matron and the Old Woman, to a greater or lesser extent, promote a conservative gender ideology, the variety of voices which appears in these articles encourages debate. While the range of problems discussed may seem limiting, this reflects the narrow scope of the average eighteenth-century middle-class woman's life. Yet, it should be noted that although women were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, a new importance was attached to duties in the home, and the value of education was increasingly emphasised. I do not wish to suggest that this was unambiguously enabling for women but neither did it result in a complete narrowing of options.

²⁰⁰ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, January 1799, pp. 25-7.

²⁰¹ Cf Dr Gregory's claim that women learn to love in gratitude for being a gentleman's preferred choice: 'What is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex' (*Father's Legacy*, p. 80).

²⁰² *Lady's Monthly Museum*, February 1799, pp. 133-134.

Female biography in eighteenth-century women's magazines

I now wish to turn my attention to the female biographies contained within the miscellanies, where we will find that factual details in the life stories of famous personalities are frequently manipulated in order to illustrate a correct ideology of feminine behaviour. An important objective of these articles was to educate female readers about the importance of duties within the domestic sphere. Yet, paradoxically, they often chose to feature women who came to public attention as a result of their achievements outwith the home. By focusing upon famous singers, actresses and historical figures, these works demonstrated that women could and did successfully participate in wider society.²⁰³ Nevertheless, the stories of the specific women featured were often subservient to generalisations about the importance of female virtue. These biographies had an overt moral agenda and this is particularly noticeable in the more conservative *Lady's Monthly Museum*. In contrast, the messages to be absorbed from the life stories featured in the *New Lady's Magazine* are not always so obvious.

Each issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* featured a famous female writer in a way which was meant to inspire emulation, not of literary skills, but of domestic virtues. Consequently, a link was created between the literary productions of female authors and their personal virtue. The writings of these women were to be viewed as a reflection of their character. For instance, the reader is assured that Hannah More's publications are 'an exact transcript of her own life, which is literally spent in doing good.' If More's writing reflects personal virtue, it distances her from the inadmissible desire for fame or success. Similarly, the biography of Anna Laetitia Barbauld insists that she had no desire 'to revive the profusion of adulation which accompanied her first introduction to public attention'.²⁰⁴ A number of strategies were utilised to reconcile the public success of these women with a domestic ideal. Barbauld's educational writing, for example, could be placed within the remit of domestic duties and justified on the basis that it was the result of catering to her own

²⁰³ Histories of exemplary women have been used to challenge notions of female inferiority since the early modern period. See Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle*', *Signs*, 8:1 (1982): 4-28.

²⁰⁴ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, p. 5; September 1798, p. 172.

children's needs. Clearly the *Lady's Monthly Museum* did not want to be accused of encouraging women to give up domesticity for more ambitious intellectual pursuits. As a result, even a successful writer like Anna Seward is judged on her failure to marry.²⁰⁵ Yet, it should not be presumed that eighteenth-century women were willing to acquiesce in these judgments. A wide range of literature was enjoyed by women at this time which did not revolve around domestic duties, and undoubtedly individuals would have formed their own opinions about the value of specific works.

Evidently, the writers of these biographies were reluctant to acknowledge any form of scandal. The beginning of the feature on Barbauld may indicate some of the reasoning behind this. This biography begins by advising readers that women of 'superior excellence' seem 'rather more susceptible of the many virtuous dispositions and good qualities displayed by each other, than is customary with men'.²⁰⁶ The belief that women were more 'susceptible' to influences around them, whether for good or ill, was grounded in a gendered reading of the nervous system. According to this notion, passing images and impressions had a greater impact upon delicate feminine nerves, and consequently the positive examples given in female biography were more likely to influence female readers. However, this reduces virtue - or vice - to a largely passive behaviour and paints the picture of a woman, who far from being inspired to do good, simply absorbs the influences of the environment around her. Consequently, it is important that these memoirs do not cater to prurient curiosities. The biography of educational writer, Sarah Trimmer, notes that

In these brief traits of feminine distinction, it is no part of our design to draw aside the curtain of private life, to ransack the cabinet of female secrecy, or to drag into light, any thing the nicest delicacy can wish concealed. Far be it from us to cater for envy, or to help the idle gossip, at the expence of the absent.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ The writer of this biography states that 'with all our deference for the powers of composition she possesses in a very eminent degree, and the sincere admiration in which we hold many of her verses, we still presume to think, that all her productions are very inferior to what she might have yielded in a conjugal state, and as a mother of a family' (*Lady's Monthly Museum*, March 1799, p. 171).

²⁰⁶ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, September 1798, p. 169.

²⁰⁷ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, November 1798, pp. 337-8.

Truth is subservient to the message of female virtue; if there are any less than respectable incidents in the lives of these authors, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* will make no effort to expose them. We find, for example, that while the account of Charlotte Smith, notes the financial constraint she suffered while waiting for her father's estate to be settled, it makes no mention of her separation from an unfaithful husband who had run up considerable debts. Not only was this magazine prepared to ignore certain facts, in the absence of information a suitably respectable narrative could be made up. In an attempt to justify Sarah Trimmer's decision to make her work public, the reader is told that

It was from her own domestic attentions and laudable endeavours to improve the faculties of her children, that an idea of publication first occurred to her. The commencement of her authorship, and gradual progress of her literary labours evidently sanction this surmise.²⁰⁸

Although this starts as a statement of fact, the writer of this biography is forced to admit that this is merely speculation. Far from clashing with domestic duties within the home, writing which originates from women teaching their own children directly was assumed to arise out of the proper fulfilment of these more important responsibilities. While I would suggest that the manifest discrepancies between these women's actual achievements and the virtues attributed to them had the potential to enable resistance, I also wish to note that for many middle-class women who embraced the status awarded to them as a moral index of society, this elevation of domestic duties assured them that they made a valuable contribution to society.

However, not all of the life stories of famous women contained within the female miscellanies conform so easily to conduct-book standards. The *New Lady's Magazine* subtly challenges assumptions about the objective of eighteenth-century female biographies. As we have seen, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* portrays its female subjects as prioritising domestic duties, rather than professional achievements. As a consequence, they appear to take little positive action in their

²⁰⁸ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, November 1798, pp. 338-9.

own lives. In contrast the biography for ‘Mademoiselle la Chevaliere D’Eon’, featured in the January 1792 issue of the *New Lady’s Magazine*, provides a detailed account of noteworthy actions and achievements. The reader is told that as a child D’Eon was dressed in boy’s clothes. This character learns to ride and fence, as well as becoming a ‘doctor of canon and of civil law’.²⁰⁹ This seems like a classic tale of a woman achieving the same freedom as men by cross-dressing. However, as a woman D’Eon is sent on difficult diplomatic journeys to improve France’s relations with Russia. This would appear to be one of the most potentially inspiring biographies for women, where real action and achievement are shown.

Unfortunately, although the writer of the biography was unaware of it at the time, D’Eon was in fact a man. The question of D’Eon’s gender raged during his own lifetime and was only conclusively settled after his death.²¹⁰ This biography is nevertheless interesting, for even when it was believed that D’Eon was a woman, the writer was prepared to include a great deal of information about important public tasks successfully undertaken. Perhaps it was not necessary to represent French women in so respectable a light as British and this allowed greater freedom in the portrayal of this character.

As I have noted, the female miscellanies prioritised respectability in their representation of eighteenth-century women and were prepared to leave certain details out of their biographies in order to portray blemish-free lives. In the service of this ideal, the women they chose to feature, for the most part, conformed to eighteenth-century expectations of respectability. In contrast, Sophia Baddeley, whose biography appeared in the April 1791 issue of the *New Lady’s Magazine*, was acknowledged to be a notorious actress who had enjoyed a string of lovers during her lifetime. Yet, the most noticeable feature of this short history of Baddeley is its complete silence on the subject of her personal virtue. Perhaps, appearing five years after the actress’s death made it easier to skim over the scandalous details of her life, and concentrate instead upon her achievements as an actress and singer. Only the briefest hint is given that the actress’s personal conduct may not have been ideal,

²⁰⁹ *New Lady’s Magazine*, January 1792, p. 33.

²¹⁰ See Julie Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), pp. 211-218.

when it is noted near the end of the biography that ‘owing to some private motives she unexpectedly quitted London for an engagement in Dublin; from which period her theatrical career seems to have been checked by misfortune’.²¹¹ In fact, having ran up considerable debts as a result of extravagant spending, Baddeley was forced to leave London to avoid her creditors.²¹² A refusal to recognise these disreputable elements of Baddeley’s life is not at all unusual, but it is surprising that the magazine chose to feature the actress at all and to focus on her professional artistic accomplishments rather than her personal conduct. While this biography does not indicate an acceptance of Baddeley’s behaviour, since it is not acknowledged, it does perhaps suggest that unconventional women were not always ostracised from society. Baddeley finished her life in Edinburgh; poor and unable to work, she was supported by a ‘subscription raised among the ladies and gentlemen’. Despite her reputation, respectable men and women contributed to make the actress’s ‘last winter’ more comfortable.²¹³ I do not wish to over-emphasise this point but clearly the *New Lady’s Magazine* was not alone in its willingness to turn a blind eye to these transgressions. Yet even more remarkable is the decision of this magazine to privilege Baddeley’s professional achievements over the issue of her moral character. Perhaps the inclusion of this biography, and that of D’Eon’s, should be attributed, in part, to the eclectic format of the miscellany which allowed more potentially controversial material to be furtively surrounded by items which were unquestioningly socially acceptable and respectable.

While accounts of the lives and achievements of famous women could be utilised to advise female readers about appropriate conduct, by featuring female authors, singers, actresses, and historical figures who possessed a public profile, even the most conservative of the miscellanies tacitly admitted that the female sex could be successful outwith the domestic sphere. Yet, even where women had a significant impact upon unfolding historical and political events, their biographies prioritise the representation of ideal domesticated feminine behaviour. In the biography of Lady Jane Grey, for example, readers interested in the broader circumstances surrounding

²¹¹ *New Lady’s Magazine*, April 1791, p. 184.

²¹² Katie Hickman, *Courtesans* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003) p. 79.

²¹³ *New Lady’s Magazine*, April 1791, p. 184.

the attempt to alter the succession of the crown in her favour are referred to ‘the general history’ because this biography ‘is concerned only in relating the part that was destined for Lady Jane’.²¹⁴ The attention of readers was to be directed to the domestic sphere, not world affairs. It is, therefore, a deliberate choice not to include analysis of the political motivations or religious tensions which led to this situation. Similarly, in the biography of Mary Stuart the emphasis is upon the Scottish queen’s personal experiences rather than extending the reader’s historical understanding.²¹⁵ Although both queens had been dead for over two hundred years by the time their biographies appeared in these magazines, they are presented as icons of pious, self-effacing womanhood intended to inspire emulation in the eighteenth-century middle-class woman.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, certain qualities were sanctioned in a Renaissance queen, notably the cultivation of classical languages, which generally attracted disapproval in the female sex. While this may suggest an acceptance that there was no single ideal of womanhood, this insight is never pursued. In an age which cast doubt on the ability of women to rule, the position of queens was inevitably difficult, as West reveals in her conduct book. Harshly criticising Elizabeth I for her ‘masculine’ character, she nonetheless notes that ‘in most cases, it was from the predominance of some amiable *female* quality that our queens erred in their public duties’.²¹⁷ Although feminine virtue was viewed as an essential quality which identified British queens as ideal models of womanhood, this was considered incompatible with the harsh duties of a ruler.²¹⁸ I do not wish to dismiss the biographies of these two queens, which place important female figures within a historical framework, as simplistically reinforcing an eighteenth-century gender ideology, but clearly parts of their stories are left out or distorted to make them suitable reading for the middle-class woman.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, December 1799, p. 464.

²¹⁵ *New Lady’s Magazine*, February 1791, pp. 70-74.

²¹⁶ Eighteenth-century readers did not always respond to these biographies in the same way. See Jacqueline Pearson on differing assessments of Lady Jane Grey’s passivity (*Women’s Reading in Britain 1750-1835* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999] p. 51).

²¹⁷ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, pp. 112, 119.

²¹⁸ For changing representations of Elizabeth I and Margaret of Anjou during the eighteenth century see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004) pp. 15-18.

²¹⁹ It was not only British women who were presented in this ideal light. See, for example, the August 1760 issue of the *Royal Female Magazine* which contains a short history of Sappho, the famous Greek

A negotiation between unchanging ideals and pragmatic acceptance of current social conditions is built into the structure of these biographies. The considerable numbers of successful women featured show that the female sex is capable of intellectual achievements and heroic acts. Although an emphasis on domestic virtues may appear to overshadow professional successes, it could also be argued that conformity to a feminine ideal enabled the other less traditional achievements of these women to be acknowledged and celebrated. By portraying women combining the traditional roles of wife and mother with careers in the public sphere, these biographies demonstrated that respectability did not have to be sacrificed to personal achievements. Perhaps the eighteenth-century reader of the miscellany harboured similar aspirations.

The female miscellanies and knowledge within the domestic sphere

In this final section I wish to return to the question I posed when considering Haywood's *Female Spectator*: what constituted appropriate knowledge for the eighteenth-century woman and how was this judged? I have been arguing that the miscellanies constructed a moderate position in relation to this question by connecting self-improvement and the accumulation of factual knowledge to domestic duties in the home. I now wish to consider the way in which these works identified a wide array of skills and abilities required by women for the proper fulfilment of traditional roles.

As I have previously noted, one of the most important duties allotted to women was the teaching of children and this helped validate female interest in educational theory. As we will see, questions about how individuals learn and what knowledge they should be accumulating are addressed in the female miscellanies in a range of ways. The various essays which address these questions presume that readers have a prior knowledge of educational theory. Although they are largely concerned with the

poet who lived around the sixth or seventh century BC. Completely ignoring the erotic content of her verse and her putative sexual attachments to other women, this biography presents Sappho to the eighteenth-century reader as a heterosexual heroine of sensibility.

pedagogical role of mothers, the domestic arena in which this knowledge is to be exercised should not lead to a dismissal of its importance. Often appearing as readers' contributions, these items, like the juvenile magazines, combine practical teaching advice with an awareness of the theories of Locke and Rousseau.

Inherently practical, they address questions about how children should be taught, the qualities required in a teacher, and indeed what the aims and objectives of female education should be.

Individual items commenting upon the pedagogical role of mothers could take the form of anecdotal evidence, particularly readers passing on the benefits of their own experiences in the correspondence pages; we also frequently find women engaging at a more theoretical level with these issues. Combining these approaches, the advice page could feature first hand accounts of difficulties encountered by women in the education of their children, while offering the rational response of an intelligent woman who regularly advised her own sex on a range of issues. For instance, in the August 1799 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, a reader's letter is addressed to the Female Mentor, an advice writer in the same tradition as the Old Woman and the Matron, which contains a cautionary warning to female readers about the necessity of personally taking responsibility for their children's education.²²⁰ Sarah Congou begins by explaining that she and her husband lived quite happily in relative comfort with their three children until her husband's brother died in the East Indies, leaving them fifty thousand pounds. They subsequently adopt a luxurious mode of living, moving house and sending their daughters to boarding school, where they learn superficial accomplishments and to despise the parents who are not as learned as themselves. Both radical and conservative writers of this time tended to recommend home education, where parents could supervise all aspects of their children's welfare and development. Sarah Congou is represented as neither corrupt nor stupid but as having made significant errors in the education of her children. In the following month's issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, the Female Mentor makes her reply; giving an extended commentary on Congou's situation, she highlights the importance

²²⁰ The Female Mentor made her first appearance in the January 1799 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*. There is no connection between these occasional articles and the juvenile educational magazine, also named the *Female Mentor*, considered in the previous section.

of the teaching role of parents, whilst acknowledging the difficulties this involves. Firstly, echoing Locke's advice, the difference between constraint and severity in the education of children is emphasised: 'One keeps the passions under a necessary control, but the other destroys both principle and sensibility'.²²¹ The Female Mentor goes on to discuss the need to correct children's natural weaknesses and the qualifications required to do so. A teacher must be able to 'discriminate the different dispositions of her pupils':

She must strengthen the feeble and repress the bold, inform the ignorant, intimidate the presumptuous, allure the idle, reward the industrious, applaud the ingenuous, and punish the hypocritical; in short, must trace the very foundations of their actions, and attend to *causes*, rather than *effects*.²²²

The influence of Locke can be seen in both the description of the qualities required in a tutor and in the teaching methods recommended, though his ideas are not referred to directly. Next to advising young ladies how to attract a partner, the most popular subject in eighteenth-century women's magazines is educating the young; educational theory is a continual feature in the female miscellanies, rarely discussed in depth, but informing these articles in a range of ways.

Interestingly, instructions for teaching children could be combined with material which promoted an ideology of femininity. For instance, in August 1798 the *Lady's Monthly Museum* includes a letter written to a new stepmother, which merges conduct-book advice with educational theory and examples of practical teaching material.²²³ The first part of the letter is taken up with an assurance that engaging in the traditional role of caring for children enhances a woman's attractiveness. Recommending the fulfilment of important duties as a sexual attraction, this article has much in common with conservative conduct books which recommend the cultivation of feminine virtues on the same basis. Clearly this emphasis is a consequence of women's economic dependence on men. However, the writer of this

²²¹ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, September 1799, p. 170.

²²² *Lady's Monthly Museum*, September 1799, p. 172.

²²³ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, August 1798, pp. 108-113

letter, signing herself 'Matilda', soon begins to articulate her thoughts about the way in which individuals learn. Mirroring Locke's opinions, she notes that instruction should be modified to meet the individual's needs, that long prayers beyond the understanding of the young should not be imposed upon them, and that good temper and firmness are essential requisites in a teacher. 'Matilda' additionally rejects Rousseau's insistence that a child is incapable of knowing right from wrong.

Assuming that the moderation of the temperament is the main objective of education, she argues that errors in conduct and attitude are more effectively illustrated through example than instruction. For this reason, 'Matilda' suggests that a 'propensity to pride, or an inclination to be revengeful' is best corrected through the use of stories from history which will inspire either emulation or horror. The article finishes with some suggestions of anecdotal material which may be used in this fashion.

Interestingly, then, it is not only suggested that women may themselves benefit from vicarious experience, but that they should use this as teaching method for the next generation. While there is no in-depth analysis of the works of Locke and Rousseau in eighteenth-century women's magazines, contributors are clearly responding to these authors and I would argue that the miscellanies' representation of women engaging with these theories collapses the distinction between the domestic and intellectual woman, actively demonstrating that successful fulfilment of traditional duties and the improvement of the female mind may go hand in hand. The moderate attitudes to female education constructed in the miscellany tend to confine women to traditional roles in the home, but simultaneously extend the boundaries of the domestic sphere, opening up new opportunities to participate in debate.

As I noted earlier, the female miscellanies presumed that women required a range of skills and abilities within the domestic sphere. An essay 'On the Present Mode of Female Education' which appears in the *New Lady's Magazine* emphasises how important the role of the efficient housewife is, and the good understanding that is a prerequisite for the job:

Though it is by no means incumbent on the fair-sex, that they should have the knowledge of a *Bacon*, the oratory of a *Demosthenes*, or the grammatical pronunciation of a *Johnson*, it is

nevertheless very necessary, that they should possess common sense, and be able to speak and discourse with propriety.²²⁴

It could be argued that an important distinction is being made here between intellectual capacity and ‘common sense’, the latter being an inferior, practical form of reasoning deemed suitable for women. Indeed, this article suggests that women would put their time to better use learning to cook, rather than sing or draw. However, it shows an equal concern that they obtain a good command of their own language. As women were responsible for teaching the next generation, it was essential that they had the necessary knowledge to tutor sons, who would eventually enter the field of politics and public life, in English grammar. Cohen has noted the concern which existed at this time about establishing a suitably ‘masculine’ English language, and the part which grammar could play in this. Women’s speech was generally believed to be inherently more charming and eloquent. However, in order to avoid passing on a feminised language, Cohen argues that women were expected ‘to regulate their own language through grammar and render it “manly”, to prepare their sons for service in the polis and thus ensure the future success of the nation’.²²⁵ Consequently many eighteenth-century guides to English grammar particularly encouraged women to learn the rules of correct speech. Yet, an item on the ‘Rules for Writing and Speaking Correctly’ which appeared in the January 1800 issue of the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* makes no mention of the duties of wives and mothers, and, thus, claims for women the right to learn for personal fulfilment. I have previously noted that at this time conversation was viewed as a feminine virtue and have suggested that this may have made women’s participation in a range of debates more acceptable. An emphasis upon correct grammar may have further aided the ability of women to articulate clearly their concerns in a range of forums, including the miscellanies in question.

It is apparent, then, that the line between practical domestic knowledge and subject-based information was not always clear-cut. The overwhelmingly practical focus of the miscellanies justified the inclusion of a wide range of material on the basis that it

²²⁴ *New Lady’s Magazine*, February 1786, p. 22.

²²⁵ Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 29-31.

assisted middle-class women in the fulfilment of their duties in life. A variety of articles addressing common concerns about the care and development of children illustrate an obvious link between the traditional female role of caring and medical knowledge. Even the most conservative of the miscellanies recognised that for women to fulfil domestic duties appropriately, rational understanding should replace hearsay. An item appearing in the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, entitled 'Medical Vulgar Errors Refuted', puts to rest fears about children walking too soon, casting teeth and squinting.²²⁶ Although simple and uncomplicated in its approach to such issues, this article nevertheless indicates that women utilised an extensive range of knowledge within the home. Nor were they necessarily confined to a shallow understanding of medical issues. An essay 'On the Diseases of the Skin', which appears in the *New Lady's Magazine* attempts to explain to readers some of the underlying causes of these complaints. Women are advised that if they observe accompanying symptoms, these may be interpreted to explain what is happening within the body and this will decide the treatment. It is necessary to distinguish between a 'local complaint' which may be treated by 'external applications', and 'latent disease' which 'can only be cured by gentle evacuations, and such medicines as correct and sweeten the blood'.²²⁷ Reflecting wider eighteenth-century thought on medical complaints, the reader is informed that eruptions on the skin are often the 'endeavour of nature to purify the blood, and relieve the constitution'. The issue is not whether the medical knowledge is accurate, but rather that this article requires women to exercise their rational faculties and extend their understanding of such matters.

We have seen that the miscellanies largely judged the appropriateness of knowledge for women in terms of its usefulness within the domestic sphere. Yet, the content of these works was not necessarily restrictive or confining for women. Educational theory, appropriate teaching material and practical information on medical issues were all deemed essential to women fulfilling their duties as wives and mothers. In addition, the *New Lady's Magazine* embraces a wide range of subjects that exceed

²²⁶ *Lady's Monthly Museum*, July 1798, p. 50.

²²⁷ *New Lady's Magazine*, February 1791, p. 64.

the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Articles on history, geography and science appear within its pages, adopting a broad educational perspective similar to that of Haywood's *Female Spectator* and the juvenile magazines. I am not suggesting that any of these works could provide in-depth knowledge of such subjects but they could and did participate in a process which encouraged women to pursue intellectual challenges.²²⁸

Over the course of this chapter I have been arguing that eighteenth-century women's magazines negotiated between conservative and radical notions about female abilities, and in doing so helped construct a moderate position in relation to these issues. Yet, as we have seen, this moderate position was by no means straightforward and could accommodate a variety of views which presented the eighteenth-century middle-class female reader with a range of options. Within the boundaries of respectability and moderation, women still had numerous decisions to take about their own lives; the middle ground constituted a space requiring careful navigation. By portraying a range of female characters responding in different ways to a variety of circumstances, the magazines could reveal what was at stake in the choices made. Despite many differences between the women's magazines I have been considering, they appeal to their readers to utilise logic and contain a common message about the importance of women assessing the world for themselves.

Eighteenth-century women's magazines attempted to offer readers a greater range of choices, redefining parameters of acceptable behaviour for women. Nevertheless, many of the individual items guide readers towards a given position and much of the content of these works is instructional. In contrast, the novels of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen which I will be looking at in Part Two of this work depict the specific circumstances of women's lives, and leave readers to extract meaning for themselves. Concerned with many of the same issues as the miscellanies, these works address questions about the education and knowledge women require to

²²⁸ Mary Somerville's interest in algebra was originally stimulated in this manner: 'she showed me a monthly magazine with coloured plates of ladies' dresses, charades and puzzles. At the end of a page I read what appeared to me to be simply an arithmetical question; but on turning the page I was surprised to see strange looking lines mixed with letters, chiefly X's and Y's'. (Somerville, *Queen of Science*, p. 37).

negotiate obstacles in society. Through the portrayal of women's thoughts and feelings in a range of circumstances, the consequences of education, both good and bad, could be revealed. In particular, Burney and Austen imaginatively portray both the dangers and advantages of women attaining direct experience of the world. These novelists take a moderate position, upholding the importance of the domestic role, while portraying intelligent women who challenge notions of female inferiority. Yet, as we will see, despite many surface similarities between these works, Burney and Austen represent the difficulties faced by their heroines in entirely different ways.

PART TWO: INTRODUCTION

FEMALE EDUCATION AND MODERATE VALUES IN THE NOVELS OF FANNY BURNEY AND JANE AUSTEN

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that eighteenth-century women's magazines were instrumental in constructing moderate attitudes towards female learning. Neither willing to side with radical appeals for female equality, nor embrace notions of women's inherent inferiority, these publications demanded respect for their female readers by elevating the importance of specifically feminine roles. While claiming a moral authority to rule the domestic sphere may have further circumscribed the female sex within this designated space, as we have seen, the middle-class woman negotiating eighteenth-century expectations was still presented with a range of choices. The second part of this work will examine the theme of education in the novels of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen with the aim of showing how these authors portray women negotiating a moderate space and making choices. We will see that a 'worldly', pragmatic education is required if women are to function adequately in society. I will be arguing that Burney and Austen demonstrate that such an education must be gained in society, through direct experience and by engaging in debate with others. In chapter three I will be demonstrating that the directly lived experience of Burney and Austen's characters was an essential element of their development as individuals. We will see that these heroines must accumulate knowledge and adapt to the circumstances they find themselves in while remaining within the boundaries of respectability. In chapter four I will consider the representation of conversation, and communication generally, in these novels. Burney and Austen reveal conversation to be a significant component of female education which enables individuals to articulate and refine personal opinions.

Although the three kinds of literature considered in this work – conduct books, women's magazines and novels – share a consistent concern about the same issues, they approach their subject in markedly different ways. As we have seen, conduct books theorise in the abstract about ideal conduct, teaching a philosophy which goes

beyond outward conformity to social norms to tell women what they should think and how they should feel. The female periodicals, characterised by a heterogeneity of format, show an interesting interaction between promoting an ideology of conduct and acknowledging the importance of actual social practice. But although these magazines try to pass on the benefits of experience to their readers through fictionalised re-enactments of the ways in which education impacts upon women's ability to function in the world, the short stories, historical anecdotes and readers' letters utilised for the purpose are often dominated by obvious moral messages. In contrast, Burney and Austen reveal the consequences of education through the immediate detail of their heroines' lives. Novels which give an intricate circumstantial account of the choices made by their heroines in every-day life are ideally placed to make the connection between the education women receive and their conduct in the wider world. Burney and Austen offer a penetrating psychological insight into the minds of their female characters revealing the difficulties many women had to overcome in their pursuit of an education which would prepare them to take their place in society. Although both these novelists were actively involved in constructing moderate views concerning women's role in society, together their works provide a damning assessment of the education received by middle-class women during the eighteenth century.

While prescriptive texts, such as conduct books, were hugely successful in grafting their own interpretation of woman's 'nature' on to the aims and objectives of female education, wider cultural attitudes were also shaped by works which were less overtly moralising and more entertaining. Novels and short stories exchanged the direct instruction of conduct books for fictional narratives which featured heroines actively involved in navigating the public as well as private sphere. These works were less interested in theoretical ideas than in a more realistic portrayal of women's lives. Yet, because the focus of eighteenth-century interest in female education was on how women conducted themselves in society, fictional writing which featured female characters finding their way in the world inevitably assessed whether the education received by their heroines provided them with the skills they required for this purpose, and in doing so either reproduced, modified or rejected the dominant

mode of thought about the nature of woman. I am not suggesting that the writers of these fictional texts provided a simple, consistent image of the female sex. Such works could reject one part of the ideology of femininity, while accepting another as indisputable fact. For instance, female periodicals and women's novels largely shared the conviction of conduct-book writers that female lives would continue to revolve around the home and that the moral health of the nation was dependent upon domestic duties being properly fulfilled, yet varied greatly in their beliefs about women's intellectual capacity and had quite different ideas about their educational needs. Even where they seemed to advocate the same practical course of action, this was often for quite different ideological reasons. It should be acknowledged that these varying views of women arose from an amalgam of influences. Over the course of the next two chapters we will see that novels interacted with a range of literature, including not only conduct books and periodicals but Enlightenment and scientific writings, political tracts and educational philosophies, to form the dominant cultural attitudes of the time concerning the nature of woman and the education she should receive.

Avoiding questions concerning female equality, yet claiming the right for their heroines to exercise authority over their own lives, Burney and Austen portray intelligent women who are capable of assessing moral dilemmas for themselves. The narrative of their novels renders the constantly changing thoughts and emotions of their female characters, providing insight to the practical choices made by those negotiating conservative and radical ideas. Burney and Austen create a fictional world of choices through which their heroines must navigate, and reveal the rational and emotional motivations which govern these decisions. Although eighteenth-century educational writing displayed considerable anxiety about women gaining their knowledge of the world through direct experience, clearly the female sex had to learn either via their own interaction with society or through second-hand knowledge. Burney and Austen demonstrate a link between their heroines' opportunities to take direct action and their ability to cultivate judgment and accumulate useful knowledge. We will see that both novelists also show rational discourse to be a significant component of female education. It is through engaging

in debate that women learn to think more deeply about the world in which they live, forming and modifying opinions about those issues which have an impact upon their lives.

So far I have been emphasising that Burney and Austen share a similar concern about the deficiencies of female education. Nevertheless, they respond in quite different ways to the inherent difficulties eighteenth-century women faced in their lives. Comparing the representation of experience and conversation in Burney and Austen's novels is particularly useful in positioning them within the debate about female education, not just relative to conduct books and other educational writings, but to each other. Many of the differences between their works relate to the way they chose to portray their female protagonists and of central importance to this is the ability of these characters to assimilate experience and communicate their needs to the world. While Burney's heroines are torn and conflicted as a result of internalising society's contradictory expectations, Austen creates strong independent heroines with coherent identities, who are able to take positive action in their own lives.

Artistic temperament plays an obvious part in accounting for the contrasting visions of these authors but this difference should also be related to changes in the way female learning was viewed. Austen's first novel *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811, some thirty-three years after *Evelina* (1778) and fifteen years after *Camilla* (1796). During this time many of the influences on Burney had lost their impact on general society. In particular, Burney's writings may be associated with a throwback to the univocal perspective of conduct books in as much as her heroines' education always complies to a limiting ideology of femininity, despite revealing inconsistencies in the recommendations of this literature. In contrast Austen famously mocked conduct-book writer James Fordyce in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by putting a copy of his *Sermons to Young Women* in the hands of the ridiculous Mr

Collins and the depiction of her heroines overtly challenges many of the ideas inherent in such works.¹

As we have seen, conduct books participating in the debate about female education were less interested in fact-based learning than in promoting a particular image of the socially desirable woman; her role was to create herself as an object of desire while duplicitously pretending to be modest and virtuous. For those who embraced such values they could have a fundamental impact on character development and sense of identity. Burney was deeply influenced by the ideology of such works, even incorporating patriarchal conduct-book figures into her novels as important and admirable characters.² In her first novel, *Evelina*, the heroine receives a number of letters from her guardian which read like conduct literature and dispense similar advice. Although, as we will see, his advice is often contradictory, Burney does not invite us to hold Mr Villars in contempt. Likewise in *Camilla* the heroine receives a letter from her father which so resembled the conduct literature of the time that it was actually anthologised separately and printed alongside Dr Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*.³ Interestingly, although many of the difficulties encountered in the novel revolve around the guidance he offers his daughter in this letter, Mr Tyrold is portrayed as an ideal to which the hero must aspire. As a body of literature conduct books were, as was noted in Part One, rife with inconsistencies which placed conflicting expectations upon women. This contradictory ideology is crucial to an understanding of Burney's novels. By depicting heroines who have internalised these values, the consequences of faulty education may be revealed in a way that dry theoretical texts could never envisage.

I have been arguing that eighteenth-century women faced complex and contradictory expectations in their lives and that Burney, strongly influenced by conduct books, responded to this by portraying heroines who internalised this conflict with damaging

¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2004 [1813]) p. 51.

² Kenneth Graham, 'Cinderella or Bluebeard: The Double Plot of *Evelina*' in the Norton Critical Edition of *Evelina* (New York and London: Norton, 1998) p. 405.

³ In conjunction with G Horne's *A Picture of the Female Form* this anthology underwent five printings between 1809 and 1816. See Edward and Lillian Bloom's explanatory notes to *Camilla*, p. 941.

consequences. Austen, in contrast, clearly rejects the narrowly prescriptive ideology of this literature and seems to have more in common with the radical texts of writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay.⁴ While there is no mention of either of these writers in Austen's surviving letters or novels, it seems likely that she would have been familiar with the arguments contained within the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.⁵ As we will see, her novels indicate that she shared many of Wollstonecraft's views about the equal intellectual capacity of the sexes. Although the subject is never directly addressed by Austen, she challenges ideas about female inferiority by presenting strong, rational and highly articulate women. Despite facing contradiction in the outward circumstances of their lives, her heroines have coherent identities. At the heart of this lies the development of the individual and the importance of self-knowledge. Wollstonecraft insists that conforming to conduct-book ideology reduces women to 'objects of contempt' and appeals instead for 'their faculties' to 'have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength'.⁶ Austen's novels imaginatively portray heroines who have been given this room to experience the world for themselves. The ability to learn through experience and engage in intelligent debate is integral to her understanding of what is required for women's development into capable and socially responsible adults.

However, I am not arguing that Austen was prepared to align herself completely with Wollstonecraft's political views.⁷ Despite the educational flaws she exposes in her novels, she upholds the status quo, integrating her heroines into society as it already exists.⁸ While Wollstonecraft criticises female dependence and appeals for the right for women to work, Austen's novels do not express any overt discontent with the

⁴ David Monaghan, *Jane Austen in a Social Context* (New Jersey: MacMillan Press, 1981) p. 107.

⁵ Even if Austen had mentioned Wollstonecraft in her letters it seems unlikely that any evidence of this would have survived because, as R W Chapman notes in the introduction to the first edition of letters published in 1932, her sister Cassandra destroyed any letters 'that she supposed might possibly excite general curiosity' See Deirdre Le Faye (ed), *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. ix.

⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, pp. 82, 120.

⁷ Claudia Johnson notes that 'no woman novelist, even among the most progressive, wished to be discredited by association with Mary Wollstonecraft, particularly after Godwin's widely attacked *Memoirs* disclosed details about her sexual improprieties and suicide attempts' (*Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988] p. xxi).

⁸ Johnson argues that the 'narrative methods Austen devoted her career to refining' served 'moderately progressive rather than reactionary political outlooks' (*Jane Austen*, p. 24).

restricted role of women.⁹ To understand Austen's position, we must, therefore, recognise the importance the author attaches to domestic duties.¹⁰ Austen was more interested in gaining recognition and respect for the role women already played in society, than in widening or redefining that role. The concern for women, which informs her novels at a basic level, rests on the issues faced within the traditionally feminine private sphere, and not in removing the gendered division of duties. Notably her novels strive to represent the world as it is and do not engage in ideological debate about what ought to be. In this respect her work shares much in common with Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, written more than sixty years earlier.

It is not my contention that Austen read any of the magazines which I looked at in Part One of this work, although she may well have done so, but rather that she was subject to the same influences as these publications and that similarities between them may be discerned, not just in content but in format. As we have seen, from the 1770s onwards there were an increasing number of women's magazines which supplemented articles of direct instruction with a fictionalisation of moral and social dilemmas. By the later eighteenth century the subject of female education was being represented and debated in increasingly sophisticated ways in magazines and novels. The portrayal of communities of women exchanging information and opinions was a particularly important element of the female periodical which could be enabling for female readers, even where the content was conservative, by encouraging women to value their own thoughts and feelings. Austen's novels similarly contain a number of intelligent and serious conversations between various characters about the issues which impacted upon women's lives. These represent a range of viewpoints and, like the periodicals, encourage women to think for themselves by validating the opinion of the individual.

One subject featured prominently in both the women's magazines and Austen's novels is human nature. Austen's female characters frequently utilise their

⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, pp. 136, 266-7.

¹⁰ Monaghan, *Jane Austen*, p. 110.

observations of society to initiate conversation and engage in debate, about their own behaviour and that of others. Yet, despite Austen's forward-looking views on female education, her heroines still subscribe to more conservative expectations in various respects. Interestingly, many of her female characters continue to epitomise an eighteenth-century ideal which views women as the arbiters of morals, and their conversation as delicate and agreeable. Eliza Bennet may be witty but her conversation is always respectable, while in *Persuasion* Anne Elliot manages to express views remarkably similar to those of Wollstonecraft, while simultaneously meeting feminine criteria of modesty and delicacy.¹¹ It is the ability to reflect such contradictory views which make these novels so fascinating.

Burney and Austen were both middle-class women, writing about a world with which they were familiar, for those of their own class. As we have seen, the eighteenth-century fascination with female education largely related to a middle-class ideal which viewed women as an index of the moral health of the nation. Genteel tastes, values and aspirations are therefore central to the debate which Burney and Austen enter about what women should be learning and the ways in which this knowledge should be accumulated. Yet, while respectability is an important element of Austen's work, she takes much for granted which Burney is at pains to emphasise. Part of the reason for this is that the middle classes were still in an early stage of development when Burney began her writing career, and she and her family felt that they held a precarious position in society. Consequently their conduct had to be above reproach and those who transgressed were quickly dropped from their acquaintance in order to maintain their own status.¹² It was exactly this kind of readership that conduct books were aimed at, and although Burney could see many faults in their teachings, she nevertheless advised compliance. Burney does not, however, present a simplistic picture of reduced options for women in her novels. While the adoption of conduct-book values undoubtedly makes life difficult for her heroines, one of the things which makes Burney's novels so interesting is that they also reveal a world of expanding opportunities. The commercial landscape of

¹¹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1818]) pp. 187-8.

¹² Betty Rizzo, 'Burney and Society' in Peter Sabor (ed), *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 137.

London is an important element of Burney's novels, especially *Evelina* where her heroine visits plays, theatres, museums and pleasure gardens. A negotiation of conflicting social values takes place at these locations; for instance, as Judy Simons notes, these are often sites of danger for the heroine, but they also provide opportunities to display superior taste and aesthetic judgments.¹³ *Evelina* manages to comply with conduct-book standards of behaviour, yet is nevertheless out on the town every night enjoying the pleasures of London life. It is in this space between opportunity and restriction that Burney can convey the consequences of such conflicting expectations for women's ability to absorb experience and communicate with the world. We will see that while Burney is not prepared to align herself with conservative conduct-book writers who recommend that women withdraw from the public world, she nonetheless continues to display anxiety about her heroines' presence in these areas.

In contrast to Burney, Austen shows little anxiety about women's access to public entertainment. Local gatherings are accepted as part of life and important occasions to exchange information and meet potential partners. It is important to acknowledge that Austen's work was set in the country where women did not have the same access to pleasure pursuits as in London and that this might account, in part, for differences in attitude between the two author's works. However, Austen's heroines also find themselves in the company of unscrupulous worldly men, and it is not their geographical location which makes a difference but their education. Eliza Bennet may initially be attracted to Mr Wickham, and Emma to Frank Churchill, but their education has prepared them to assess the temperament and morals of others, and in time the real character of these men reveals itself with little danger to their peace of mind. Direct participation in society is central to the development of Austen's female characters but equally important is their ability to assimilate these experiences in a way which produces useful knowledge about the world and how they should conduct themselves in it.

¹³ Judy Simons, *Fanny Burney* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1987) p. 36.

An important element of the middle-class values which played a key role in forming eighteenth-century ideas about female education was the cult of sensibility which was increasingly viewed as a way to counteract the negative effects of commercialism on society.¹⁴ As we have seen, histories of civilisation were obsessed with the idea that the next stage in development after commercialism was luxury which would inevitably lead to corruption and the downfall of the nation. One way to address these fears was to emphasise the virtues of emotional responses which prioritised the welfare and happiness of people over commercial profit and the accumulation of wealth. For men, the cultivation of sensibility largely revolved around improved methods of conversation and social interaction which would aid them in business and help smooth over differences in society. However, in female education this translated into the cultivation of feeling at the expense of reason. The value attached to this quality did not depend just upon constructing an image of woman as a being governed by emotion, but considered the moral ends to which these feelings could be put. Sensibility was defined as a particularly feminine characteristic which would give the domestic woman the skills she required to deduce the needs of her family as well as develop a finer appreciation of aesthetics. As we will see, the formation of Burney's characters was deeply influenced by the ideology of sensibility, but while her heroes could conform to these criteria and still function effectively as individuals, the cultivation of feeling has negative consequences for her female characters. Evelina, Cecilia and Camilla do not only face difficulties in communicating their needs and desires to the wider world; their ability to absorb experience, and think for themselves is also limited. This is seen at its most extreme in *Camilla*, where the heroine is rendered a receptacle for emotion, so that each new sensation pushes logical thought from her mind in favour of feeling, most often suffering. Of course the perceived qualities of sensibility were ambiguous, for while the cultivation of feeling supposedly provided women with superior taste, it was also believed to leave them vulnerable to their own ungovernable desires. As a result of giving her heroines a refined taste in both art and manners, Burney must also defend them against suspicions of corruption. Austen too indicates in her novels that emotions may aid women in their fulfilment

¹⁴ John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) p. 5.

of traditional duties. In contrast to Burney, though, she portrays her heroines as carefully balancing emotion with reason. The sensitive feelings of Austen's heroines are meant to be admired precisely because they are controlled and can therefore be put to good use.

As I previously noted, the representation of women in fiction inevitably commented, whether implicitly or explicitly, on what the aims and objectives of female education should be. I now wish to show how Burney's and Austen's participation in this debate was influenced by literary as well as social factors, and chiefly by other eighteenth-century novelists. Of the various kinds of literature considered in these chapters, women in the eighteenth century were most closely associated with the novel, both as producers and consumers.¹⁵ One reason for this is that the novel was increasingly identified as a domestic work set within the bounds of women's knowable experience. No classical learning was necessary for this genre, and women could enter the field while remaining within the boundaries of respectability. Furthermore, women, associated with taste, sentiment and sensibility, were well placed to take advantage of the new levels of respectability demanded in literature by the rising middle classes.¹⁶ Both Burney and Austen can be seen to adopt certain standard elements of plot and character from early novelists such as Samuel Richardson, while challenging the most limiting assumptions about woman's lack of control over her own life. Nevertheless, Burney remained ambivalent about the novel's tendency to prioritise entertainment over moral purpose. Although she generally manages to maintain a balance between these elements in her first two novels, the heavy didacticism of her later works has implications for their success as

¹⁵ Modern critics question to what degree this association between women and novels is accurate. See, for example, Jan Fergus, 'Women Readers: A Case Study' in Vivien Jones (ed), *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). However, eighteenth-century commentators emphasised this connection. For example in 1790 a writer for the *Monthly Review* notes that 'Ladies seem to appropriate to themselves an exclusive privilege in this kind of writing' (Quoted in Ioan Williams, *Novels and Romance 1700-1800* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970] p. 370).

¹⁶ In 1790 the *Monthly Review* comments that 'the portraiture of the tender passions, the delicacy of sentiment, and the easy flow of style, may, perhaps, be most adapted to the genius of the softer sex' (Williams, *Novels and Romance*, p. 370). See also Jane Spencer who notes that 'as the eighteenth century advanced the "feminine" qualities of delicacy and propriety became more generally important to bourgeois society. Women writers, because they could be taken as representatives of these central values, became more acceptable, but also more restricted' (*The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 75).

pieces of fiction. In her preface to *Evelina* she declares that ‘in the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by the brethren of the quill, as the humble Novelist’.¹⁷ Despite Burney’s claim that her father kept only one novel in his library – Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751) – she clearly had access to a range of fiction.¹⁸ However, with few references to novels in her diaries and letters it is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of this reading. We do know that she admired Charlotte Lennox’s *Female Quixote* (1752) – although she did not approve of the author herself – and found Charlotte Smith’s *Celestina* (1791) inferior to her two earlier novels *Emmeline* (1788) and *Etherlinde* (1789). But Norma Clarke notes that Burney failed to acknowledge any debt to earlier female novelists.¹⁹ Instead she expressed admiration for the fathers of the novel; Burney is ‘enlightened by the knowledge of Johnson, charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau, softened by the pathetic powers of Richardson and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding, and humour of Smollet’.²⁰

The novels of Richardson had a significant impact on Burney’s writing, and she seems to have been particularly delighted whenever her work was favourably compared to that of the earlier author.²¹ These commendations would have been particularly meaningful to Burney because Richardson’s work was probably the closest model she had for her own novels. He helped develop the epistolary novel and a domestic mode of writing labelled as feminine which focused on the internal thoughts and emotions of his heroines. Moreover, in common with Burney, conduct-book ideology exerts an important influence on Richardson’s work. *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-8) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), were approved of by many who otherwise condemned novels.²² The heroines in these works are delicate,

¹⁷ Burney, *Evelina, or, the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (London: Norton Critical Edition, 1999 [1778]) p. 6.

¹⁸ Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) pp. 105-6.

¹⁹ John Wain (ed), *Fanny Burney’s Diary* (London: The Folio Society, 1961) 26 August 1778, p75. Joyce Hemlow (ed), *Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1972) 1 August 1791, p26; Clarke, *Woman of Letters*, p. 7.

²⁰ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 7.

²¹ Wain, 3 August 1778, p. 56; 26 August 1778, p. 78.

²² See, for example, James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* where he describes Richardson as ‘an author, to whom your sex are under singular obligations for his uncommon attention to their best interests; but particularly for presenting, in a character sustained throughout with inexpressible pathos

modest, gentle and submissive to male figures of authority. Richardson's concentration on female characters and on feeling, combined with his conspicuous morality, meant that he wrote as women were ideally supposed to write. The appeal of these works lay in their immediacy, as contemporary readers found themselves carried along on a wave of sensation. However, even at this early stage of development the novel was fraught with the difficulty of relating dramatic events whilst also promoting ideals of behaviour. Richardson had faced criticism of his first novel, *Pamela*, because the heroine accepts the marriage proposal of Mr B after he has continuously assaulted her virtue for most of the novel. In his next work, the difficulty was that in order to be a good example his heroine's behaviour had to be perfect, yet the plot demanded that Clarissa not only make an unsuitable friendship with Lovelace but leave the protection of her father's house with a man she knew to be a rake. Richardson had to ensure that Clarissa would be viewed as a victim of Lovelace's machinations but the novel thus becomes a tale of persecution as every avenue of escape is blocked from the heroine. Richardson is often credited with producing intelligent female characters but he also shows how worthless such intelligence is in a patriarchal society. Although, as we will see, Burney manages to achieve happy endings for her heroines, her novels are full of similarly persecuted women, powerless to control their own destiny.

However, this element of Richardson and Burney's work should be understood in relation to a sentimental tradition designed to evoke emotion in the reader. The sentimental novel which dwelt upon outward signs of emotion – shaking, fainting, tears etc – which could not be articulated, had a particular relevance for Burney.²³ As we will see, the heroines in her novels find great difficulty in articulating their thoughts and feelings to the world, and can only express themselves through physical manifestations of emotion. This is markedly different from Austen's work which demonstrates the benefits of rational and logical communication. By the time Austen began to write, the novel of sensibility had lost its ascendancy, and she characterises excessive sentimentalism, not as a display of genuine emotion, but rather as a

and delicacy, the most exalted standard of female excellence that was ever held up to their imitation' (p. 147).

²³ Katharine M Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) p. 125.

shallow affectation.²⁴ The change in attitude towards a literature of sensibility is illustrated by Lady Louisa Stuart's account of reading Henry MacKenzie's *Man of Feeling*. When the novel was first published in 1771 she remembers her mother and sisters crying in rapture over it, and fearing that she would not cry enough to demonstrate her own delicate sensibility.²⁵ Yet, fifty years later when Lady Stuart read the novel aloud it provoked laughter and scorn in the audience rather than tears.²⁶ Austen, then, was writing for a very different audience whose expectations of feminine conduct had radically shifted. I would argue that she inherited a rationalist tradition of women's writing into which she could insert herself. Authors such as Burney, Charlotte Smith and Maria Edgeworth had shown that women could be portrayed as active agents in their own stories, and not merely passive victims or vehicles for the expression of appropriately feminine emotion.

Before moving on to consider the influences on Austen's work in more detail, I want to briefly mention Eliza Haywood's *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) which I see as an important forerunner to the works of both Austen and Burney. I have no evidence that either author read this work but it is a novel which marks an important transition in women's literature. Jane Spencer notes that

Betsy Thoughtless and novels like it brought about a crucial shift in the novel's presentation of women, from the stasis of perfection or villainy to the dynamics of character change. Heroines who make mistakes about the choice of friends, about reading matters, about lovers and love - in short about the young woman's place in the world became standard in the late eighteenth century.²⁷

That is to say Haywood's heroine must undergo a process of education where she learns the importance of appearances and necessity of considering the consequences of her behaviour more deeply. Yet, *Betsy Thoughtless* actually has a great deal more

²⁴ For example Marianne's sensibility in *Sense and Sensibility* may initially seem attractive but it is also shown to be dangerous and it is Elinor's pragmatic approach to life which holds the family together. See also Austen's contempt for the Bingley sisters in *Pride and Prejudice* whose emotions are stimulated only by objects immediately before their eyes; for example, they express great sympathy and concern for Jane's illness but forget about her as soon as she is out of view.

²⁵ Pearson, *Women's Reading*, p. 106.

²⁶ Wahrman, *Modern Self*, p. 39.

²⁷ Spencer, *Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 141.

freedom than the heroines in either Burney or Austen's work because her behaviour is not governed, to the same extent, by an awareness of the importance of respectability. Interestingly, Betsy has more in common with Austen's heroines than Burney's because she is allowed to experience the world for herself and learn from her mistakes in a way denied to Evelina, Cecilia and Camilla. Nonetheless, Haywood shows that learning to negotiate the pitfalls of society is a difficult process for women who were denied the right to independence on the one hand, but on the other were expected to understand the ways of the world. She reveals, for example, the real danger which eighteenth-century women faced as a result of being denied all knowledge of sexual relations before marriage and suggests that virtue will be better preserved by women who understand the world and its dangers.

This is the tradition of writing that Burney and Austen inherit. They follow in the footsteps of Haywood's *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, working within an accepted formula whereby a young woman falls in love, undergoes a process of education and eventually marries. However, this basic plot allowed great freedom for the two authors to represent the conflict in women's lives in quite different ways. Despite becoming a novelist herself, I do not think this literature exerted the greatest influence on Burney's work, or that she ever completely approved of the genre. In her biography of Burney, Claire Harman suggests that 'her poor opinion of the form derived from the view of old-fashioned moralists such as Fordyce'.²⁸ Although Burney did not embrace the ideology of conduct books in her novels in a simplistic, unquestioning manner, I will be arguing throughout the following chapters that conduct literature constitutes the strongest influence on her writing. In contrast, I think Austen takes forward a tradition of female writing, modifying the works of writers like Burney and Charlotte Smith to create something which could provide women with models that were more realistic and better adapted to the world they inhabited.

²⁸ Harman, *Fanny Burney*, p. 42.

Austen clearly did not dismiss the literary merit of the novel, and in *Northanger Abbey* she singles out Burney and Maria Edgeworth for particular praise. Their novels are described as being

only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.²⁹

This was a literary form Austen could be proud to be part of, and one in which she and other female authors of the time could deal with the specific concerns of women. In contrast to conduct books, novels written by women about women tended to put their heroines centre stage in their own stories. Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*, admired by both Burney and Austen, indicates the restrictions female authors had to negotiate to achieve this. The heroine of this novel, Arabella, has been isolated from society and is an avid fan of French romances. Expecting to find life like the novels she has read, Arabella asks an older, respectable countess about her adventures. The Countess responds

When I tell you...that I was born and christen'd, had a usefull and proper Education, receiv'd the Addresses of my Lord - through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him with their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in great Harmony together, I have told you all the material Passages of my Life, which upon Enquiry you will find differ very little from those of other Women of the same Rank, who have a moderate Share of Sense, Prudence and Virtue.³⁰

Clearly, women with 'Sense, Prudence and Virtue' were expected to live within a restricted sphere which provided little opportunity to gain experience of life but Arabella does manage to engage in an adventure or two, as do the heroines of many novels which follow. Female novelists recognise and dramatise the expanding opportunities for women to participate in new leisure interests while negotiating the

²⁹ Jane Austen *Northanger Abbey* (Middlesex: Penguin popular classics, 1994 [1818]) p. 25.

³⁰ Quoted in Patricia Meyer Spacks's introduction to Eliza Haywood's *Selections from the Female Spectator*, pp. xiii-xiv.

increasing restrictions imposed upon them in the name of respectability, and in doing so they indicate some of the complexity and conflict eighteenth-century women faced in their lives. Although the marriage plot may seem limiting in some ways, these novels, like the women's magazines, imaginatively portray the range of choices available to women in the world as it existed.

While it is possible to speculate that Burney's work was influenced by early female writers such as Haywood and Lennox, later in the century it becomes much clearer that female novelists are following a tradition of women's writing. Charlotte Smith was one novelist Austen expressed admiration for and Smith herself appears to have been a fan of Burney.³¹ Many contemporary reviewers, including Wollstonecraft, believed Smith's first novel *Emmeline* was an imitation of *Cecilia*.³² For all of her appreciation of Smith, Austen may have learned much from this novelist in terms of how not to portray her heroines. The earlier author's female characters tended to have inflamed sensibilities and be too weak to defend themselves in society. Betty Rizzo points out that Smith takes a pessimistic view of 'women's ability to manage alone'.³³ However, she also makes significant progress in allowing female characters a degree of agency in their own lives; her heroines may face many restrictions but they are intelligent and have developed the ability to think for themselves. As a consequence they may form strong bonds of female friendship and make an active choice of marriage partner – in *Emmeline* the heroine even breaks an engagement to achieve this. These are important elements in a new kind of female-authored literature which Austen could build upon. However, the author who I think had the strongest impact on Austen's writing was Burney herself, whose work is mentioned more frequently than any other authors in her personal letters.³⁴ Although it could again be argued that Burney taught Austen what not to do, there are enough similarities between their works to suggest that the later author was deeply

³¹ See *Catharine*, written during Austen's adolescence (*Catharine and Other Writings* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993] p. 192).

³² See Anne Henry Ehrenpreis's introduction to *Emmeline* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) pp. xiii-xiv.

³³ Betty Rizzo 'Renegotiating the Gothic' in Paula R Backscheider *Revisiting Women* (London: John Hopkins Press, 2000) p. 97.

³⁴ See for example 1 Sept 1796 (p. 6), 24 Jan 1809 (p. 168), 23 Sept 1813, (p. 227), July 1814 (p. 267), 26 Nov 1815 (p. 302) (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*).

influenced by her work. I believe that Austen's debt to Burney goes beyond superficial coincidences of character names and elements of plot, noted by several critics, to the fundamental representation of her heroines and the inner workings of their minds.³⁵ While Richardson's novels give a detailed account of the thought process of his persecuted heroines, Burney's work takes this to a new level, revealing the intellectual and emotional response of her female characters to a range of circumstances. It is the portrayal of the ebb and flow of their heroines' thoughts and feelings which allow both Burney's and Austen's novels to make the connection between the type of education women receive and their conduct in society. In her own creations Austen obviously tempered the excessive emotion which made it so difficult for Evelina and Camilla to take action in their own lives, but Burney's most logical heroine, Cecilia, must have been hugely inspirational. In this novel Burney manages to convey that the cultivation of rationality is essential if women were to extend an ethic of care to those in need and I will be arguing that the response of Cecilia to her guardian's suicide is an important forerunner to the famous Cobb scene in Austen's *Persuasion*. Additionally, we will see significant similarities between Cecilia's efforts to control her emotions and the behaviour of Eliza Bennet, Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse, suggesting that the influence of Burney's admirable heroine did not stop at one scene, in one novel, but had a more extensive impact on the way Austen represented her female characters as capable of behaving rationally in difficult situations and regulating their own minds. However, even Cecilia finds herself limited by a society that will not allow her to act independently, and, as we will see, in each of the cases where Austen adopts an element of plot or character from Burney, she modifies this to grant her heroines more agency in their own lives.

Thus, both Burney's and Austen's novels comment on the kind of education that women need to function effectively in society. As we will see, neither author is arguing that a subject-based accumulation of facts will help women perform their social duties; rather they are recommending that women think about the world, and their role in it. The successful negotiation of difficulties in society is the aim of this

³⁵ For similarities between the novels of Austen and Burney, see Kenneth Moler, *Jane's Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) pp. 75-108; Also Harman, *Fanny Burney*, pp. 91-2;

‘worldly’ education. Austen’s heroines successfully utilise their knowledge of the world in a way which allows them to exert influence and exercise agency in their own lives, whilst maintaining their respectability. By contrast, in Burney’s novels, this active control does not seem to be compatible with contemporary standards of female decorum. While she does manage to achieve happy endings for her heroines, these characters are limited by their education and the internalisation of contradictory values. Over the following two chapters we will see how the ability to participate in society and communicate with others is central to the development of the individual, and that this accounts for the fundamental differences between Austen’s and Burney’s works.

CHAPTER THREE

LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE IN THE NOVELS OF BURNEY AND AUSTEN

In this chapter I will be looking at eighteenth-century attitudes towards women gaining experience through direct encounters with the world and will show that Burney and Austen responded in different ways to prevailing assumptions about women's 'natural' role in life. The question of whether it was desirable for women to gain experience was an ambiguous one, for while, not unexpectedly, conservative commentators worried that such contact with the outside world would tarnish a young lady's character, there was also an acknowledgement that inexperience left women vulnerable to many dangers and temptations. Of course, the acceptability of women gaining experience was dependent upon where it took place, who they were with and what lessons they absorbed from it. For moderate writers, the challenge was to provide their female readers with a space in which they could gain experience and knowledge within the boundaries of respectability. The narratives of novels depicting the specific circumstances of their heroines' lives were particularly well placed to achieve this. I previously suggested that novels portraying women fulfilling recognisable roles in society could offer a vicarious experience to the female reader. Certainly, eighteenth-century reviewers considered this to be an important component of novels which were often recommended on the basis of their practical use value in society. The *Critical Review*, for example, approvingly notes that *Evelina* provided 'knowledge of the world' and 'lessons of experience'.¹ Similarly, Burney praises the ability of the novel to give 'to juvenile credulity knowledge of the world, without ruin or repentance; and the lessons of experience without its tears'.²

As we will see, Burney's and Austen's heroines respond in vastly different ways to their experiences. However, contemporary reviewers tended to evaluate the

¹ *Critical Review*, 1778, See Norton critical edition of *Evelina*, p. 359.

² Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814) Vol 1, p. xvi.

experiential element of these authors' works in surprisingly similar ways. The educational value of Austen's novels, like Burney's, is related to the practical lessons they may teach young ladies. Reviewing *Pride and Prejudice*, the *Critical Review* argues that 'an excellent lesson may be learned from the elopement of Lydia'. It also suggests that the line drawn by Austen 'between the prudent and the mercenary in matrimonial concerns, may be useful to our fair readers'.³ Valuing the portrayal of everyday experiences, the question of realism became central to the educational value of novels. In an article for the *Quarterly Review*, Sir Walter Scott notes that Austen's characters 'conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognise as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances'. Consequently, 'the kind of moral' which these 'novels inculcate, applies equally to the paths of common life'.⁴

For an eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century novel to receive the approval of reviewers it had to be seen to offer practical instruction and inculcate morals in the reader.⁵ Yet, this was no guarantee that eighteenth-century readers would extract the intended message from a text, or accept the reviewer's judgment. Annika Bautz notes that private readers were much less concerned than reviewers with the morality of novels, and were more likely to comment instead on the entertainment value of the work.⁶ Yet, I would argue that the novel also provided readers with opportunities to cultivate the judgment, and that the enjoyment and instructional element of this process went hand-in-hand.

I previously noted that evidence on historical readers is scarce. The letters and diaries of eighteenth-century women tend to comment on what they have read, with only occasional and brief indications of approval or disapproval. Hence, there is little on which to base an assessment of the impact of the experiential element of novels on the lives of women from this period. However, women's private writings often compare the characters from novels to individuals encountered in real life. It

³ *Critical Review*, (1813: March): 323-24.

⁴ *Quarterly Review*, (1815: Oct): 193

⁵ James Raven, *Judging New Wealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) p. 67.

⁶ Annika Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott* (London: Continuum, 2009) p. 68.

therefore seems logical to assume that readers brought to bear their own experiences when interpreting novels and, in turn, future experiences, and particularly judgments of individuals' characters, were filtered, to some extent, through past reading.

Writing to her sister, for example, Austen compares her to Burney's most admirable heroine, *Cecilia*: 'Take care of your precious self, do not work too hard, remember that Aunt Cassandras are quite as scarce as Miss Beverleys'.⁷ Similarly, Maria Edgeworth, writing to her stepmother, notes that Lady Catherine Bisset whom she visited, 'is as unlike the Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice* as you can conceive'.⁸ This is not to suggest that readers passively absorb meaning from texts in any age. The contemporary views of *Mansfield Park*, recorded by Austen, reveal the differing assessments of characters made by individual readers and it is particularly notable that nearly as many profess an appreciation of Aunt Norris as Fanny Price. The eighteenth-century reader's response remains elusive; their approval or disapproval, like or dislike for a character or work cannot be guaranteed. However, the anecdotal evidence available to us does quite clearly indicate that novels invited judgement. Over the course of this chapter we will see that Burney and Austen portray their heroines' experiences in a way that had the potential to encourage readers to position themselves in relation to a range of issues, particularly relating to questions about women and their education.

In the first half of this thesis I argued that the eighteenth-century female periodical claimed respect for the domestic duties carried out by women and demonstrated the extensive range of skills and knowledge required for this purpose. These works offered multiple images of strong, articulate women acquiring agency in their lives by exercising independent thought and critical judgment. Burney's novels, in contrast, reveal the consequences of conforming to a limiting ideology of femininity which prevents the development of such skills. Learning through direct experience is particularly problematic for this novelist's female characters. In her representation of internally conflicted heroines who are unable to function in the world, Burney, consciously or not, shows the impossibility of assimilating experience while

⁷ Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, 24 Jan 1809 (p. 168).

⁸ Bautz, *Jane Austen and Walter Scott*, p. 57.

cultivating feminine virtues, particularly innocence. Even as women writers claimed a specifically feminine moral authority to portray female lives and experiences, they simultaneously revealed the inherently contradictory nature of eighteenth-century expectations upon women.

Within the pages of the novels considered in this chapter, we see women experiencing the world beyond the physical boundaries of the home. Yet, it is important to consider whether these female characters assimilate new knowledge as a consequence and what influence this may have on their ability to take action in their own lives. Interestingly, although Burney's three heroines, *Evelina*, *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, all face difficulties in gaining and using experience as a result of a restrictive conduct-book ideology, this plays out in a different fashion in each novel. In *Evelina*, the heroine is out every night participating in London's leisure industry but at the same time she must negate these experiences, remaining unchanged in order to maintain her innocence. While *Evelina*'s difficulties arise from internalising conduct-book values which deny her knowledge and control over her own life, *Cecilia*'s problems are external, created by the society she must exist within. Burney's most rational heroine has the intelligence and skill to respond in a logical manner, even in the most difficult of circumstances, but her efforts to convince society that she is capable of running her own affairs and helping others are futile. *Camilla* is like a dark retelling of *Evelina* but the heroine of the later novel is governed by her emotions to a far greater extent. To the reader, *Camilla* appears as a vessel for continually changing emotions which eradicate useful thought from her mind in favour of demonstrating an inappropriately inflamed sensibility. In contrast, the ability to respond reflectively to events and change one's future conduct based on new knowledge attained through contact with the world stands at the centre of Austen's novels. This writer creates intelligent, rational female characters who are able to absorb important lessons as a result of their participation in society despite the contradictions they encounter in the outward circumstances of their lives. The second part of this chapter will demonstrate how the heroines of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* take control of their own lives,

how they learn through experience, communicate their thoughts and opinions, and influence the behaviour of others.

Burney's heroines, with the notable exception of Cecilia, are continually denied the right to act for themselves in any meaningful way and as a result are kept in a child-like state, dependent on a male figure of authority for approval. Nevertheless, I do not wish to suggest that Burney presents a simple image of women as weak and incapable of rational thought. In common with the eighteenth-century women's magazines we have looked at, Burney challenges notions of women's inherent inferiority by presenting intelligent female characters capable of assessing the world for themselves. However, Burney also reveals that in the face of contradictory expectations, such intelligence is little use to women. For those attempting to conform to an eighteenth-century ideology of femininity, the passivity and delicacy requisite in the female character made it difficult, if not impossible, to take direct action; complying with conduct-book criteria cultivated a docility incompatible with independent initiative. *Evelina* and *Camilla* are often caught in a situation where they must fulfil their obligations to others without being seen to act. Both these heroines are caught in a space between action and non-action because they have internalised the conflict inherent in eighteenth-century notions of appropriate behaviour for women. Cecilia, in contrast, looks forward to Austen's admirable heroines and shows herself to be capable of logically assessing the various situations she finds herself in; however, the world she occupies refuses to take her seriously and ultimately prevents her from assuming responsibility either for herself or others.

Yet, despite this seemingly caustic critique of women's position in society, I do not believe that Burney should be characterised as a radical feminist. Throughout her novels there is significant evidence to suggest that she subscribed to conduct-book ideology to the extent that she valued specifically feminine 'virtues' in her heroines, and believed men and women to have different qualities suitable to their own sphere of influence. In the introduction to her pamphlet, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793), which appeals to the women of Great Britain to provide financial support for these religious men, Burney expresses the view that 'all

interference in public matters' is outwith 'the allotted boundaries and appointed province of Females'. Nevertheless, far from believing that women should be 'mere passive spectatresses', she singles out charity and benevolence as specifically feminine duties requiring action. Furthermore, she held that women's retirement from public life and distance from commercial transactions enabled them to retain a sensitivity of emotion which qualified them for this purpose.⁹ Although Burney's heroines are often overwhelmed by feelings which leave them unable to act, their sensibility was also supposed to prompt virtuous feats. As we will see, negotiating between conflicting views of women, and often failing to reach a coherent assessment, Burney's work epitomises the contradiction inherent in eighteenth-century moderate attitudes towards women.

Burney's first novel, *Evelina*, as the subtitle advertises, is the story of 'a young lady's entrance into the world' and her exposure to the various leisure pursuits of London. It largely consists of letters sent home to her guardian in the country in which she makes clear that she is participating in a number of new experiences. The expanding leisure industry of the eighteenth century did not only offer new forms of entertainment, it provided opportunities for display and socialisation in sites where future partners could be attracted. While these leisure activities offered new freedom to young ladies, the onus on women to attain marriage also intensified their vulnerability to male predators in these locations. Consequently it became essential for the female sex to develop the skills and knowledge required to navigate this difficult landscape. Bannet suggests that by featuring heroines who are ignorant in the ways of the world, narratives depicting young ladies' entrances into society and subsequent events, could offer instruction to female readers. Theoretically, the eighteenth-century woman could be taught to avoid the heroine's errors, whilst cultivating the judgment and prudence attained as a result of these mistakes.¹⁰ Yet, it is notable that, attractive and intelligent though the heroine of Burney's first novel is, *Evelina*'s education is inadequate to allow her to negotiate the difficulties she encounters. Through the course of *Evelina*'s journey Burney reveals the difficulties

⁹ Fanny Burney, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (London: Thomas Cadell, 1793) p. iii.

¹⁰ Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, p. 73.

faced by young women denied experience of the world or pressured into conforming to an ideology of femininity which arrests their development. It is more than possible that many eighteenth-century readers recognised this educational defect and developed an ability to judge and act which was denied to the heroine.

Throughout this chapter I will be asking what Evelina learns from her experiences, or in what way, if any, she changes as a result of her time away from home. The heroine's exposure to these new influences is initially justified by her guardian on the basis that to deny her would simply heighten her curiosity. This is remarkably similar to Eliza Haywood's argument in the *Female Spectator* that allowing young ladies to experience the world for themselves is to arm them against the 'Artifices of Mankind', while denying them the opportunity to participate in society, and evaluate people and situations is to leave them vulnerable.¹¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, eighteenth-century women's magazines were in an ideal position to pass on surrogate experience through accounts of events which contained overt moral messages or which encouraged their readers to assess the world for themselves. Their insistence on the importance of experiencing life obviously lies in the assumption that women will assimilate new knowledge which will allow them to act more wisely in the future. However, I will be arguing that Evelina fails to develop strategies for dealing with difficult social situations because she must maintain her innocence and artlessness at all costs. In certain areas her knowledge must remain incomplete and this leads her into dangerous situations of which she has no understanding. Although Villars acknowledges to Evelina that 'the artlessness of your nature, and the simplicity of your education, alike unfit you for the thorny paths of the great and busy world', he does not suggest that she remedy this through the gaining of experience.¹² Indeed, Villars is far more approving when Evelina's ignorance of social custom leads her into trouble than when she tries to adopt more

¹¹ Haywood, *Female Spectator*, pp. 21-22

¹² Burney, *Evelina*, p. 97. Joanne Cutting-Gray argues that 'Villars's wish to have Evelina returned from her social experiences unchanged, still "all innocence" implies sacrificing the seasoning of practical knowledge on the patriarchal altar of pristine ignorance' (*Woman as Nobody and the Novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1992) p. 12).

sophisticated strategies to gain some control over her own life.¹³ The whole plot of the novel revolves around a glaring inconsistency. The heroine's vulnerability upon her entrance to society is the result of her inexperience but her goal is not to absorb lessons which will help her navigate the obstacles she encounters but rather to emerge completely unchanged. Paradoxically, *Evelina* is a novel about negating the experience of an 'entrance into the world'.

Burney's novels are dominated by the common eighteenth-century assumption that women are more susceptible to momentary sensations. *Evelina*'s guardian worries incessantly about the influences she may be exposed to and admits that it has been his 'study to guard' her against the 'delusions' of 'pleasure' and 'dissipation' by 'preparing her to expect - and despise them'. There is evidence to suggest that Villar has achieved this goal, to some extent, when his young ward refuses to take flattery seriously and laughs at the absurd manners she encounters in London.¹⁴ In recognising insincerity and dismissing the foolish flattery and behaviour she encounters in others *Evelina* shows that her education has prepared her to think for herself.¹⁵ Yet, it is clear that understanding the behaviour and character of others is not enough to protect her from persecution. Although she identifies Lovel as a shallow fop and realises that Sir Clement's intentions are far from honourable, she has also been taught that passivity is an essential characteristic in a young lady and cannot break free from the restriction this imposes upon her response. *Evelina* may understand many, although not all, of the motivations of the characters she is surrounded by but this does not enable her actively to oppose their intentions and this explains why she simultaneously appears as an intelligent, sensible young woman and as a child who cannot act for herself.

¹³ See, for example, Villar's first letter to *Evelina* in London: 'I am sure I need not say, how much more I was pleased with the mistakes of your inexperience at the private ball, than with the attempted adoption of more fashionable manners at the ridotto' (Burney, *Evelina*, p. 46).

¹⁴ Burney, *Evelina*, p13. See for example when *Evelina* laughs at Lovel's behaviour at her first London ball; and also when she comes to the realisation that certain phrases are used without any real meaning: 'but these sort of expressions I find are used as words of course, without any distinction of persons, or study of propriety' (p. 23).

¹⁵ Spencer notes that '*Evelina*, always bolder on paper than in action, makes sharp observations about scenes during which she was passive and frightened, so that the record of her experiences builds up into a satirical novel written by a timid heroine' (*Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 155).

Villars fears that Evelina's attendance at balls, plays, theatres and so on will endanger her in two ways. In the first the danger is external, and the result of being exposed to a number of disreputable characters who pursue and persecute her. His second area of concern is about Evelina's internal vulnerability to corruption through her own desires. To a certain extent I think Burney shares an anxiety concerning large crowds. It is in places of mass congregation that Evelina is most exposed to outrageous characters, while public diversions are shown to encourage affectation and dissimulation. Undoubtedly Evelina faces real danger at these locations but these are external difficulties imposed on her by the unscrupulous behaviour of others and made worse by an education which keeps her ignorant. Although I will be arguing that Burney was strongly influenced by conduct-book ideology, all of her heroines are exposed to public entertainments without obvious consequences to their characters. Conservative conduct-book writers often argued that eighteenth-century leisure activities destroyed domestic life, yet for many women of this time, these locations facilitated the attainment of domesticity through marriage. Burney's attitude is, in many ways, ambiguous towards her heroine's participation in the commercial pleasures of London. Yet, there is clear evidence that she does not fully accept the judgment of the conduct-book writers that such experiences are detrimental to a woman's character and peace of mind.

Nevertheless, Burney's novels do suggest that the geographical spaces of the eighteenth-century leisure industry constitute sites of danger and vulnerability for women. The presence of the female sex in certain areas is seen to invite male aggression. James Fordyce warns that those women who are seen too often in public will be considered 'lawful game, to be hunted down without hesitation'.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the education of young girls like Evelina does not prepare them to recognise the dangers they face. To maintain innocence necessitates complete ignorance of sexual matters, denying Evelina the knowledge she requires to make the correct decisions to protect herself. Unwittingly, the heroine places herself in the position of almost inviting assault when she accepts a carriage ride home with only Sir Clement as an escort. However, having become separated from her party,

¹⁶ Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 108.

Evelina requires help to get home and her acceptance is motivated by the awareness that Sir Clement was the first to offer the use of his carriage. Having previously learned the cost of ignoring social convention Evelina is frightened of the consequences of accepting instead Lord Orville's offer. If she had the knowledge to understand the real threat of rape posed by Sir Clement, the reader can surmise that she would have made a different decision. The threat of force is implied by the hand that Sir Clement refuses to release: 'I would fain have withdrawn my hand, and made almost continual attempts; but in vain, for he actually grasped it between both of his without any regard to my resistance'.¹⁷ Only at the last crucial moment does he choose instead to beg forgiveness: 'he poured fourth abundant protestations of honour, and assurances of respect, entreating my pardon for having offended me, and beseeching my good opinion'.¹⁸

In a similar event Evelina again places herself in danger through her own ignorance when she follows the Branghton sisters into the dark walkways of the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall. She is accosted by a group of young men from whom Sir Clement rescues her. Once again her so-called rescuer threatens to become her attacker. The reader is made aware that the opportunity and potential for violence lurk and that Evelina is powerless to protect herself, demonstrating yet again the heroine's difficulties in reconciling innocence and experience. The necessity of doing so and the basic incompatibility of these requirements deny her the possibility of taking action in her own life. Even making the decision who to dance with is denied to her. Early in the novel, oblivious to social custom, Evelina rejects one dance partner but later chooses to dance with the hero. However, the 'rules of assembly' dictated that a woman who turned down one partner did not later dance with another, and Evelina, as a result of her social gaffe, faces distressing persecution from her rejected dance partner. In a later incident, she pretends to be engaged to another partner in order to avoid this restriction but faces similar torment from the rejected Sir Clement. For the naïve heroine, the possibility of circumventing rules and taking action in one's own life can only lead to disaster. Yet, since the heroine's

¹⁷ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 82.

¹⁸ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 83.

education deliberately cultivates passivity, she is inevitably a victim of this kind of manipulative behaviour.

Villar's letters to Evelina exemplify the conflicting demands made on her by the gender ideologies of the period. Often he treats his ward as too young and ignorant to make her own choices, but then contrarily advises that she must judge and act for herself. The paradox of this situation is that when Evelina is at her most vulnerable, exposed to dangers she has little control over, Villars throws her on her own resources. He clearly recognises the danger she faces from Sir Clement, but does not write to Lady Howard or Mrs Mirvan requesting he be denied access to Evelina's company. Instead he relies upon his ward's discretion. Moreover, he advises her to abandon the passivity requisite in a young lady's character and to show active resentment at Sir Clement's liberty of manner:

It is not sufficient for you to be reserved; his conduct even calls for your resentment: and should he again, as will doubtless be his endeavour, contrive to solicit your favour in private, let your disdain and displeasure be so marked, as to constrain a change in his behaviour.¹⁹

Despite valuing the qualities of innocence and artlessness which conspire to silence the heroine, Villars insists she express herself in such a way as will give deter Sir Clement, a rogue clearly not easily controlled. Evelina does manage to express resentment to Sir Clement when he accosts her in various places but she cannot maintain control of these situations and finds herself again and again voicing forgiveness which she does not feel.²⁰ Ironically, although Villars advises Evelina that she has the ability to restrain Sir Clement's actions, he refuses to accept her responsibility for her own feelings. For when it becomes clear that she is attracted to Orville, her guardian insists that she return home at once: 'You must quit him! - his sight is baneful to your repose, his society is death to your future tranquility!'²¹

¹⁹ Burney, *Evelina*, pp. 133-134.

²⁰ See Susan C Greenfield "'Oh Dear Resemblance of thy Murdered Mother': Female Authorship in *Evelina*" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3:4 (1991): 309.

²¹ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 255.

According to Villars it is Evelina's own emotions which pose the greatest danger; he is more worried about this than the threat of a potential rapist.

It is these inconsistencies which leave Evelina in a situation where she must simultaneously act and remain passive. Even with regard to that great eighteenth-century virtue of showing benevolence through charity, Evelina is caught between action and non-action. This is wonderfully captured in the scenes with Mr Macartney, later revealed to be her half-brother. When Evelina sees Macartney going upstairs to his rooms with a pistol in his pocket she mistakenly assumes he is about to commit suicide (his real intention is to turn mugger). She follows him upstairs and seeing the pistols on the table decides to grab them, but in Evelina's world innocent heroines do not take action - they faint: 'I started, and rushing precipitately into the room, just caught his arm, and then, overcome by my own fears, I fell down at his side, breathless and senseless.'²² The idea that a woman take charge of such a situation might be more acceptable if she showed a delicate sensibility. Additionally, Evelina's ignorance of the true nature of the situation, which could easily have backfired on her, both emphasises her vulnerability and reduces the value of her efforts on Macartney's behalf. Nevertheless, her achievements between faintings and tremblings saves a young man from a terrible fate, though a different one from that she imagines. In a later meeting Evelina provides Macartney with the charity necessary to alleviate his immediate distress. However, she cannot directly hand him the money but rather she 'let fall my purse upon the ground, not daring to present it to him'.²³ Burney reveals here that while emotional sensitivity may inspire in women the desire to be charitable and benevolent, it does not equip them to fulfil this task properly. Readers may have avidly followed Evelina's adventures, but given her inability to act, it is unlikely that she served as a role model in any practical way. The novel may have drawn the reader's attention to situations to be avoided, but it offered no strategy for negotiating difficulties once encountered.

²² Burney, *Evelina*, p. 150.

²³ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 179.

Evelina's overwrought sensibility may in part be attributed to her young age, but it is also the result of an education system which encouraged women to feel rather than think. Fourteen years after the publication of *Evelina*, Wollstonecraft voices concern in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that the female sex were taught to cultivate their sensibilities at the expense of their rational faculties:

Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling.²⁴

Evelina does appear to be 'blown about by every momentary gust of feeling'. Although she proves to the reader, through her account of London life, that she has intelligence and wit, this is not enough to overcome a sensibility that paralyses her. At social events she is so overawed that she cannot even speak, while at a perceived suicide attempt she faints in the midst of trying to prevent it. Wollstonecraft argues that such weaknesses in women's characters are as a result of their being denied the right to work. While middle-class men had to exert themselves in business, women were excluded from this means of self-improvement and had 'no other scheme to sharpen their faculties'.²⁵ However, in Burney's second novel, *Cecilia*, she creates a heroine completely different from Evelina, one who is calm, rational and in control of her own actions. Central to the difference between these characters is the fact that Cecilia is an heiress. This not only saves Cecilia from having to cultivate feminine charms in order to attract a husband but also places a responsibility upon the heroine, which, I will argue, 'sharpens' her 'faculties'.

Cecilia, like Jane Austen's Emma, is free from a financial obligation to marry and retains the right to choose a partner for herself. Although her fortune is temporarily in the hands of Mr Briggs, he has no other authority over her, and cannot use her inheritance as an enticing dowry to make a match against her will. But eighteenth-century notions of propriety, still limit Cecilia in some ways, in that she must wait for the hero to declare his feelings first. In the first chapter I showed that writers such

²⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 153.

²⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 152.

as Gregory and Fordyce advised young ladies never to admit, even to themselves, that they were falling in love until the gentleman first declared his intentions. In *Cecilia*, Burney shows the heroine conforming to the highest standards of propriety in her outward behaviour towards Delvile, but, significantly, she is not required to hide her feelings from herself. In fact acknowledging her emotions is the key to controlling them:

as she was not of that inflammable nature which is always ready to take fire, as her emotions were under the control of her reason, and she suffered not her affections to triumph over her principles she started at her danger the moment she perceived it, and instantly determined to give no weak encouragement to a prepossession which neither time nor intimacy had justified.²⁶

Acknowledging her ‘rising partiality’ allows Cecilia to adopt a rational response; she will not cultivate feelings where she has had no encouragement, or allow them passively to grow upon her. However, Cecilia does not deny the possibility of a different response in the future, should ‘time’ and ‘intimacy’ justify it. In her portrayal of this admirable heroine, Burney disputes the assumption that women cannot conquer their feelings, and shows that the overwrought sensibility deemed natural in the female sex is the result of their restricted education and experience of life.

Cecilia’s status as an heiress is important to her development as an individual, not just because it provides her with financial security, but because she has been taught that an important responsibility goes along with this:

And not without trembling did she then look forward to the claims which the splendid income she was soon to POSSESS would call upon her to discharge. A strong sense of DUTY, a fervent desire to ACT RIGHT, were the ruling characteristics of her mind.²⁷

This income must be redistributed to those most in need, and it will be Cecilia’s responsibility to assess the most worthy causes. The heroine, then, clearly has an

²⁶ Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1782]) p. 251.

²⁷ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 55.

important function to fulfil in society which exercises her rational faculties. Jane Spencer notes that Cecilia ‘becomes a demonstration of the eighteenth-century ideal of the right use of riches: taking possession of her inheritance, she lives moderately, ignores fashion, and helps the poor’.²⁸ The heroine’s estate provides her with the means to offer shelter to less resilient women whilst her capacity for rational thought provides her with the skills she needs to fulfil these obligations. Cecilia does not just bestow money, she takes an interest in the lives of those she cares for, offering counsel and solutions to the real problems faced by the working class. In doing so she conforms to an eighteenth-century ideal which insists that charity be given in a responsible manner. In Burney’s third novel *Camilla*, Dr Marchmont explains what this requires:

To give money without inquiry, or further aid, to those who have adopted bad practices, is, to them, but temptation, and to society an injury; but to give them both counsel and the means to pursue a right course, is, to them, perhaps salvation and to the community, the greatest service.²⁹

As I previously noted, Burney indicates in her *Brief Reflections* that charitable work falls within the province of women. Cecilia fulfils the role and responsibility set out by Priscilla Wakefield in her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798). As Wakefield notes, ‘women of enlarged understanding’ were required to undertake the extensive duties of inspecting workhouses and schools of industry as well as extending protection to the girls apprenticed by a parish.³⁰ Interestingly, neither Wakefield nor Burney is prepared to emphasise logic over feeling; female sensibility stimulates action; and the fulfilment of these virtuous roles should also be guided by feminine emotions. Yet Cecilia is Burney’s only heroine to show such independence and I would argue that this is because she understands that feelings need to be balanced and controlled by logic; a skill that Evelina and Camilla’s education prevents them from developing.

²⁸ Jane Spencer, ‘*Evelina and Cecilia*’, Peter Sabor (ed) *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 33.

²⁹ Fanny Burney, *Camilla, or A Picture of Youth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1796]) p. 152.

³⁰ Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (London: J Johnson; Darton and Harvey, 1798) pp. 83-6.

In *Camilla*, the heroine's sister is also an heiress but Eugenia has lived isolated from society, and although 'delighted to give' is 'unhabituated to any other exertion'. While Camilla does not have the same financial means as her sister, she initially seems to share some of Cecilia's charitable responsibility. The reader is told that she has been taught 'never to pass distress without inquiry, nor to refuse giving at all, because she could give but little'.³¹ Camilla gives a shilling to a poor crying woman whose husband is in jail, but more importantly she listens to her petition and promises to do all she can to help. However, she does not consider what she personally may arrange, but rather passes the responsibility on to Edgar. It is the hero of the novel, not the heroine, who helps release the man from jail, and then provides him and his family with both shelter and employment. Camilla displays her delicate sensibility through her joy in the family's improved circumstances, but like Evelina, she is unable to act for herself.

In contrast, Cecilia shows herself to be quite capable of running her own affairs and carrying out a duty of care to others in the manner expected of a responsible landowner. While Evelina cannot even directly present money to Mr Macartney, dropping her purse at his feet instead, Cecilia actively intervenes on behalf of the Hill family when she finds her guardian, Mr Harrel, has failed to pay them for work completed. She does not hesitate to make her displeasure clear when he fails to rectify this situation immediately. Confident in her own views, Cecilia tries to convince Harrel that his way of life, which accumulates debt without thought, is wrong. Although she fails to convince him, her rational communication makes her a worthy heroine.

In a magnificent scene which looks forward to Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and Anne Elliot's rational behaviour after Louisa's fall at the Cobb in Lyme Regis, Burney shows the advantages of having a heroine who can rationally respond to the needs of others, even in the most horrific of circumstances. When it becomes clear that his debts are insurmountable, Harrel agrees that his only option is to go abroad to avoid

³¹ Burney, *Camilla*, pp. 97, 83.

prosecution. He insists Cecilia and his wife go with him to the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall, promising to leave directly from there for the continent. However, as the evening progresses he becomes drunk and his mood increasingly manic. In this state Harrel takes a pistol to himself. His death is not immediate, and it is Cecilia's response when she hears this that shows her to be a heroine capable of action.³² She is galvanised by the belief that she can make a difference, first running to see that a surgeon is called for, and then attempting to make her way towards the injured man. Even when assured there is no hope of saving Harrel, Cecilia is 'determined to make way to him, that she might herself enquire if, in his last moments, there was anything he wished to communicate, or desired to have done'.³³ Despite never having faced such an incident before, Cecilia can respond to the needs of the situation because she has experience of dealing with others, and thinking rationally about her own conduct. In her second novel Burney shows that women are capable of rational behaviour and do not necessarily faint at the first hint of trouble. Consequently, eighteenth-century female readers could take Cecilia's actions in society as a model worthy of imitation in their own lives. Unlike Evelina and Camilla, Cecilia offers practical strategies for negotiating difficulties. Yet, this heroine, too, faces insurmountable problems.

While Evelina's difficulty in directly acting for herself is rooted in her own desire to fulfil contradictory expectations, the problems faced by Cecilia are the result of other people's actions. Cecilia is prevented from helping Mr Harrel in his final moments, not through her own weakness, but by various male characters who assume the scene is too horrific for her to witness. As I will show in the next chapter, although she responds in a rational and honest manner to others, Cecilia is often not believed, or simply not heard. One of the great inconsistencies of Cecilia's character is that this exceptionally intelligent and rational heroine suffers an episode of madness near the end of the novel. In the next chapter I will return to this scene in greater detail and show that this is the result of Cecilia being denied the opportunity to communicate in a rational manner. However, I want to note briefly that Cecilia's madness does not occur because she loses her capacity for logical thought, but rather as a result of no

³² Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Bristol: Bristol Classic Press, 1989) p. 165.

³³ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 416.

rational course of action being available to her. For young women at this time it was rational to conform to society's expectations - they risked ostracisation if they did not. However, when these expectations are themselves irrational, Cecilia has no defence.

After writing *Cecilia*, Burney was offered a position in the royal household as Keeper of the Robes to the queen.³⁴ Five years later, due to ill health, she was allowed to retire. When she returned to her writing she was aware that having occupied a place in the royal household, all her future work would have to conform to the highest standards of respectability.³⁵ Under these circumstances it would have been almost impossible for her to have created another radical heroine like Cecilia. In her next novel, *Camilla*, the heroine's qualities are, like those of Evelina, innocence and passivity.

There is clear evidence throughout Burney's third novel that the heroine has been raised to consider her conduct and the consequences her decisions may have. However, there is a complicated relationship between Camilla's desire to fulfil a responsible role in life and her excessive sensibility. Although empathising with those in need, she is at the mercy of feelings which make it difficult for her to stick to her principles. This vulnerability reflects an eighteenth-century physiological understanding of woman's nervous system. Barker-Benfield shows that in the eighteenth-century there was a new awareness of the body as a mechanical machine, where nerves processed sensations, such as sight, smell and touch. Both men and women were the results of their sensory processes; however, women's nervous systems were labelled inferior.³⁶ Robert Whytt, the Scottish physician to King George III, took it for granted that 'women, in whom the nervous system is generally more moveable than men, are more subject to nervous complaints, and have them in

³⁴ See Epstein on the effect Burney's experiences at court had on her later writings (*The Iron Pen*, p. 24).

³⁵ Claudia L Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp. 144-145.

³⁶ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 26.

a higher degree'.³⁷ It was believed by many that the nervous system which disposed women to hysteria, also made them more impressionable to sensations and perceptions and I believe that we see the influence of this in the characterisation of Camilla whose nervous system seems to be overwhelmed for much of the novel.

In *Camilla* the heroine's internal emotions do not corrupt, in the sense of stimulating desire for material objects or attention, as conservative conduct-book writers so feared. Nevertheless, in the course of the novel, she incurs debt and becomes estranged from her family as a consequence of her excessive sensibility. In the next chapter I will show that this is largely the result of Camilla's inability to communicate, but I first want to note that it is her overwhelming emotions which prevent her from absorbing useful lessons from her experiences. Burney was clearly ambivalent as to whether Camilla's sensibility was a desirable quality or not, for she shows that while people were naturally attracted to her vivacity, thoughtlessness and absence of reflection were an integral part of her temperament:

Her qualities had a power which, without consciousness how, or consideration why, governed her whole family. The airy thoughtlessness of her nature was a source of perpetual amusement; and if sometimes her vivacity raised a fear for her discretion, the innocence of her mind reassured them after every alarm.³⁸

It is not intelligence or wit which makes Camilla so valued, but rather her impulsive nature, where she acts what she feels.³⁹ Often it is when others find themselves in difficulties that her emotions are stimulated, giving her the opportunity to demonstrate her capacity for sympathy. Yet, this emphasis upon Camilla's emotional sensitivity, far from facilitating her fulfilment of domestic duties is actually shown to result in an abdication of important responsibilities.

³⁷ Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been Commonly Called Nervous Hypochondriac or Hysterical, to which are Fixed Some Remarks on Sympathy of the Nerves* (Edinburgh: J Balfour, 1765) p. 118.

³⁸ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 51.

³⁹ See Cutting-Gray, *Woman as Nobody*, pp. 58-59.

On the one hand eighteenth-century women were encouraged to cultivate feminine sensibility; on the other they were advised that the expression of many thoughts and feelings was unacceptable. Through her immature heroine, Burney demonstrates the consequences when women have to repress the feelings they have been taught to foster. Never having been taught the importance of balancing sensibility with reason, Camilla's inability to express her emotional confusion prevents all rational thought. When she is forced to disobey the hero to clear herself of the suspicion that she is trying to attract him, her aggravated emotions prevent her from even considering exactly why she is so upset:

Camilla, meanwhile, shut up in her room, wept almost without cessation, from a sense of general unhappiness, though fixed to no point, and from a disturbance of mind, confusion of ideas and of feelings, that rendered her incapable of reflection.⁴⁰

She is at the mercy of emotions and perceptions which impress themselves upon the mind, leaving her confused and agitated. Throughout the novel she appears as a receptacle for the emotion of the moment, which dominates her consciousness and leaves her unable to consider the future. Consequently, it is impossible for Camilla to absorb any lessons from her experiences. When forced to recognize her attraction to Edgar, her uncontrollable feelings actually make her ill: 'Her sensations were now most painful: she grew pale, she became sick'.⁴¹ Perhaps this may be interpreted as a forerunner to her more serious illness at the end of the novel, where she is clearly implicated as being at least partly responsible for her own state of health.

Camilla's difficulty in assuming responsibility for herself is particularly obvious when it comes to organising her money. Interestingly, Camilla is given a quarterly allowance in a manner similar to that recommended by Mary Wollstonecraft in her early conduct book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). This was to be part of an educational process which would show young girls the consequences of how they spent their money. Wollstonecraft suggests that if girls are given an allowance for their dress 'their mothers can easily without seeming to do it, observe

⁴⁰ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 174.

⁴¹ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 191.

how they spend it, and direct them accordingly'. This has the benefit of not only encouraging girls to recognise the value of money and practice moderation, but also allows them to be 'charitable, in the true sense of the word, as they would then give their own'.⁴² Practising benevolence comes easily to Camilla because this is related to her ability to sympathise with the plight of others. In contrast, taking charge of her money remains a difficulty throughout the novel. In middle-class society living within one's means was considered an important virtue and women, in particular, were associated with the household economy. It is, of course, particularly important that women learn to budget if they are to be in charge of their own household. Hester Chapone argues in the conduct-book she addresses to her niece that 'oeconomy is so important a part of a woman's character, so necessary to her own happiness, and so essential to her performing properly the duties of a wife and of a mother, that it ought to have the precedence of all other accomplishments, and take its rank next to the most important duties of life'. Chapone, like Wollstonecraft, believes that mothers have an important role to play in this educational process. She tells her niece that

I hope it will not be long before your mother entrusts you with some part, at least, of the management of your father's house. – Whilst you are under her eye, your ignorance cannot do much harm, though the relief to her at first may not be near so considerable as the benefit to yourself.⁴³

While Camilla has been allowed to budget her own small allowance, there is no evidence in the text that she has been given any greater responsibility for her own household, and it may be significant that her mother is absent for much of the novel. Yet, even more noticeable is the fact that this heroine is lacking the control and common sense required for the proper fulfilment of one of the most important domestic duties – economy. Burney clearly reveals that an education which nurtures feeling at the expense of critical judgment is no more suited to the domestic sphere than the wider public world.

⁴² Wollstonecraft, *Education of Daughters*, p. 140.

⁴³ Chapone, *Improvement of the Mind*, pp. 147, 149.

While there is little to tempt Camilla at her family home in the country, a move to Tunbridge and Southampton, where both the resorts and the people are more sophisticated, presents considerable difficulties for the heroine. Burney shows that while Camilla is not corrupted by materiality, she is incapable of running her own finances. At first, when a locket she admires is about to be raffled, she refuses to ‘hazard upon what was unnecessary her little allowance’. When tempted, she withdraws from the crowd with a ‘resolve not to look at it again’. Yet, when Mrs Arlbery ventures her money in the raffle, and assumes that Camilla will do the same, she finds it impossible to refuse, though nearly instantaneously regretting the loss of her half guinea. Often Camilla’s financial precariousness is the result of pressure to conform rather than a desire to purchase goods. While Camilla has no great interest in material objects, she lacks the steady principles required to stand by her decisions. Additionally, from the beginning of her trip with Mrs Arlbery she shows herself to be completely ignorant about money matters, and unable or unwilling to learn. As a result of abdicating this important responsibility, Camilla gradually incurs debts and finds she is beholden to characters she would otherwise not choose to associate with. Rather than learning from these experiences, the heroine, in the management of her money, continues to make the same mistakes over and over again. When early in her visit to Tunbridge, Mrs Arlbery spends extended time in a book shop, Camilla continues on to a ‘toy-shop’ where

She amused herself, till Mrs Arlbery came in search of her, in selecting such various little articles for purchase as she imagined would amount to about half a crown; but which were put up for her at a guinea.⁴⁴

Camilla is ‘disconcerted’ and recognises her mistake in not first ascertaining the cost of the items. At first the reader may believe an important lesson has been learned for ‘she determined, when next she entered a shop for convenience to put nothing apart as a buyer, till she had inquired its price’. However, Camilla’s lack of interest in material items lies at the root of the problem, for she pays little attention to her own purchases. Instead she proceeds from the toy-shop to the milliners, where she

⁴⁴ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 395.

immediately repeats her mistake. It is the habit of ‘imagining’ what an item might cost, rather than ascertaining the real price which leads Camilla to difficulties in both these shops. As time goes on the heroine is cheated by those more cunning than herself. However, Camilla makes this possible by refusing to take responsibility for her own finances. Burney does want our understanding of Camilla to take into account her young age, and she makes it clear that the heroine is not frivolous: ‘Camilla resisted all incitements to new dress and new ornaments which must not be judged by the aged, nor the retired’.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, she cannot withstand real temptation. Receiving an invitation to a ball and believing that if Edgar can only see her in the correct light it will end the estrangement between them, Camilla decides that she must have a new gown for the occasion. Only after the ball does she realise that she has no idea about the costs she has incurred. In the country Camilla had no temptation to spend money, and no bad example to follow, but when in more sophisticated company, lack of interest and the desire not to be different leads her into the same patterns of behaviour as those around her.

Because Camilla’s whole character is dominated by feeling, she is shown to be incapable of absorbing lessons from her limited experiences and as a result is unfit to take her place in society. Her sister Eugenia is equally incapable of dealing with the complexity of life but her vulnerability arises from another source. When Eugenia was a child, her uncle, Sir Hugh, was responsible both for her being infected with smallpox, which left her badly scarred, and for a fall which damaged a leg that never developed properly. To recompense her in the only way he knew how Sir Hugh made her his heir, and she resided with him at his estate. There she takes up the study of classical texts and leads a largely insular existence. Eugenia gains much peace of mind and enjoyment from her studies but it fails to equip her for the cruelties and deception she encounters in society:

Early absorbed in the study of literature and languages, under the direction of a preceptor who had never mingled with the world, her capacity had been occupied in constant work for the memory; but her judgment and penetration had been wholly unexercised.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 689.

⁴⁶ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 271.

Burney clearly felt that women pursuing intellectual studies risked isolating themselves from the world, with dangerous consequences. Not only is Eugenia unable to detect the lies told by Alphonso Bellamy, who claims to love her but only wants to marry her for her fortune, her education has cultivated in her a romantic sensibility. While Camilla's ready ability to feel is part of a natural disposition encouraged by her family, Eugenia's classical education has prepared her to be affected by declarations of romantic sentiment. She has been denied experience most of her life, so that when at fifteen she is exposed to the world she interprets it through the knowledge gathered in books.

Women were often advised to abandon large public gatherings in order to pursue more sober studies – although, as I have previously shown, neither the conduct books nor female periodicals recommended subjects which were too intellectually rigorous, or of too abstract a nature. Quiet solitary reading was supposed to bring long lasting happiness and improve character. Whilst not dismissing the importance of study, Burney shows in her novels the importance of reaching the correct balance between social contact and solitary learning. Unlike the ideal woman depicted in conduct books, Burney's heroines do not achieve serenity of spirit when they refuse to attend public gatherings. Instead they regret this social withdrawal. When Evelina, 'not in a humour to be amused', refuses to go out with Mrs Mirvan and Maria she admits 'and now I am sorry I did not accompany them, for I know not what to do with myself'.⁴⁷ More significantly, in *Cecilia*, the heroine, although not averse to parties, finds the continual social engagements of her friend unrewarding. Consequently, in perfect conduct-book fashion, she decides to retire to a combination of charitable works and a challenging course of study: 'And thus in the exercise of charity, the search of knowledge, and the enjoyment of quiet serenity in innocent philosophy passed the hours of Cecilia'.⁴⁸ This adheres to the course of behaviour recommended by many conduct-book writers of the period, particularly Hannah More. Yet, once again

⁴⁷ Burney, *Evelina*, pp. 30, 31.

⁴⁸ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 103.

Burney seems to reject the assumptions made by this literature. Cecilia, her most sensible and rational heroine, does not find satisfaction in this way of life, for when

the fervour of self-approbation lost its novelty, the pleasure with which her new plan was begun first subsided into tranquillity, and then into languor. To a heart formed for friendship and affection the charms of solitude are very short-lived; and though she had sickened of the turbulence of perpetual company, she now wearied of passing all her time by herself, and sighed for the company of society, and the relief of communication.⁴⁹

I would argue that Cecilia's dissatisfaction with this life makes an important point. It shows that social interaction is necessary to balance the more sober contemplative aspects of women's lives. Burney, then, remains ambiguous about what kind of education women should receive. While, on the one hand, her novels may imply that female learning should be based on practical experiences which prepare women for the difficulties they will have to negotiate in society, on the other hand, she is not willing to openly challenge an ideology of femininity which denies women control over their own lives.

Throughout this section I have been trying to show that while Burney's heroines, notably Evelina, engage in a number of experiences beyond the geographical boundaries of the home, conduct-book values, whether they are internalised by the female characters or externally imposed upon them by society, prevent them absorbing useful lessons from their contact with the wider world. Even Cecilia undergoes surprisingly little character progression within the pages of the novel because her mindset was formed by experiences which took place before the story begins. A move from the country to London actually signals a new restriction on her, proving that the geographical location of experience is less relevant than the opportunity it provides to think and act for oneself. Burney's depiction of naïve heroines reveals that even women embracing traditional notions of the feminine role have to interact with society and take responsibility for their actions, and that the education available to them was inadequate for this purpose. Jane Austen's novels

⁴⁹ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 131.

may take place in more limited environments but, in contrast, her heroines use their experiences to learn valuable lessons about the world in which they live. We will see that her work is dominated by the theme of education through experience. Austen indicates in her novels that she believed education was fundamental to the development of character in both men and women and that its objective should be to teach the individual how to think and act independently.⁵⁰

I will now examine four of Austen's novels - *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* - and show how her heroines modify their behaviour and take positive action in their own lives in the light of their experiences. Eliza Bennet, Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot do not have access to the same range of leisure activities as Evelina but opportunities to socialise allow them to assess their own behaviour and that of others while taking action according to their own judgment. In showing the mutually reinforcing qualities of reason and experience, Austen's work has much in common with Mary Wollstonecraft. In contrast to those who argued that women's direct participation in society should be limited, Wollstonecraft insists that this is essential to their basic education:

It is almost as absurd to attempt to make a youth wise by the experience of another, as to expect the body to grow strong by the exercise which is only talked of, or seen.⁵¹

Like the body, judgment must be exercised by the individual and understanding gained through personal experience. Instruction is not enough, 'laying precept upon precept' does not allow 'a child to acquire judgment itself'.⁵² Austen's heroines do not always judge correctly but they have enough presence of mind to act with caution, and their continued experience of the world corrects their misconceptions and widens their understanding.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Mansfield Park* where brother and sister, Mary and Henry Crawford are subject to the same faulty education and both prove thoughtless and inconstant.

⁵¹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 221.

⁵² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 221.

Austen demonstrates in her novels that experience is essential to the ‘worldly’ education that women required to function in society. She, perhaps, most clearly spells out the relevance of education for the formation of character in *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny and Edmund discuss at various points the effects of early influences on Mary Crawford’s dubious principles. At the end of the novel Thomas Bertram re-evaluates his daughters’ education, trying to work out where he went wrong. He comes to the conclusion that they were never taught the importance of governing their tempers; something they should have learned through daily experience:

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice.⁵³

He regrets that his daughters were never taught the ‘necessity of self-denial and humility’ and that they failed to consider the consequences of their own behaviour in society.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Bertram believes that the importance of education lies not just in learning to discriminate right from wrong but in controlling immediate desires, a concern which, as we saw in the second chapter, was shared by eighteenth-century educational literature and periodicals.

It is notable that none of Austen’s heroines excel at the feminine arts; instead their time is spent in thinking about the world they inhabit.⁵⁵ In *Emma* the heroine has to undergo a process of education which will improve her understanding of the world but it is not subject-based learning which will teach her these important lessons, for although she ‘has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old’ this is not significant to her development as an individual. From early in her life Emma has been exercising her own judgment and it is this experience which prepares her to navigate the social world. We are told that her governess had little authority

⁵³ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, [1814] 1998) p422.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 422.

⁵⁵ See Monaghan, ‘Jane Austen and the Position of Women’, p. 108.

over her and although ‘highly esteeming Miss Taylor’s judgment’ she was ‘directed chiefly by her own’.⁵⁶ Emma’s judgment may be faulty on a number of occasions but it is through making mistakes and feeling the consequences that she matures as an individual.⁵⁷ It was normal in the eighteenth century for feminine accomplishments such as singing, drawing or foreign languages to be criticised as inadequate or unsuitable subjects for female education. However, Austen does not stop here; she is equally unimpressed by the study of history and geography. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price proves herself completely ignorant of both subjects, unable to ‘put the map of Europe together’ or ‘repeat the chronological order of the Kings of England’. In contrast, the Bertram sisters excel at the memorising of facts. But Austen scorned an education which did not teach the recipient to consider their own behaviour. Despite ‘their promising talents and early information’, Maria and Julie were ‘entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility’.⁵⁸ It is this self-knowledge which stands at the centre of Austen’s ideal of education and bears much in common with Wollstonecraft’s appeal for women to be taught the importance of principles.⁵⁹

Austen nevertheless, does not dismiss the value of subject-based knowledge but rather shows that the relevance of this is its ability to enhance women’s understanding of their own direct experience of the world. Fanny, for instance, shows an appreciation of star-gazing, and suggests that a moral message may be absorbed from observing the natural world:⁶⁰

When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of nature were more attended

⁵⁶ Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1815] 2003) pp. 29, 5.

⁵⁷ Mellor notes that both Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet learn and mature as a result of the mistakes they have made. She argues that ‘all of Austen’s novels are novels of female education, novels in which an intelligent but ignorant girl learns to perceive the world more correctly and to understand more fully the workings of human nature and society’ (‘Why Women Didn’t like Romanticism: The Views of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley’ in Gene W Ruoff [ed], *The Romantics and Us* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990], p. 279).

⁵⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, pp. 15, 16.

⁵⁹ cf ‘As they submit without reason, they will, having no fixed rules to square their conduct by, be kind, or cruel, just as the whim of the moment directs’ (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 136).

⁶⁰ cf Eliza Haywood’s *Female Spectator* essays on science and the natural world. See previous chapter, section two on Haywood and science.

to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.⁶¹

Fanny does not memorise astronomical facts or star-charts, but rather uses nature as a road to self-knowledge and to greater contemplation of human nature.⁶² Similarly when she travels to Sotherton for a visit, she proves herself a keen observer of the world she lives in:

Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the road, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt.⁶³

Fanny's ability to reflect in this way is a sign that she has an independent mind, not reliant on others for improvement or entertainment.⁶⁴ However, she recognizes that an additional advantage may be gained by using such observations as subjects for debate with others. As I previously noted, conversation was considered at this time a most effective means for self-improvement, and, as we will see in the following chapter, Edmund's willingness to discuss a range of issues with Fanny is crucial to her development as an individual. It was common for eighteenth-century female novelists such as Burney, Edgeworth and Smith to create admirable heroines whose education revolved around observation of society and self-knowledge as opposed to empty facts memorised from books. Yet, Austen is, perhaps, the first writer to show women successfully utilising this knowledge in a way which allows them not only to

⁶¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 102.

⁶² Jane McDermid notes that 'the educational writings of conservative women even from the seventeenth century had been concerned not simply with the discreet subjects to be included in a young lady's education. Rather they were preoccupied with education in the widest sense for the improvement of the female mind and character. They believed that education should be a preparation for life, for which fashionable training in accomplishments so ill-equipped women' ('Conservative Feminism', p. 316)

⁶³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, pp. 72-3.

⁶⁴ cf Wollstonecraft 'the power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations, is the only acquirement, for an immortal being, that really deserves the name of knowledge' (*Rights of Woman*, p. 145).

maintain their own respectability but to have an influence on the world around them.⁶⁵

The ability to absorb new knowledge from experience of the world and then utilise it in some practical way, and the freedom to take action in one's life and then face the consequences of choices made, is central to the 'worldly' education advocated by proto-feminists such as Catharine Macaulay and Wollstonecraft. In her *Letters on Education* Macaulay describes 'experience' as the 'only efficacious instructor of man' and advises her readers that

It is only by an extensive knowledge of the relation of things, and the effects of causes, by which our reason becomes a more valuable gift than those instinctive powers which nature has bestowed on the brute.⁶⁶

Direct experience should lead to the assimilation of new knowledge and the reassessment of previous assumptions. In Austen's novels, all her heroines are shown to think about their contact with the world and even where they live in relatively confined circumstances, socialisation with friends and neighbours provides them with opportunities to observe and assess their own behaviour and that of others. According to Wollstonecraft, this direct contact with the world cannot be substituted with instruction because the latter brings only obedience, not understanding:

I have already remarked that we expect more from instruction than mere instruction can produce; for instead of preparing young people to encounter the evils of life with dignity, and to acquire wisdom and virtue by the exercise of their own faculties, precepts are heaped upon precepts and blind obedience required when conviction should be brought home to reason.⁶⁷

Rules on social etiquette do not teach women how to think and adapt when faced with difficult circumstances. Wollstonecraft notes that it is 'much easier to point out

⁶⁵ Hina Nazar argues that 'Austen "socialises" the domestic sphere, opening it out in the direction of a wider public sphere' ('The Imagination Goes Visiting: Jane Austen, Judgment and the Social', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 59:2 (2004): 152).

⁶⁶ Macaulay on Education, *Letters*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 213.

this or that mode of behaviour, than to set the reason to work'.⁶⁸ It is only through the exercise of the rational faculties that women develop the skills they require to fulfil their important duties and responsibilities regardless of the situation they find themselves in.

In *Pride and Prejudice* it is clear from the beginning of the novel that Elizabeth and Jane have the ability to think and judge for themselves, and that this is the result of the opportunities their active participation in society provides for them to observe and assess the behaviour of others.⁶⁹ Their reliance on their own judgment is such that they may discard the wishes of figures of authority in their life. We see Elizabeth and Jane deliberately ignore their mother's attempts to manipulate events when they feel she is being unreasonable. After Jane has recovered from her illness at Netherfield, Mrs Bennet refuses her daughters the use of the horses to return home in an obvious matchmaking attempt to prolong Jane's stay with Bingley. However, Elizabeth is keen to return home and Jane is convinced that this is the appropriate course of action; they achieve this goal by requesting and receiving the use of Bingley's carriage. In more important matters Elizabeth is equally capable of making rational decisions. She is quite clear, for example, that she will never marry Mr Collins despite her mother's obvious hopes to the contrary. While Elizabeth receives the author's approval for holding out for love, Austen is also sympathetic to women who decide to marry for security. Charlotte Lucas, having fewer prospects, is more than content to be Mrs Collins, and makes up for her husband's stupidity in the enjoyment of her home. Interestingly, Charlotte's role is not just one of passive acceptance; she actively decides to secure Mr Collins for herself and achieves this while conforming to the requirements of respectability. Elizabeth is also quite clear in her initial refusal of Darcy. Unlike Mr Collins's proposal, this comes as a complete surprise to her but she does not hesitate in her answer. Although her

⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 201.

⁶⁹ Prince notes that 'Austen's entire pedagogy is premised upon the difficulty of forming judgments without extensive observation, apt comparison, and careful inference' (*Philosophical Dialogue*, p. 242).

response is, at least partly, based on a misconception, it shows that women may be firm in their decisions.

In *Persuasion* Anne had yielded to family pressure to break off her engagement with Wentworth eight years before the novel begins. Although she regrets the loss and in hindsight feels ‘she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it’, she ultimately feels she could not have made any other decision in the circumstances she faced.⁷⁰ The wisdom of this judgment is confirmed by the fact that Austen’s novels are full of women living in poverty and disorder as a result of imprudent matches made without parental consent. After her marriage to Wickham, Lydia must continually borrow from her sisters; and in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny’s mother lives in poverty and chaos after an ill-advised marriage. The term ‘persuasion’ was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe the parental pressure on children to make a marriage that was socially and economically acceptable. In the conflict between parent and child about whether marriage should be made for love or money, it was generally agreed that a child should give up a match disapproved of by their parents, but should not be forced to marry against their inclination.⁷¹ This is the principle that governed Anne’s actions when she allowed herself to be guided by Lady Russell into ending her engagement with Wentworth. Interestingly, Austen shows that there was no absolutely right or wrong decision in those circumstances. Anne suggests that ‘it was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides’. Her behaviour is guided by a moral code and she insists that

I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience.⁷²

It is, therefore, Captain Wentworth who needs to reassess his decision not to renew his addresses to Anne once his affairs became more prosperous. Initially he believed

⁷⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 29.

⁷¹ Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion*, pp. 193, 195.

⁷² Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 198.

that Anne was too easily governed by others but over the course of the novel he begins to re-evaluate her qualities and ‘to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind’.⁷³ Anne’s judgment is shown to be sound and Austen demonstrates through her that when women are educated to think independently they are quite capable of taking decisions and action in their own lives.

Anne also uses her observation of life to make character judgments about those with whom she comes into contact. Rejecting the importance of titles, she describes ‘good company’ as ‘the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation’.⁷⁴ She has learned to judge people and value them according to their intelligence and sincerity. Anne is obviously describing the kind of people whom she finds it pleasant to spend time with and who may influence her understanding of the world, and be influenced in turn. Conversation and the exchange of opinions is an important part of women’s educational process and they must, therefore, be able to judge the worth of their conversational partners. Anne shows that she is prepared to look beyond the surface to assess real character, even overlooking momentary mistakes:

She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped.⁷⁵

Believing that there is dishonesty, or at least the potential for deceit in characters lacking spontaneity, Anne’s suspicion is raised by her cousin’s manners. Others may suspect an impending marriage but Anne is quite clear that if William proposes she will refuse. Women claiming a specifically feminine authority as guardian of morals had to exercise judgment, particularly in the appraisal of those they interacted with in society. Furthermore, after marriage, a husband had immense power over his wife’s

⁷³ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 195.

⁷⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 122.

⁷⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 131.

life. It was therefore essential that women had the ability to assess the character of future partners before making such an important commitment. Austen utilises the processes of socialisation in her novels to provide her heroines with a space in which they could interact with others and gain these skills. In doing so, she could also indicate viable strategies for negotiating these kinds of difficulties to the eighteenth-century reader.

Although there is little call for Fanny Price to take direct action in her own life, she is shown to be capable of independent thought throughout the novel. This strength of mind provides her with the resolution to uphold her principles and refuse to conform to the expectations of others.⁷⁶ While Sir Thomas's return from the West Indies rescues Fanny from pressure to appear in a home performance of 'Lovers Vows', she must rely upon herself to maintain her refusal to marry Henry Crawford. There is evidence to suggest she becomes increasingly confident in her own powers of reasoning; for while she fears that her refusal to comply smacks of ingratitude, she is convinced that if she is constant in her attitude to Crawford, her uncle will eventually recognise that her actions are the correct ones:

But she trusted, in the first place, that she had done right, that her judgment had not misled her; for the purity of her intentions she could answer; and she was willing to hope, secondly, that her uncle's displeasure was abating, and would abate further as he considered the matter.⁷⁷

I would like to suggest that Fanny's experiences throughout the novel prepare her for this moment – to have confidence that others will come round to her way of thinking, given time. Although Edmund has been hugely influential in her life, this relationship has taught her, not to acquiesce to his opinions, but rather to form her own. When Edmund looks for Fanny's approval to participate in the play, to prevent Mary from having to act with a stranger, she tells him 'I am sorry for Miss Crawford; but I am more sorry to see you drawn into what you had resolved against'.⁷⁸ Her

⁷⁶ Kirkham, *Jane Austen*, pp. 105-6.

⁷⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 293.

⁷⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 139.

penetrating observation also gives her an insight into Henry Crawford's character. When he flirts with her, she refuses to take him seriously. She has watched him toy with the emotions of both her cousins and reaches the conclusion that he wants 'to cheat her of her tranquillity as he had cheated them'.⁷⁹ Although Fanny's active participation in activities outside the home is less than that of Austen's other heroines, her experience of observing and judging the behaviour of others is just as relevant.

Emma's judgment may be faulty for much of the novel but her experience of making mistakes in society, and feeling the consequences of them, improves her understanding of the wider world. From the beginning she is an intelligent heroine, capable of independent thought and taking her responsibilities seriously. She cares for the poor and in a similar manner to Burney's Cecilia offers not only money but time and advice. However, her interaction with society is an amusement to her and the impact her actions have on others, for instance her manipulation of Harriet's thoughts and feelings, are only learned slowly over the course of the novel. Emma's first mistake is in advising Harriet to refuse a proposal of marriage from a man she cares about because she is attempting to bring about a more socially and financially advantageous match for her friend. Although warned by Mr Knightley that Mr Elton will never marry below himself, Emma remains deaf to everyone's opinion but her own. However, when Mr Elton makes his feelings clear to Emma, she realises that her own understanding was at fault: 'she had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made everything bend to it'.⁸⁰ She takes responsibility for the mistake and learns through her experiences the consequences of her actions:

The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 235.

⁸⁰ Austen, *Emma*, p. 106.

⁸¹ Austen, *Emma*, p. 108.

Emma learns, not only that she has been wrong about Mr Elton's feelings but that she has been wrong in principle. Although she may think about and imagine other matches – Harriet and Frank Churchill, for example – she does not attempt to manipulate others in this fashion again.

Emma must also learn from a number of mistakes she makes concerning Frank Churchill. Early in the novel we learn that she feels predisposed to like him because he is the son of Mr Weston, now husband to the woman who used to be her governess. She shows that her flights of fancy in matchmaking are not limited to her efforts for other people, when she admits, prior to even meeting him, that 'she had frequently thought...that if she *were* to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition'.⁸² Although she has little serious intention of marrying, she finds it pleasant to think that others may speculate and finds herself defending Churchill against Knightley's criticism that he has never found time to visit his father and his new wife. Yet, Emma herself judges Churchill's behaviour as not all that it should be. She notes that although a woman's dependent status might make it impossible for her to find time to visit relatives even for a few days that 'one can hardly conceive a young man not having it in his power to do as much'. When she does meet him, although finding him 'very good looking' and with a 'well-bred ease of manner', this does not prevent her judging him as frivolous when she hears he has gone to London for a haircut: 'There was certainly no harm in his travelling sixteen miles twice over on such an errand; but there was an air of foppery and nonsense in it which she could not approve'.⁸³ Emma, therefore, shows that even a predisposition to like does not make her blind to his faults, and in time she realises that she has no serious feelings for him. It is Emma's past experiences in society which have provided her with the skills and knowledge to navigate, without danger, this complicated relationship with Frank Churchill; and this experience, mistakes and all, in turn provides her with further opportunity to refine her judgment.

⁸² Austen, *Emma*, p. 94.

⁸³ Austen, *Emma*, p. 161.

I have been arguing that the education advocated by Austen is one in which individuals experience the world and learn by exercising their own judgment and reason. This cannot be learned from books and it cannot be implanted by others. Interestingly, Wollstonecraft argues, not only that this kind of knowledge cannot be attained through direct instruction, but that it should not be taught in this manner. She believes that the truth of human nature as frail and full of weaknesses and inconsistencies should be learned slowly over time so that it may be viewed in the context of a wider understanding of the world as a place mixed equally with good and evil: ‘the vain attempt to bring forth the fruit of experience, before the sapling has out thrown its leaves, only exhausts its strength and prevents its assuming a natural form’.⁸⁴

In the character of Elizabeth, I think we see Austen trying to balance emotional responses with the judgment gained through experience over time. When Bingley leaves Netherfield for London, without a word to Jane, and Charlotte marries the unworthy Mr Collins, the heroine of the novel is disgusted with her observations of life:

The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense.⁸⁵

Elizabeth struggles with her disappointment and must counter this with her awareness of the good in society, notably her sister’s consistently kind nature. Judgment is a valuable part of Elizabeth’s education, for although Jane has much to recommend her, Austen gently satirises her throughout the novel for her reluctance to think badly of anyone. Elizabeth must therefore learn to balance her capacity for critical judgment with a willingness to make allowances for others and I would argue that we see her achieving this by the end of the novel. For example, although not completely reconciled to Charlotte’s marriage, after seeing her friend settled and satisfied in her own home, she is more accepting. The change in Elizabeth’s

⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 211.

⁸⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 104.

assessment of the world is particularly marked after receiving Darcy's letter. Once she has acknowledged her own misjudgement of Wickham, she is more prepared to believe that Darcy's interference in his friend's romance was not deliberately evil but rather the consequence of misreading the depth of Jane's feelings. Elizabeth also finds upon observing her family's behaviour in the light of Darcy's remarks that she is more sympathetic to his contempt for them.

Austen's heroines are all exceptional women who take responsibility for their own decisions and gain a degree of control over their own lives. In doing so, they exert a positive influence on others and demonstrate the benefits to be gained in wider society by the practice of a more suitable system of female education which teaches the importance of principles and enables women to learn through direct experience. This point is further shown through the actions of a number of minor characters who make obvious the negative consequences of an inadequate female education. In particular, Austen dramatises the impact of badly educated mothers who abdicate responsibility for their household. In *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs Bennet's daughters are beyond her control, resulting in an impropriety of behaviour which makes the family the gossip of the neighbourhood and eventually leads to Lydia's downfall. In *Mansfield Park* the influence of loose morals and superficiality in the household can be traced to Lady Bertram's complete failure to exercise any kind of authority over her domain in her husband's absence, the consequences of which are felt by her ruined daughter at the end of the novel. The effects of defective household management may also be seen in the home of Fanny's parents in Portsmouth.

So far I have been emphasising the importance of experience in cultivating reason in Austen's heroines but I do not want to suggest that emotion is unimportant in the novels. Crucially, the education advocated by both Austen and Wollstonecraft is not about denying or repressing emotion, but about controlling it. In her initial misjudgement of Wickham and Darcy, Elizabeth's emotions are very much involved, and learning to monitor these is an important part of an educational process which cultivates the judgment. Wollstonecraft even argues that making mistakes improves the mind:

It would seem, that one reason why men have superior judgment, and more fortitude than women, is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds.⁸⁶

Feeling an attraction to Wickham and then having her perception of him corrected teaches Elizabeth the importance of caution and critical assessment. Yet, Austen by no means recommended the cultivation of sensibility; her heroines are made attractive by their affectionate natures but their emotions are genuine, not affected, and often strictly controlled to avoid worrying others, or indeed to avoid inflaming their own emotional state. Jane, for example, views it as a duty to struggle with her emotions:

Having never even fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and from her age and disposition, greater steadiness than first attachments often boast; and so fervently did she value his remembrance, and prefer him to every other man, that all her good sense, and all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets, which must have been injurious to her own health and their tranquillity.⁸⁷

Clearly Jane must battle with these feelings if she is to continue to fulfil her role in society but Austen is not condemning sensibility, only the indulgence of it at the expense of reason. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price must continually struggle with emotions which are too sensitive for the world, and, similarly, in *Persuasion* Anne Elliot is shown to suffer because she feels so deeply. After seeing Captain Wentworth again for the first time in eight years, she is upset and distracted but crucially she uses her rational faculties to control these emotions:

Soon, however, she began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less. Eight years, almost eight years had passed, since all had been given up. How absurd to be resuming the agitations

⁸⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 216.

⁸⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 173.

which such an interval had banished into distance and indistinctness!⁸⁸

Far from attempting to elevate her feelings, Anne identifies them as ‘absurd’, and as she has little hope that he will renew his addresses, can only attempt to downplay her own regret. While Anne finds old emotions resurfacing for much of the novel, notably when Wentworth demonstrates kindness towards her, she exerts control over her responses and proves to be the most effective character when it comes to coping with a crisis.⁸⁹ In her creation of strong, rational female characters, Austen shows that women may approach romantic entanglements in a reasonable way, and that simply because their emotions are involved does not mean they will lose all control.

In contrast to figures like Dr Gregory who insist that women should deny themselves all knowledge of an attraction until the man has first declared his feelings, Austen makes her heroines aware of their emotional state and shows that this is crucial to their ability to conduct themselves in a rational manner. When Elizabeth realises that Darcy still cares for her she carefully analyses her own emotions and realises that ‘hatred had vanished long ago’ and that respect ‘created by the conviction of his valuable qualities’ had grown in its place. When she also witnesses a change in his manner, a desire to please rather than intimidate others, Elizabeth comes to the conclusion that Darcy has listened to her criticism and recognised the validity of her complaints. Motivated by a desire to please, Darcy’s behaviour, importantly, indicates not only that he loves her, but that he respects her. Although convinced of Darcy’s feelings, Elizabeth still takes the time to consider her own. In Austen’s novels women do not just play a passive role, waiting to be chosen, they also choose in return. Elizabeth may take an active role, while remaining within the rules of propriety, in her own romance. It is up to her to assess her feelings and then decide whether she wants to ‘employ the power’ she has to encourage his ‘addresses’.

⁸⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 53.

⁸⁹ See for example when Wentworth rescues Anne from her youngest nephew, who is misbehaving, by lifting him from her back; and also when he realises she is tired walking and arranges for her to go home by carriage with his sister (Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 69, 77).

Like Burney's Cecilia, Elizabeth may, by acknowledging her emotions, control not only her outward behaviour, but, to an extent, her own emotional vulnerability.

Although, in the first part of the novel, she is obviously attracted to Wickham, and has every indication that her feelings are returned, she continues to behave in a rational manner. She tells her aunt that Wickham is 'the most agreeable man I ever saw' but that she 'will not be in a hurry to believe myself his first object'.⁹⁰

Although Elizabeth continues to believe Wickham's lies about Darcy, she is clearly in control of her feelings and actions, for she is not devastated by his engagement to another woman:

His apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else. Elizabeth was watchful enough to see it all, but she could see it and write of it without material pain.⁹¹

I would argue that Elizabeth's emotional awareness is crucial to her composure at this point. A comparison with Evelina's experience and education indicates the relevance; for while Burney's heroine is encouraged to cultivate her sensibility, while paradoxically repressing and denying emotional attachments, Elizabeth cultivates her reason but acknowledges her emotions and uses her powers of rationality to control them. Whereas Evelina is so overawed by her feeling for Lord Orville that her guardian insists she must not be in his company, Elizabeth's behaviour allows for the possibility of a relationship developing. Crucially, though, propriety also plays a part in facilitating the heroine's need for space to assess the situations she finds herself in. As Hina Nazar notes, 'propriety gives us the leeway to think before we act; it sustains the priority of invisible private deliberation over action that is visible to social others'.⁹² Elizabeth's ability to socialise with the opposite sex within the bounds of propriety should be viewed as part of a process of assessing the potential of relationships. She finds herself attracted to Colonel Fitzwilliam, for example, but takes an early warning that he must make a financially advantageous marriage. Elizabeth may enjoy the company of an attractive,

⁹⁰ Austen *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 111-12.

⁹¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 115.

⁹² Nazar, 'Imagination Goes Visiting', p. 147.

intelligent man without being overwhelmed by her emotions. Contrary to the advice in conduct books, this is not a danger to either her peace of mind or reputation, and she still goes on to make a suitable match with Darcy.

The necessity of balancing reason and sensibility can be seen at its clearest in the caring roles that women have to perform. Sensibility may aid women in the traditional task of caring only if it is balanced by the capacity for logical thought and action. When Anne's nephew falls and hurts himself, she takes charge of a difficult situation:

It was an afternoon of distress, and Anne had every thing to do at once - the apothecary to send for - the father to have pursued and informed - the mother to support and keep from hysterics - the servants to control - the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe.⁹³

Two things are clear; first that women need to cultivate reason to fulfil their duty of care, and second the consequences if they do not. Anne's sister, Mary, the mother of the hurt child is not only useless but adds to the burden of care. She is unable to control her emotions and responds, in a similar manner to Burney's Camilla, to momentary sensations. Even once Mary recovers from her initial shock she claims her emotions make her less able to care for her son:

I am sure, I am more unfit than any body else to be about the child. My being the mother is the very reason why my feelings should not be tried. I am not at all equal to it.⁹⁴

Mary's inability to cope is the result of an education system which encouraged women to believe they were weak and at the mercy of their feelings. As we saw in the first chapter, James Fordyce envisaged the cultivation of emotion in women as central to their role in life. But while he describes the tenderness of women's feelings – a mother overcome by pride and affection for her daughter, or reduced to tears by 'virtue in distress' – he does not indicate how these emotions may be

⁹³ Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 47-8.

⁹⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 50.

actively used for the benefit of self and others.⁹⁵ In contrast Hester Chapone reminds her readers in *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* that

Our feelings were not given us for our ornament, but to spur us on to right actions – Compassion, for instance, was not impressed upon the human heart, only to adorn the fair face with tears, and to give an agreeable languor to the eyes – it was designed to excite our utmost endeavours to relieve the sufferer.⁹⁶

There is certainly an implied criticism of works such as Fordyce's which encourage the display of emotion as a mere attraction. Writing more than thirty years later, Jane West takes a position in *Letters to a Young Lady* that stands somewhere between these two writers. She argues that sensibility is essential to women's ability to fulfil their caring role:

Our services are most valuable, and consequently most requisite, in the dreary season of distress; whether it be occasioned by adversity or disease; whether the storm proceed from false friends or secret enemies, or from the imprudence or guilt of the sufferer; whether it affect the fortune, the reputation, or the person of him with whom our fate is interwoven; the faithful wife, the tender mother, the dutiful daughter or the affectionate sister, must still be the guardian angel to bring the cup of consolation.⁹⁷

While fortitude of mind would be required to bear this burden of care, it is a passive duty which West allots women, and one where their primary role is that of acceptance rather than judgment. Chapone, while acknowledging that 'the same degree of active courage is not to be expected in woman as in man', envisages a practical use of feminine sensibility directed at caring and supporting others and launches a criticism against those who claim their affections are too tender for active use. She exclaims 'how often have I heard that selfish weakness, which flies from the sight of distress, dignified with the name of tenderness!'⁹⁸ Austen shows women

⁹⁵ Fordyce, *Sermons*, pp. 273, 15-6, 185.

⁹⁶ Chapone *Improvement of the Mind*, p. 72.

⁹⁷ West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, vol 1, p. 75.

⁹⁸ Chapone, *Improvement of the Mind*, p. 72.

putting their emotion to good use, to inspire action, while controlling its excesses. Her heroines must balance sense with sensibility to fulfil their role in society.

As I previously noted, although Austen shares many similar views with Wollstonecraft about the importance of cultivating reason in the female sex, she does not join her in the appeal for women to be given the right to work. She assumes that the lives of most women will continue to revolve around the home and that they have important responsibilities to fulfil there. Caring for the sick, for instance, is defined as one such role, requiring women to exercise their rational faculties. I have already noted the similarity between Louisa's fall at the Cobb and the suicide scene in *Cecilia*; notably, though, in this episode Anne takes the active, caring role that was denied to Cecilia:

Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried at intervals to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth.⁹⁹

The word 'instinct' may appear to put Anne in a traditional role of woman guided by feeling, but this is clearly reinforced by reason. I believe that Austen is deliberately showing that the two are not mutually exclusive, and that indeed they must be balanced for women to adequately fulfil the domestic role. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth must also balance sense and sensibility when it comes to caring for her sister at Netherfield. In the situation Elizabeth finds herself in, independence of mind is required, for she must care for Jane and assess the seriousness of her sister's illness. Austen demonstrates that women require rational thought and logic to cope with the demands of their traditional role as carers; her implied criticism of female education does not indicate a desire for a radically altered social structure.

Like Wollstonecraft, Austen shows a concern about women being guided by momentary impulses and she similarly attributes the thoughtlessness of many women to education and environment rather than inherent gender traits. Where women are

⁹⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 92-3.

not taught to think about the consequences of their choices and behaviour, they cannot be expected to be governed by anything other than the impulse of the moment. It is this that Chapone warns her readers to guard against

When instead of regulating our actions by reason and principle, we suffer ourselves to be guided by every slight and momentary impulse of inclination, we shall, doubtless, appear so variable and inconstant that nobody can guess by our behaviour to-day, what may be expected from us to-morrow; nor can we ourselves tell whether what we delighted in a week ago, will now afford us that least degree of pleasure.¹⁰⁰

Women ungoverned by principles cannot expect to be happy or consistent. In *Mansfield Park* we clearly see the consequences of a faulty education in the character of Maria who becomes engaged to a man she does not love because he is rich. Her inclination for riches satisfied, she is delighted with the match until Henry Crawford comes along. Although he clearly has no real feelings for her, she is persuaded to leave her husband for him, but it is her own attraction, which she makes no effort to control, which accounts for this choice. Mary Crawford, although naturally intelligent is similarly guided by momentary sensation; her attention can only be grabbed by that which immediately affects her, and she seems incapable of any form of introspection.

In contrast to Mary, Fanny relates education to her experience of the world. Interestingly, while many of the things which Fanny takes an interest in have a relation to subject-based learning – geology, geography, history, science – she learns about these, not from books, but from participation in society, where she also learns important lessons about her place in the world. I would suggest that Austen only condemns an academic education when it separates the student from society. Interestingly, in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth is faced with the necessity of socialising at Netherfield during Jane's illness, she is uncomfortable but does not use the excuse of reading, when it offers itself, to isolate herself from the company. Instead she finds herself putting her book down to observe their behaviour, and I

¹⁰⁰ Chapone, *Improvement of the Mind*, p. 140.

would argue that exercising her judgment to assess the conduct of others is an important part of her 'worldly' education.¹⁰¹

We may therefore conclude that Austen's attitude to experience is radically different from Burney's. While the latter maintains her heroine's innocence at the expense of their reason and understanding, Austen regards experience as an integral part of the learning process. It is by participating in society, that Austen's heroines improve their judgment. She shows that women may learn through interaction with others while remaining within the boundaries of respectability, and further that this educational process is fundamental to the fulfilment of their traditional role in life. In the portrayal of her heroines, Austen illustrates that the cultivation of reason did not inevitably lead to a lack of caring skills in women. On the contrary she demonstrates that it is by balancing feeling with reason that their emotions may be put to their most practical use.

¹⁰¹ Nazar notes the importance of the 'culture of the drawing room' in Austen's work: 'this culture includes not only the constraints of politeness but also training in "attention" to others: learning to see others as participants in dialogue, representative of standpoints that are not identical to one's own but that are productively engaged in determining one's own standpoint' ('Imagination Goes Visiting', p. 173).

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONVERSATION, MISCOMMUNICATION AND SILENCE IN THE NOVELS OF BURNEY AND AUSTEN

In the previous chapter I noted the important link between experience and action, and demonstrated that the capacity to judge and act was central to the personal development, or lack thereof, in Burney's and Austen's heroines. Clearly, the ability to act is closely connected with the ability to speak. Expressing an opinion is an assertion of self which has the potential to influence listeners, and engaging in debate with others involves an exchange of information which provides opportunities to refine the judgment. While the benefits of experience may be most obviously gained through direct action, communication with others may provide a practical, if vicarious knowledge of the world. In this chapter I will be considering the importance of communication skills for Burney's and Austen's female characters. We will see that the knowledge Austen's heroines assimilate through conversation with others aids their progression towards becoming rational, socially responsible adults. In contrast, communication is shown to be problematic throughout Burney's novels; by conforming to an ideology which silences them, her heroines are rendered impotent, unable to exercise control over their own lives.

Throughout this thesis I have been indicating the contradictory expectations eighteenth-century women faced in their lives. Nowhere is this clearer than when considering questions about women and communication. As we have seen, there was widespread debate in the eighteenth century about the benefits to be gained from effective communication practices. The middle classes viewed polite conversation as an important way to bind society together, and share common values and concerns. Early periodicals such as the *Spectator* argued that intelligent conversation encouraged toleration of others' views and smoothed over differences between those with competing interests. Additionally, conversation was recognised as a valuable educational tool – a way to gain access to knowledge and refine one's opinions

through interaction with others. Yet, the part women were to play in the ideology of conversation remains ambiguous and unclear. Conduct books and histories of civilisation argued that the middle-class woman could exert a civilising influence on the behaviour of men and awarded a special significance to female conversation on this basis.¹ This approval was not based, however, on a belief in the intellectual equality of the sexes; the role of women was envisaged as facilitating rather than contributing to meaningful debate.

Across a range of literature at this time, the distinction between the influence exerted by a delicate young lady's silence and an intelligent woman's deliberate speech is blurred. Philip Carter notes that eighteenth-century commentators understood women's refining influence to work in two ways; firstly, the basic belief that women were more sensitive and less argumentative than men demanded that, in the presence of the opposite sex, male speakers tempered their conversation. Secondly, female company was valued for improving an otherwise rougher and more aggressive masculine personality: 'exposure to women's compassion, sensitivity and eloquence would, it was hoped, stimulate admiring men to adopt equivalent characteristics'.² The writers of periodicals, conduct books, novels and philosophical works articulated a common conviction that men could acquire an ease and charm in their manners by associating with the opposite sex. Interestingly Cohen demonstrates, in her study of gender and national identity in the eighteenth century, that a familiarity with French was also believed to polish the manners, producing the same benefits as those gained in the company of women. She notes that the 'French tongue was held to be soft, harmonious and elegant, and the "vivacity" of discourse the French displayed deemed very pleasing'.³ However, a similar ambiguity was felt about the effects of both French and feminine manners on the male character. Cohen shows that French was constructed as feminine and frivolous in contrast to the 'strong and masculine' English language, characterised as honest, simple and even taciturn. The conversation of the middle-class Englishman, then, was meant to be relevant and

¹ Clarke notes that 'women, represented for these purposes as the 'politer sex', helped spread civility through their skills in the conversational arts' (*Woman of Letters*, p. 283).

² Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 68-69.

³ Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 3.

purposeful as well as agreeable. This left female conversation, valued for being light and amusing, in a precarious position because these were precisely the qualities for which it also attracted criticism.

Conflicting opinions about women and their conversation were not new in the eighteenth century. As early as the sixteenth century, courtesy books, such as Castiglione's *Courtier*, found that they had to negotiate contradictory assumptions about female nature when they argued that women could exert a beneficial influence on men through their conversation. As Ann Rosalind Jones notes, an explicit equation between women's speech and sexuality had conspired to silence women but once a conduct-book writer 'admitted the presence of women at court and in other masculine gathering places, he faced the contradiction between longstanding discourses that condemned the public woman as whore and the courtly code, which constructed women as decorative and inspiring adjuncts to men'.⁴ In eighteenth-century England, women faced similar contradictory expectations, which elevated female conversation while simultaneously attempting to silence women. Yet, at least on the surface, the eighteenth-century ideal of conversation was more compatible with expectations of femininity, being characterised by the traditionally feminine virtues of politeness and deference, intended to bring men together – not set them apart as with the competitive discursive skills of the renaissance courtier. While willingness to accommodate one's self to the views of others was important for both sexes, this quality, along with respectability, was particularly emphasised in female conversation. As we will see, those eighteenth-century women who utilised conversation with greatest success did so by complying with strict criteria of politeness.

Nevertheless, in some quarters doubt remained over whether women should be allowed to speak at all. After all, many of the benefits of female conversation could be gained simply by a feminine presence, and silence could display delicacy whilst

⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Nets and Bridles: Early Modern Conduct Books and Sixteenth-Century Women's Lyrics,' in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (eds), *The Ideology of Conduct*, (London: Methuen, 1987) p. 43.

preserving unblemished reputations. It is this ideology which Burney's novels both mirror and question. As I have previously indicated, Burney was heavily influenced by conduct books of the time, but although, on the surface, she may seem to accept the desirability of feminine reticence, her novels challenge this assumption by indicating the consequences that an ideology of silence had for women. As we will see, Evelina and Camilla's compliance with expectations of silence leave them unable to function in public. In contrast, Cecilia communicates in a straightforward and logical manner. However, Burney shows that a society which habitually restricts the free expression of women loses the ability to hear them. Consequently, this heroine also finds that her ability to learn and exercise a positive influence on wider society is constrained by the incompatible expectations placed upon eighteenth-century women.

In his history of the rise of politeness in eighteenth-century society, Carter argues that 'as the crucial means for uniting and engaging friends or strangers, conversation was recognised as being central to the polite gentleman'.⁵ Yet, good communication did not rely on logic alone. Sensibility and sensitivity were considered important in both men and women as it was believed that one should be able to empathise with visible emotions in others. Nevertheless, while heightened susceptibility was approved of for women, there was an acknowledgement that for men excessive sensibility hampered the ability to take action in society. Carter notes that although the 'man of feeling' received some approval, this was 'seldom expected to blur gender identities'; the male sex remained associated with traditional masculine virtues such as reason, fortitude and self-command.⁶ It was acknowledged, then, that the ability to demonstrate visible emotion, and empathise with it in others, could not adequately replace more direct and logical means of communication. Yet conduct books advocated exactly this for women. In a *Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, Dr Gregory denies women the right to participate in conversation. He tells his female readers:

⁵ Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 62.

⁶ Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 101.

This modesty, which I think so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one. People of sense and discernment will never mistake such silence for dulness. One may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable. The expression in the countenance shews it, and this never escapes an observing eye.⁷

Although Burney's heroines are all quiet, delicate and modest, following the advice of patriarchal figures, the investigation of women's enforced silence which takes place in her novels suggests, as we will see, that she was aware of the inherent contradiction in conduct books, such as those written by Fordyce and Gregory; that communication was deemed good for men but bad in women.

The difficulties which this cultural prescription could create in the lives of women are evident throughout Burney's work. I will begin by considering her first novel, *Evelina*, where, as we will see, the heroine proves to be completely incapable of directly articulating her thoughts. Through her letters, Evelina provides a satirical narrative of her experiences, proving to the reader that she is an intelligent and witty heroine. Yet, when Lord Orville meets her at a private ball and tries to engage her in conversation she finds it impossible to respond.⁸ Despite expressing admiration that Orville's 'remarks upon the company in general were so apt, so just, so lively', Evelina is only able to listen 'in silent embarrassment.' After several attempts by Lord Orville to include her in the conversation, she writes:

It now struck me, that he was resolved to try whether or not I was capable of talking upon *any* subject. This put so great a constraint upon my thoughts, that I was unable to go further than a monosyllable, and not even so far, when I could possibly avoid it⁹

If the perfect conduct book heroine must be modest and silent, this is the logical outcome; an inability to speak even when one is desperate to do so. Yet, although

⁷ Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, p.28.

⁸ Simons notes that Evelina outwardly 'conforms to the masculine ideal of womanhood: she is the embodiment of the pallid courtesy book figure created by male fantasy – childlike, dutiful, modest and limp. But by establishing the narrative in Evelina's consciousness, Fanny Burney is able to show her simultaneously as perceptive, independent, critical and mentally alert' (*Fanny Burney*, p. 50).

⁹ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 26.

Orville initially describes Evelina as a ‘poor, weak girl’, her silent modesty convinces him of her artlessness and true delicacy. The hero of this novel, then, seems to subscribe to a conservative ideology insofar as he doesn’t want a sparkling conversationalist for a wife. Indeed, throughout *Evelina* empathising with the heroine’s visible emotions gives Orville his only insight into her thoughts. Evelina seems to embody the qualities expected in a virtuous young lady, and it is this which convinces Orville that she is the woman he wants to marry.

This inability to communicate directly with others extends even to those with whom Evelina claims to be most comfortable. After receiving an inappropriate and offensive letter, which she believes to be from Orville, she returns home to her guardian at Berry Hill, in low spirits. Villars guesses that she is unhappy but even once he convinces her to reveal her secret, she finds it impossible to break her silence. The articulate letter writer is unable to string two sentences together, and Villars must attempt to guess the nature of the problem. Eventually, still unable to communicate in a rational manner, Evelina gives him the letter. Partly, of course, the problem revolves around what was considered appropriate knowledge for young ladies. Evelina cannot admit, even to herself, that she is sexually attracted to Orville. She barely understands her own distress over the letter she has received. Instead of words, Evelina’s visible emotions must speak for her, often of feelings of which she has no understanding. Throughout the novel, the heroine’s inner turmoil is revealed by her involuntary physical reactions; the tears well in her eyes, she stammers, blushes and shakes with emotion. These signs are read by the male characters of the novel, in the absence of direct speech, as proof of her delicacy of feeling and emotional state. Yet eighteenth-century women were often warned that these visible emotional responses also revealed too much. The *Lady’s Magazine* insists that

Prudence requires that a great veil be drawn over the passions, and though a lady may feel one, yet she should cautiously hide it to prevent men from observing, who generally read quickly the eyes, and discover it sooner than is expected.¹⁰

¹⁰ *The Lady’s Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* (London: printed for G Robinson) January 1776, p. 25.

Women, then, are advised not only to remain silent but to guard against expression in less direct ways. Again, I think this must be related to the question of appropriate knowledge, for stoicism was not generally considered attractive or desirable in the female sex. As we have seen, conservative commentators often approvingly associated women with the display of emotion and feeling. Only when it came to romantic attachments were women expected to conceal their emotions. Insisting that young ladies should hide such feelings not only from others, but from themselves, Dr Gregory advises his readers:

Though a woman has no reason to be ashamed of an attachment to a man of merit, yet nature, whose authority is superior to philosophy, has annexed a sense of shame to it. It is even long before a woman of delicacy dares avow to her own heart that she loves: and when all the subterfuges of ingenuity to conceal it from herself fail, she feels a violence done both to her pride and to her modesty.¹¹

As the perfect conduct book heroine fulfilling these values, Evelina cannot admit even to herself that she has romantic feelings for Orville. When her friend Maria suggests she is harbouring an attraction, Evelina claims that ‘I am unconscious of the weakness you suspect’.¹² Even once the misunderstanding between Orville and Evelina has been cleared up, she is unable to define her feelings until Villars points them out to her. He warns her that ‘every chance for your future happiness may depend upon the conduct of the present moment’.¹³ To develop an attachment when the gentleman has not first openly declared his own feelings was not just completely inappropriate, it was regarded as dangerous. If a woman openly revealed her feelings for a man that she did not ultimately marry, it could destroy all hopes of a future relationship. Conduct books warn that future husbands want to be the first and only object of their wife’s affection. Yet women were kept in ignorance of their own feelings, rather than being armed with the knowledge necessary to avoid unfortunate romantic entanglements. Not only does Villars believe Evelina to be incapable of

¹¹ Gregory, *Father’s Legacy*, p. 67.

¹² Burney, *Evelina*, p. 216.

¹³ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 254.

sound judgment on her own behalf, once he guesses her feelings for Orville, he insists that she flee his company, denying the couple any possibility for a relationship to develop.

Even contemporaries recognised that the reserve insisted upon in young ladies would thwart many potentially happy marriages. In *Virtue in Humble Life*, a conduct book consisting of a dialogue between a father and daughter, Jonas Hanway tells us:

It is prudent and modest in young women, to decline the discovery of their thoughts, when it is of no use to make them known: but reserve hath prevented the union of thousands who would have gladly met; and after a little knowledge of each other's humour, been happy together¹⁴

However, historian, Amanda Vickery, believes that the lives of eighteenth century women were not so confined as Burney's novels would suggest. In *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*, courtship is a painful process but Vickery suggests that in many cases 'courtship was the supreme adventure for an agreeable young lady with a genteel fortune. Perhaps for the only time in her life, a woman was the absolute centre of attention, and often the protagonist in a thrilling drama'. Nevertheless, these young ladies had to adhere to a balancing act: 'Many walked a tightrope of romantic excitement: imprudent encouragement smacked of filial disobedience and could end in disinheritance and disaster, but a fastidious decorum might dishearten a suitor and lead to aching disappointment'¹⁵ Despite her 'fastidious decorum' Evelina achieves a happy ending in Burney's first novel. However, as we will see, in *Camilla* the heroine who has to perform this balancing act remains tortured with uncertainty for most of the novel.

I have been suggesting that Evelina internalised many conduct-book values, making it difficult for her to communicate effectively. However, the heroine of Burney's first novel in part overcomes her discursive difficulties through the epistolary method

¹⁴ Quoted in Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth Century Women: An Anthology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984) p. 78.

¹⁵ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 82.

of narration. Indirect communication through letter makes it considerably easier for the normally reticent Evelina to articulate a range of thoughts, feelings and opinions.¹⁶ So far I have been emphasising the forces which conspire to silence women but Burney finds space within the format of the letter for her heroine to communicate her enjoyment and share her experiences of London life. Her description of seeing Garrick perform on her first night in London reveals an exuberance and desire for new experiences. She admits to Villars ‘I would have given the world to have had the whole play acted over again’. Furthermore, while London’s extensive leisure industry provides opportunities for Evelina to display her good taste, her commentary also indicates an enjoyment of more shallow amusements:

We sat in the pit, where every body was dressed in so high a style, that, if I had been less delighted with the performance, my eyes would have found sufficient entertainment from looking at the ladies.¹⁷

Evelina’s appreciation of the opera demonstrates her refined sensibility, but her comments on the ladies’ dress shows that she is enjoying observing all aspects of London society. Nevertheless, Evelina’s freedom to communicate through letter is still constrained by conduct-book values. She must, for instance, carefully differentiate between those experiences which have gained her approval, and those which shock her fine sensibilities. When she again visits Drury-Lane, this time to see a play by William Congreve, she describes the event to Villars:

The play was *Love for Love* and though it is fraught with wit and entertainment, I hope I shall never see it represented again, for it is so extremely indelicate, - to use the softest word I can, - that Miss Mirvan and I were perpetually out of countenance, and could neither make any observations ourselves, nor venture to listen to those of others.¹⁸

¹⁶ Greenfield notes that ‘although silenced by Orville and Willoughby when she is with them, Evelina regains linguistic mastery by describing these men in her prose. In her letters she does all the talking – she controls the representation of both Orville and Willoughby (as well as everybody else) and even the accounts of her verbal effacement are ironically offset by the fact that she is writing the description’ (“Oh Dear Resemblance of Thy Murdered Mother”, p. 309).

¹⁷ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 65.

Evelina's response mirrors conduct-book warnings about comedies; Dr Gregory advises that 'there are few English comedies a lady can see, without a shock to delicacy'.¹⁹ However, there is a basic contradiction in the expected response from women. For if they do not respond, they are suspected of being comfortable and familiar with the play's indelicate content, yet, if they do respond, they reveal a knowledge they should not have. Harman notes that it was '*knowingness* not innocence' which made Burney herself embarrassed. She points to Burney's reaction to traveller Richard Twiss, who, after conversing with Dr Burney on the subject of prostitutes in Naples, asked if she knew what he meant by 'ragazza'; she could barely respond 'lest he should conclude that in understanding *that*, I knew much *more*'.²⁰ In Beaumont's *Young Ladies Magazine*, Mrs Affable, similarly worries about what knowledge her pupils will be perceived to have:

the gentlemen who see you at such plays, can they believe, that you don't understand what is said? Will they not on the contrary pretend a just right to entertain you with such discourses as you hear with pleasure from the actors.²¹

Evelina must remain silent in such social situations, hoping that her outward appearance conveys both her discomfort and her lack of understanding. Indeed her letter manages to convey her affront without providing any details of what was so offensive. Even in her epistolary communication, then, Evelina is caught between contradictory requirements. While she must communicate her disapproval, anything but silence indicates a knowledge she should not have.

Nevertheless, I would argue that Evelina's letters constitute a space which not only allows but actually requires the heroine to formulate opinions about her experiences. Throughout the course of the novel, we see Evelina exercise independent thought and successfully balance an enjoyment of London life with a sceptical assessment of its more shallow and frivolous elements. For example, although Conduct-book writers

¹⁹ Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, p. 58.

²⁰ Harman, *Fanny Burney*, p. 68.

²¹ Beaumont, *Young Ladies Magazine*, vol 1, p. 58.

are quick to criticise women who pay too much attention to fashion, this does not stop Evelina from describing with delight the range of fabric colours available in London shops. However, dress does not dominate Evelina's attention and often her interest in the subject revolves around her amusement at the elaborate behaviour of others. The self-importance of men selling women's fashions, for example, appealed to her sense of humour:

But what most diverted me was, that we were more frequently served by men than by women; and such men! so finical, so affected! they seemed to understand every part of a woman's dress better than we do ourselves; and they recommended caps and ribbands with an air of so much importance, that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them.²²

Much like Burney herself, the heroine appears to have a comic genius, and the knack for drawing out the humour of some of the more ridiculous elements of social convention and behaviour.²³ Yet, Evelina may only perform in this way when there is no direct social contact.

Although this heroine requires the mediation of the letter to overcome an ideology of silence, not all eighteenth-century women were so constrained. I wish at this point to emphasise how complicated conversational expectations were for eighteenth-century women. While they may have faced pressure at one level to be silent, women were also central to an ideal of socialisation.²⁴ The example of famous bluestocking, Hester Thrale, who regularly hosted dinners with Samuel Johnson as a guest, clearly demonstrates that women could be admired for their conversational skills. Thrale's ability to develop these skills was enhanced by the encouragement she received in her youth from the scholar and lawyer Dr Arthur Collier and through her later contact with Johnson. The witty and entertaining dialogues enjoyed by Thrale and

²² Burney, *Evelina*, p. 22.

²³ Burney may also be covertly suggesting that such work was really within the remit of women. Traditionally these industries had employed women who now found themselves unemployed, with little hope of future respectable employment. While Burney would not openly engage in politics, she could subtly suggest the inappropriateness of men working in this area.

²⁴ Vickery notes that 'at the heart of polite sociability was conversation. The whole purpose of conversation was positively to please other people, yet the art had to be well-judged' (*Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 212).

Johnson at social occasions were legendary. As Harman notes ‘the ease and relaxation of the relationship gave the Streatham table-talk its peculiar sparkle, and if other guests seldom got a word in edgeways, it may be because they were far too busy being entertained’.²⁵ We see, then, that the part of sparkling conversationalist was within the bounds of respectability for women in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, Thrale’s mother never approved of her social prominence, and made continued efforts to restrict her daughter to the home and to the duties of caring for her children.²⁶ Yet, even for those who embraced more traditional roles for women, communication skills were essential, especially as a common method for teaching children within the home. Cohen has argued that ‘social conversations promoted the development of a much more sophisticated and even rigorous mental training of children than has hitherto been acknowledged to have taken place in domestic settings’.²⁷ This point would appear to be confirmed by the educational plan drawn up by Jane Griffin in 1811, in which she assumes that conversation is integral to intellectual endeavour: ‘A frequent recollection & repetition of our intellectual possessions is the most effectual method of fixing them in the memory, & perhaps few things will tend more to this end than the making our daily acquisitions in knowledge, the subject of familiar conversation’.²⁸ In contrast to Burney’s representation of *Evelina*, many eighteenth-century female writers consistently promoted positive images of middle-class women exerting their influence through polite and intelligent conversation. Claiming the domestic sphere as the proper arena of action for the female sex enabled women to speak with moral authority about the duties to be fulfilled by wives, mothers and mistresses of households. Additionally, while overt socialisation was often disapproved of, the home was increasingly viewed as a social venue, requiring women as hostesses, not only to exercise judgment, but to share thoughts and opinions in ways which made important

²⁵ Harman, *Fanny Burney*, p. 120.

²⁶ See, for example, the lecture Thrale receives about the education of her daughter: ‘It was now Time to *teach* the little Girl my Mother said, & bring her forward as She had done by me; I was reproached with want of Attention to my Daughter, & told that I had now – *or ought* to have, something to amuse me without visiting or fooling at Places of publick Resort, like fashionable Wives and Parents (Katharine C Balderston (ed), *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale 1776-1809* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942] vol 1, p. 308).

²⁷ Cohen, ‘Familiar Conversations’, p. 102.

²⁸ Russell, ‘An Improper Education?’, p. 254.

contributions to the greater good of society by upholding moral standards.²⁹

Consequently, there was an acknowledgement that cultivating the kind of sensibility which silenced Evelina was an abdication of responsibility.

The contradiction between Evelina's confident rhetorical self-presentation in her letters and her inability to articulate her thoughts when in direct social contact with others is indicative of the conflicting demands imposed on women at this time. However, Mrs Selwyn, epitomising the stereotypical figure of the masculine woman, manages to escape these limitations. This formidable female character proves that it is possible for women to exert control over their own lives and openly displays her intelligence whilst practicing her wit on others. However, although she is a respectable character with a well-defined sense of morality, Mrs Selwyn does not receive the heroine's approval:

She is extremely clever; her understanding, indeed may be called *masculine*; but, unfortunately, her manners deserve the same epithet; for, in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex, she has lost all the softness of her own.³⁰

This description is remarkably similar to conduct-book warnings to young ladies about the consequences of pursuing inappropriate knowledge or cultivating wit at the expense of delicacy. Evelina must clear herself of all suspicion of such inappropriately 'masculine' behaviour. Yet, I do not think that we can presume that all eighteenth-century women recoiled from the image of Mrs Selwyn wielding discursive power. Despite her satire and roughness of personality, this ambiguous character's efforts to make Evelina's father acknowledge her may be viewed within the context of extending a feminine ethic of care. Combining indisputable morality with more traditionally masculine characteristics, Mrs Selwyn may have offered for many a new perspective on women's role in life.

²⁹ See, for example, Chapone's advice to her niece that 'in your father's house it is certainly proper for you to pay civility to the guests and to talk to them in your turn – with modesty and respect' (*Improvement of the Mind*, p. 181).

³⁰ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 224.

Although her desire to conform to a limiting ideology of femininity may seem to restrict Evelina's opportunities for self-development, this is in part offset by her ability to mould her own story. In contrast, since *Camilla* is not narrated by epistolary means, the heroine of this novel does not even have this less direct method of communication at her disposal. The impersonal, authorial voice adopted in both *Camilla* and *Cecilia* tends to distance the reader from the heroines' immediate lived experience; events are reported as happening to them, rather than being relived as an account of personal choice. This is particularly true of Camilla. Often finding herself in questionable situations, this heroine must be portrayed as a victim of circumstances beyond her control. Hence, in contrast to Evelina, Camilla remains a non-character, existing only to suffer.

Sensitivity, believed to aid communication between men, is shown to have exactly the opposite effect on Camilla. In the hero's presence, she is completely oppressed. Her inflated emotions make it impossible for her to speak. When Edgar approaches after a misunderstanding she 'curtsied to him slightly, and turned away, without making any answer'. She is 'enchanted, affrighted, bewildered, yet silent' in the face of his questions and left in 'speechless wonder' when she discovers he loves her.³¹ At least part of Camilla's problem is her inability to acknowledge her own feelings. She is hampered by social constraints which dictate that she keep her emotions hidden, not just from others but from herself. Camilla's father acknowledges the contradiction that while feminine delicacy prohibits women from communicating their emotions, unacknowledged feelings can be dangerous. However, he recommends that emotional attachments be recognised only in order that they can be repressed. Tyrold tells Camilla that 'what you would rather perish than utter can never, since untold, be suspected'.³² Even though he recognises the essential unfairness that women must repress their feelings while men are at liberty to express theirs, Tyrold still insists that 'where there are two parties, choice can belong only to one of them'.³³ Yet, as we will see, Burney reveals a basic irony in this belief - for

³¹ Burney, *Camilla*, pp. 537, 539, 544. See Epstein, *The Iron Pen*, pp. 136-137.

³² Burney, *Camilla*, p. 360.

³³ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 358.

men too wish to be their wife's choice; Edgar wants to know that Camilla loves him before he makes a commitment.

Under the influence of Dr Marchmont, who is cynical about women since discovering that his wife married him for material gain, not love, Edgar is advised that 'to avoid all danger of repentance, you must become positively distrustful'.³⁴ While Dr Marchmont's advice is based upon a social reality, where love was not always the main consideration for young women entering marriage, it places both the hero and heroine in an impossible situation.³⁵ Social convention prevents Camilla from revealing her feelings, while Edgar watches in silence as appearances conspire against her.³⁶ Even worse, when Mrs Arlbery recognises that Edgar will not admit his feelings, she advises Camilla to flirt with others in order to make him jealous; this leads only to further misunderstanding. Dr Gregory tells his readers that a woman may only behave in this fashion 'where a gentleman purposefully declines to make his addresses, till such time as he thinks himself perfectly secure of her consent'. Yet, he disapprovingly notes that this forces a woman

to violate the modesty and delicacy of her sex, and to invert the clearest order of nature. All this sacrifice is proposed to be made merely to gratify a most despicable vanity in a man who would degrade the very woman whom he wishes to make his wife.³⁷

Clearly Dr Gregory does not approve of the man who refuses to declare his feelings but this is based on his belief that women who communicate their feelings first 'violate' 'modesty' and 'delicacy.' He views with horror the idea that women may have to 'explain' themselves. In *Camilla* difficulties arise because of the hero's unwillingness to declare his feelings, and the blame for this is put at the door of Dr Marchmont who subsequently admits his advice to Edgar was wrong. However, Burney's novel also reveals that this problem is not just the result of a misjudgement of one individual, but rather the consequences of an ideal of reticence in women.

³⁴ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 160. Spencer, *Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 165.

³⁵ Cutting-Gray, *Woman as Nobody*, p. 61.

³⁶ Epstein, *The Iron Pen*, p. 149.

³⁷ Gregory, *Father's Legacy*, pp. 92-3.

Yet, despite recognising that conforming to this ideology creates considerable difficulties for Camilla, Burney fails to condemn the qualities, such as sensibility and innocence, which prevent her heroine from maturing beyond these limitations. In order to resolve her problems with Edgar, Camilla must communicate her true feelings to him; but such is the heroine's repression that she can do this only when she believes she is dying, and even then the letter is not to be delivered until her death. The problem is resolved not by the couple learning to express their feelings to each other, but rather by a plot twist which allows Edgar to read Camilla's note without her knowledge. Edgar's doubts are thereby removed without Camilla violating her delicacy.

Ironically, while her inability to express herself reveals her to be the ideal modest heroine, it is this silence which allows Camilla's respectability to be compromised again and again. When her brother finds himself in debt and asks that she request money from Sir Hugh on her own behalf, Camilla finds it impossible to refuse while she is in direct social contact. She therefore decides to write to her brother but is interrupted by Sir Sedley, who, without her permission leaves a bank draft for the requested sum. Camilla has no intention of becoming obligated in this way but when Lionel returns he takes the draft and refuses to return it. Unable to act for herself or offer explanation when others take advantage, Camilla has no way of controlling these events.³⁸ An ideology which does not allow women to express themselves is taken to its logical conclusion, where they are unable to communicate with those they are closest to, even in the direst of circumstances. Finding herself in financial distress, as a result of the liberties others have taken with her, Camilla cannot admit, even to her father, the trouble she is in. This ultimately leads to an illness which nearly kills her.

³⁸ Epstein, *Iron Pen*, pp. 132-133

Perhaps part of the reason Camilla is so easily oppressed is that she has been raised to conform to the expectations of whomever she marries.³⁹ Rather than cultivating judgment in his daughters, Tyrold has attempted to raise them with as few opinions and expectations as possible.⁴⁰ Clearly, this is not compatible with improving one's understanding of the world and this leaves Camilla vulnerable to the machinations of more sophisticated characters. As we have seen, Jane Austen's novels suggest that the aim of female education should be to gain self-knowledge; a woman who understands herself will be able to assess the world and uphold her principles. In contrast, Burney's heroines remain dependent upon male figures of authority to interpret the world for them. Camilla must wait for a gentleman to fall in love with her, and then develop her opinions to coincide with his. Consequently, she cannot argue or disagree with Edgar, because, as the man she wishes to marry, she must believe him to be correct in all things. The relationship is not based on the mutual exchange of viewpoints. Camilla has been taught to listen and obey, and indeed throughout the novel she strives to do so. Even in deciding whether or not to attend an exhibition of animals she turns to Edgar for his guidance. He only has to suggest that it might not be in a suitable area for a young lady for her to agree, 'Most certainly then...I will not go!'⁴¹ In many ways, Camilla remains a child. A situation made all the clearer when she agrees at the end of the novel to be governed by Edgar and her mother.

Burney shows Evelina and Camilla to be incapable of engaging in rational conversation. These heroines are kept silent by an overblown delicacy and sense of propriety with many troublesome consequences. It seems unlikely that many eighteenth-century women would have regarded either Evelina or Camilla as role models. Their overt innocence may show them to be virtuous young ladies but they

³⁹ See Tyrold's letter to his daughter: 'You have been brought up, my dear child, without any specific expectation. Your mother and myself, mutually deliberating upon the uncertainty of the female fate, determined to educate our girls with as much simplicity as is compatible with instruction, as much docility for various life as may accord with invariable principles, and as much accommodation with the world at large, as may combine with a just distinction of selected society' (Burney, *Camilla*, p. 357).

⁴⁰ Spencer argues that Camilla's parents have 'tried to reconcile opposites: to create women of judgment, with their personalities left blank for their unknown husbands to fill in later' (*Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 164).

⁴¹ Burney, *Camilla*, p. 421.

fail to develop strategies to deal with difficult situations. Through stock stereotypical characters which represented a particular virtue or vice, eighteenth-century novels could investigate the consequences of particular behavioural patterns. The innocence and exacerbated sensibility which characterise Evelina and Camilla reveal figures that often feel rather than speak or act. While the diaries and journals of eighteenth-century women emphasise sensibility as a virtue, they also show an awareness of the need to balance this emotional sensitivity with reason in order to take action in the world. It is possible that even those readers who approved of Burney's heroines recognised that their position in society was not enviable and that their actions were unsuitable for emulation.

From the outset Cecilia is a different kind of heroine. At the beginning of the novel, Cecilia, like Evelina, moves from country to town. Both these heroines enter London society with fresh eyes, which allow them to see how shallow and frivolous the fashionable world is. However, in contrast to Evelina, Cecilia is able to operate in this environment with composure. At age twenty, Cecilia is a little older than Burney's other heroines and has had more experience of the world which better prepares her for the various circumstances she finds herself in. I wish to note briefly the relevance this experience has for the ability to communicate. While living with her uncle, Cecilia had been used to socialising with 'the first people of the county in which he lived'. Although his parties were small and private, they initiated Cecilia

in the practical rules of good breeding, had taught her to subdue the timid fear of total inexperience, and to repress the bashful feelings of shame-faced awkwardness; fears and feelings which rather call for compassion than admiration, and which, except in extreme youth, serve but to degrade the modesty they indicate.⁴²

Cecilia reverses the trend of Burney's other heroines; neither Evelina nor Camilla are able to 'subdue' 'timid fear,' nor 'repress' 'bashful feelings' but this may, perhaps be attributed to their 'extreme youth'. Nevertheless, Burney's authorial narrator makes it clear that qualities such as bashfulness and awkwardness, often recommended in

⁴² Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 23.

conduct books, should excite ‘compassion’ rather than ‘admiration’. Interestingly, this analysis of excessive bashfulness even suggests that it ‘degrades’ true modesty. Burney herself was painfully shy and one cannot help but feel that she was representing difficulties that she and other women faced in everyday life; but these were not characters she intended her readers to mimic. In contrast, I believe that in Cecilia, Burney deliberately creates a heroine worthy of emulation and that her early experience of the world is crucial to the formation of her character. Her uncle’s parties allowed her to develop into an adult free from the pretensions of London society, while being used to mixing with a variety of people. It seems likely that this company would have engaged her in intelligent conversation and improved her capacity for logical thought.

Yet, despite Cecilia’s ability to engage in rational conversation, she finds herself little better off than Evelina and Camilla. Burney depicts a society which is unable to take seriously the idea that an intelligent young woman may take responsibility for her own life. Cecilia finds that it is habitually presumed that she cannot express herself in an honest or rational manner. This is particularly notable in the matter of relationships. When Belfield and Sir Robert are involved in a duel, everybody assumes the quarrel is over Cecilia. She may assure her guardian, Mr Delvile, that this is not the case but the cultural assumption that women cannot be frank about emotional attachments means that Cecilia’s answer is dismissed as feminine modesty. His wife finds it equally difficult to believe that Cecilia has no involvement with either Belfield or Sir Robert, and persists in this misunderstanding even after Cecilia has denied it. I have previously looked at the difficulties Evelina and Camilla face in their attempts to communicate. It is particularly difficult for these women to speak their mind to their future husbands. Despite Cecilia’s ability to express herself clearly, she too experiences a similar problem in communicating directly with Delvile.⁴³ There are plenty of examples in the novel where Delvile’s presence shocks her into silence. When he meets Cecilia unexpectedly at Belfield’s house and suspects a relationship between the pair we are told:

⁴³ Epstein, *Iron Pen*, p. 168.

Cecilia, notwithstanding the openness and purity of her intentions, was so much disconcerted by this unexpected meeting, and pointed speech, that she had not the presence of mind to call him back and clear herself⁴⁴

Cecilia deals with this situation by fulfilling her part as the rational heroine of sense. Next time she sees him he is 'gay and easy, general in his conversation, and undesigning in his looks,' and Cecilia 'soon recovered from her embarrassment, and passed the rest of the day without restraint or uneasiness'.⁴⁵ Her good sense allows her to go on operating in a rational manner but it does not allow her to break through the rules of propriety and deny a relationship with Belfield unless Delvile himself raises the subject. Her feelings for Delvile, which she must continually repress, make it difficult for her to speak to him in the same open manner that she adopts with others. This essentially means that although Cecilia has far better communication skills than either Evelina or Camilla, she is nevertheless, still subject to social restraints which conspire to silence women.

Consequently, for the first part of the novel Cecilia remains in confusion, sometimes believing her attraction is returned, and at other times convinced Delvile is completely indifferent to her. Throughout Burney's novels, silence and the inability to communicate stand in for a sexual attraction which cannot be acknowledged or represented in any other way. When Delvile visits her unexpectedly, 'all utterance seemed denied her, and she courtesied without saying a word.' If her feelings are not returned they must be overcome, but Cecilia's uncertainty leaves her unable to act one way or the other and it is this which largely contributes to her silence. However, this is a silence we see the heroine struggle to overcome:

The simplest question, in the then situation of her mind, was sufficient to confuse her, and though she answered, she hardly knew what he had asked. A minute's recollection, however, restored an apparent composure.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 213.

⁴⁵ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 238; Cutting-Gray, *Woman as Nobody*, p. 36.

⁴⁶ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 331.

Cecilia may be momentarily overawed but reason and logic reassert themselves. In *Cecilia* we see the heroine try to balance sense and sensibility in a way that looks forward to Jane Austen's stronger and more articulate female characters.

As long as Delvile's feelings for Cecilia remain unknown communication is difficult, but, once he declares his love and proposes, Cecilia gains a freedom to express her emotions in a way that Evelina and Camilla never could. When their secret wedding is interrupted, Cecilia, convinced that this is the result of the marriage being denied parental blessing, realises that she cannot go through with the ceremony. However, now that their feelings for one another have been declared, she is free to reiterate her love, even as she refuses to marry him:

‘Oh Mr Delvile! were our connexion opposed by no duty, and repugnant to no friends, were it attended by no impropriety, and carried on with no necessity of disguise, - you would not thus charge me with indifference, you would not suspect me of insensibility, - Oh, no! the choice of my heart would then be its glory, and all I now blush to feel, I should openly and with pride acknowledge!’⁴⁷

There is obviously still a coded language at work here, but in this speech, Cecilia leaves Delvile in no doubt as to her feelings for him. It is reasonable to assume that this clear communication encourages him to come back later with another solution to their problem. When Cecilia once again insists on parental consent, she also conveys how much she wants to marry him: ‘when I have said I will hear nothing without it, may you not almost infer - I will refuse nothing with it!’⁴⁸ This relatively straightforward manner of communication prevents the misunderstandings which plagued the relationship of Camilla and Edgar.

If Cecilia marries, in order to maintain her fortune, her husband must agree to take her name – a term considered unacceptable by Delvile's proud father. Offered a separate consent from Delvile's mother, Cecilia reluctantly agrees to marry without his father's knowledge. However, shortly after the wedding, Delvile fights in a duel

⁴⁷ Burney, *Cecilia*, pp. 632-3

⁴⁸ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 809

and seriously injures his opponent, obliging him to visit the continent to avoid prosecution. At this point the heroine has given up the protection of her own name and fortune but in the absence of her husband has nothing to replace it with. Evicted from her home and denied sanctuary by her new father-in-law, she decides to follow her husband abroad, and seeks the help of Mr Belfield to plan her route. When Delvile appears unexpectedly at Belfield's home, Cecilia realises that her husband suspects the reasons for her visit. She immediately tries to clear matters up, begging him to 'let me speak and hear to be understood'.⁴⁹ Her only thought is to convey the truth, but Delvile refuses to listen. She fears her husband's jealousy may lead him to duel with Mr Belfield, and when she hears they are together she follows them around the city, pursuing them from place to place but continually arriving too late. At this point she seems to have no control over her own life, and as her emotions are worked into a greater and greater frenzy, her reason fails her. As I have noted, Cecilia is a logical and rational heroine who utilises these qualities to allow her to communicate in a straightforward manner. It is this which differentiates her from both Evelina and Camilla, but perversely Cecilia can only express herself completely openly when she loses her rational capacity. In a world where women are both identified with emotions, and denied the right to express them, Cecilia can only reveal the extent of her feelings for Delvile when they are sure to be dismissed as the ramblings of a mad woman.

Cultural expectations of innocence and modesty made it impossible for middle-class women to express themselves openly without transgressing the rules of society. However, in a situation where Cecilia's inner resources have been pushed to breaking point, the heroine can disconnect from a world of rules, and inhabit a solitary space where her words make sense only to herself.⁵⁰ In her madness she is obsessed with the image of her husband; 'she called upon Delvile without intermission, beseeching him to come to her defence in one moment, and deploring his death the next'. When Delvile finally finds Cecilia she can say things to him that could never be expressed while her actions were dictated by logic and propriety. She

⁴⁹ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 887

⁵⁰ Epstein argues that 'Cecilia goes mad for the same reason that Camilla goes mad: there is no sane response to the circumstances she find herself in' (*Iron Pen*, p. 167).

can express her fear of Delvile, saying ‘if you do not mean to mangle and destroy me, begone this instant’.⁵¹ Because her words are taken as madness, she can honestly point to how destructive his presence has been in her life. Throughout the novel, Delvile’s proud family name has been the cause of many of the difficulties. The mad Cecilia can ask ‘will you not tell me your name?’, but the sane and reasonable one must accept that his name will always be the same; it is her own name and power which must be sacrificed. Because she has lost her reason Cecilia can articulate disappointment and hurt without it ever having to be acknowledged. When she returns to sanity none of these issues have to be dealt with because nobody has listened to her ramblings. Only the freedom of incomprehensible madness allowed their expression, and in that language they can remain hidden.

Burney’s heroines, then, find themselves silenced again and again, unable to articulate their needs, sometimes even unable to acknowledge to themselves their hopes and fears. In *Evelina* and *Camilla* Burney reveals some of the difficulties faced by middle-class women who internalised the conflict inherent in conduct-book criteria, particularly with regard to the desirability of female speech. Even Cecilia finds it difficult to gain new knowledge through debate with others. While this intelligent and rational character is capable of communicating her thoughts, feelings and opinions clearly and directly, social convention prevents her voice from being heard. Despite her superior abilities, Cecilia’s impact on the world is as limited as Evelina’s and Camilla’s. Burney shows, not only that the society she inhabited created difficult obstacles for women who wished to assert their views, but that they are repressed as individuals at every level, unable to speak, at times even unable to think for themselves. I have been arguing throughout this work that often moderate attitudes concerning female abilities and education were formed in the eighteenth century, not by avoiding extremes, but by negotiating between them, frequently without reaching any obvious resolution. Nowhere can this tendency be seen as clearly as in Burney’s work. Her ideal model of femininity is strongly influenced by conduct books, but she mounts a damning critique of the limiting ideology promoted by this literature. Neither willing to embrace unambiguously nor reject conduct-

⁵¹ Burney, *Cecilia*, pp. 898, 906.

book values, Burney's novels are rife with contradiction and indicate the incompatible expectations faced by many eighteenth-century women.⁵²

I will now turn to Austen's novels and show that her characters demonstrate the benefits of more equal and frank verbal relationships between men and women. At the centre of this stands the ability of couples to communicate directly with one another. One major difference between Burney's and Austen's heroines is that the later author's characters develop as individuals, changing and evolving throughout the novel. Engaging in rational dialogue is integral to this maturing of character. In this respect, Austen's work has much in common with the female periodicals we looked at in chapter two of this work.

If Burney's work was clearly influenced by conduct literature, I wish to suggest that women's magazines in their various formats have a particular significance for Austen's writing. Conversation, as we have seen, played an important part in eighteenth-century periodicals which emphasised the pedagogical potential of rational communication. Juvenile educational magazines aimed at girls and young women, such as the *Female Mentor*, and the *Young Lady's Magazine*, consist of intelligent and sensible dialogues about a range of subjects and assume that the female sex will benefit from meaningful conversation. Such works could constitute significant forms of female communication in their own right. In later periodicals, readers' letters formed a communal but anonymous place of advice and communication between women. Although much of the content of these works is conservative in nature, the representation of various voices, and range of discreet articles lends itself to individual interpretation. Similarly, as we will see, rational debate and polite dialogue make up a significant part of Austen's novels. Elizabeth, Fanny, Emma and Anne are highly self-aware and the conflict inherent in their lives is not internalised but openly acknowledged and discussed. Through conversation these women may learn important lessons but, crucially, they may also have an impact upon the behaviour of others. These conversations have much in common

⁵² See Harman on Burney's conflict between proto-feminist values and traditional conservative beliefs (*Fanny Burney*, pp. 41, 58).

with the intelligent dialogues represented in the juvenile magazines which show young women engaging in frank debate in a way which remained within the bounds of an eighteenth-century ideal of polite and delicate feminine conversation. While I would argue that these magazines encouraged the development of rational deliberation in young women, by showing multiple viewpoints, they also included authority teacher figures who succeeded in bringing consensus to the subject of appropriate behaviour for women. In contrast, Austen's dialogues often present little in the way of concrete answers, leaving many questions open to reader interpretation. Her novels embrace uncertainty by refusing to adopt a settled or determined position and the dialogue between her characters is particularly effective in conveying the equal validity of different choices.

In his study of eighteenth-century philosophical dialogues, Michael Prince notes that polite conversation could play an important part in enabling disputing parties to resolve their differences. Prioritising polite conversation would ensure that topics 'creating violent disagreement' would be avoided while the 'polite rhetorical community' would 'share a complex network of directives governing conversational exchange'.⁵³ I believe evidence of these polite communities may be seen in both the juvenile educational magazines and Austen's novels. However, we will see that a complexity exists in Austen's representation of conversation, which is lacking in the educational dialogues; the fictional world of the novel tries to represent the difficulties encountered in real life and the way in which the conflicting motivations of individuals impede effective communication. Interestingly, Austen's work, by refusing to provide easy answers involves the reader as well as the heroine in the process of decision-making and judgment.

Self-knowledge stands at the centre of Austen's novels. As we saw in the previous chapter, her work subscribes to the theory that knowing oneself is essential to the proper fulfilment of duties in society. Austen's novels revolve around the story of her heroines gaining knowledge and bringing it to use at the correct time. They learn this partly through conversation, but, in turn, their steady sense and knowledge is

⁵³ Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue*, p. 219.

required to provide them with the skills necessary to engage in useful dialogue. In other words, the beneficial effects of experience and conversation are shown to be mutually reinforcing in Austen's heroines. I will begin by showing that the successful union of Austen's hero and heroine depends upon their ability to communicate effectively with one another. They meet on a basis of equality, and neither politeness nor deference stops them from disagreeing with one another. Integral to such exchange is the ability of both parties to gain self-knowledge through rational conversation. I will then go on to look at female friendship in Austen's novels and will demonstrate that in this author's work conversations between women often provide highly beneficial support networks. Finally, I will focus on a number of dialogues and consider how they relate to eighteenth-century ideals of polite conversation.

In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, Austen demonstrates that honest and open communication between the hero and heroine brings a greater understanding of both themselves and their future spouse. Interestingly, while disagreements oppressed Burney's heroines, the squabbles of Elizabeth and Darcy, and Emma and Knightley, enable a freedom of expression.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the hostility Elizabeth feels towards Darcy prevents meaningful communication in the early stages of their relationship. When Darcy asks Elizabeth to dance her anger over what she believes to be his ill-treatment of Mr Wickham makes her unwilling to engage in anything more than futile small talk:

‘It is *your* turn to say something now Mr Darcy. - I talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples’.⁵⁵

In the course of their conversation they prove themselves to be equal in wit, but their words are clever, rather than communicative. This is clear when Darcy cannot remember what they were talking about and Elizabeth tells him: ‘I do not think we

⁵⁴ Fergus argues that ‘one of Austen's most significant discoveries is that without violating decorum, surprisingly direct statements, either about emotions or revealing them, can be made’ (*Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (London: MacMillan, 1983) p. 117).

⁵⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 69.

were speaking at all. Sir William could not have interrupted any two people in the room who had less to say for themselves'.⁵⁶ In both Burney's and Austen's novels it is this kind of non-communication which creates misunderstandings and difficulties in relationships. Burney's couples seem to be caught in a never-ending cycle of silence and confusion. Austen, in contrast, shows her couples maturing beyond such problems.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the catalyst for this change is an argument which occurs when Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, although, as we will see, significant dialogue does occur before this. He makes it clear that marriage to her is against his better judgement. He is so insulting that Elizabeth's reply is freed from the usual constraints of politeness:

‘I might as well enquire...why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?’⁵⁷

Argument may not on the surface seem a good method of communication but the truths they tell result in a process of self-education and reformation for both of them. Darcy's arrogance allows Elizabeth to reveal her resentment of the wrongs she believes Mr Wickham has received at his hands, which in turn gives him the opportunity to clear his name and reveal the real character of his accuser. The letter he sends Elizabeth makes her think again about the conduct of Wickham, and leads her to re-evaluate the behaviour of both men.⁵⁸ This is the beginning of an educational process where Elizabeth learns to recognise her own prejudice:

‘- Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned’.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 146.

⁵⁸ Fergus notes that in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen ‘exposes the fallibility of judgment and humbles pride in it, while insisting that it be exercised nonetheless’ (*Jane Austen*, p. 9).

⁵⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 159.

The straightforward honesty of their argument has also had an impact on Darcy, and when she meets him unexpectedly while visiting Pemberley, he has undergone a transformation: ‘Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting’⁶⁰ He makes civil enquiries about the family he was once so disparaging about, and shows a diffident respect to her aunt and uncle. A few home truths from Elizabeth have helped Darcy see how he is perceived by others and there is a marked change in his manner. Additionally, it was Darcy’s unwillingness to engage with others which kept him isolated and enabled Mr Wickham to impose upon him. The new Darcy shows a respect for others, which helps him to communicate more effectively and gain a better understanding of those around him. Austen demonstrates through Elizabeth that when women participate in dialogue, they may wield a beneficial influence in the wider world.

In Burney’s *Camilla*, Edgar expects the heroine to conduct herself with a greater degree of propriety than any other character and their conversation centres upon his approval or disapproval of her actions. On the surface this may seem to bear a resemblance to the relationship between the hero and heroine in Austen’s *Emma*. I will argue, however, that these characters connect in a completely different way. The relationship between Emma and Knightley is based on equality and unimpeded communication.⁶¹ Very early in the novel, Emma tells her father, ‘we always say what we like to one another’.⁶² Whereas Camilla is oppressed by Edgar’s criticisms and silently acquiesces in his judgement, Emma will not back down from an argument. Emma and Knightley disagree, argue, express opinions and both show a good, if at times one-sided, understanding of the world they live in. After an argument about Harriet’s refusal of Mr Martin, Emma is keen to make up but not because she now believes that she had been wrong:

⁶⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 191.

⁶¹ See Mary Waldron, ‘Men of Sense and Silly Wives: The Confusions of Mr Knightley’, *Studies in the Novel*, 28:2 (1996): 141-57.

⁶² Austen, *Emma*, p. 9.

She certainly had not been in the wrong, and *he* would never own that he had. Concession must be out of the question; but it was time to appear to forget that they had ever quarrelled;⁶³

Emma and Mr Knightley's friendship is not dependent upon them thinking each other perfect; they respect each other's opinions even when disagreeing and communication is always good between them. Emma can say, 'as far as good intentions went, we were both right,' a conciliatory statement that is proffered without giving up her own independence of thought.⁶⁴ In contrast to this agreement to put their differences behind them, Edgar continually pressures Camilla to acquiesce to his judgment.

In *Cecilia* Lady Honoria makes an insightful comment about argument. When Cecilia asks 'You think, then, the quarrel more amusing than the reconciliation?' Lady Honoria answers:

'O, a thousand times! for while you are quarrelling, you may say any thing and demand any thing, but when you are reconciled, you ought to behave pretty, and seem contented.'⁶⁵

In the world of *Camilla* the heroine must acquiesce to conduct book arguments of her naturally subordinate position in society that prevent her from defending herself. One feels that it would be almost impossible for Burney's hero and heroine to argue. In contrast, I have tried to show that in *Emma* arguing is necessary to the maintenance of the honest and open relationship between the hero and heroine, and that they both find their heated conversation stimulating.

It is taken for granted by Austen that conversation between female friends allows women to offer each other support and advice. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth and Jane share a number of relevant, useful conversations where they express opinions and show interest in the welfare of each other. Since, the two sisters are of different

⁶³ Austen, *Emma*, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Austen, *Emma*, p. 79.

⁶⁵ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 934.

temperaments they can offer alternative perspectives on the world. For instance, when Charlotte agrees to marry Mr Collins, Elizabeth is disgusted, but through conversation, Jane can try to make her see the broader picture: ‘You do not make allowance for difference of situation and temper. Consider Mr Collins’s respectability, and Charlotte’s prudent, steady character’.⁶⁶ Elizabeth is not entirely convinced but Jane offers an alternative way of looking at the situation. She, in turn, can offer Jane comfort and advice when she begins to fear that Bingley has no feelings for her. Elizabeth’s cynical eye gives her a different perspective on the situation from her sister; she is convinced that the blame for his seeming defection lies with his family. When Jane worries that Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst do not approve of her, Elizabeth can bring her dilemma into perspective:

‘if upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disoblighing his two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him.’⁶⁷

Jane, of course, intends no such thing; Elizabeth may, through conversation, help her sister prioritise her own needs and desires and recognise that not everybody’s actions are as open and honest as her own.

The Bennet sisters’ friendship with Charlotte also shows good communication taking place. As her eventual marriage to Mr Collins shows, Charlotte is not romantic. When she and Elizabeth discuss Jane’s growing relationship with Mr Bingley, Charlotte advises that she should ‘shew more affection than she feels’.⁶⁸ Charlotte is cynical on the topic of love but she and Elizabeth still converse well, expressing their own opinions and contributing to each others’ understanding of the world.⁶⁹ These women are shown to look out for each other and offer their best advice, even if the reader does not always agree with them. Elizabeth, Jane and Charlotte do not discuss

⁶⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 105.

⁶⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 92.

⁶⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Nazar notes that Austen ‘construes the social world not only as a domain of power relations or an arena of banal chatter but also as a field of dialogue, discourse and mutual recognition. And it is within the context of this more fluid sense of “the social” that Austen delineates the dynamics of her understanding of judgment’ (‘The Imagination Goes Visiting’, pp. 157-8).

politics or philosophy, nor do they talk about the latest fashions. Their conversation centres upon important questions which will have a direct impact on their lives; such questions as how to find the right partner in life and where the balance should lie between love and money.

The benefits of rational discourse between women may also be seen in Anne's friendship with Lady Russell. In the opening pages of *Persuasion* the older woman prepares a plan to convince Sir Walter of the need to economise on his expenses. She consults Anne, and the two women communicate effectively as they embrace each others' point of view. As we so often see in Austen's work, the cultivation of rationality is shown to have relevance for women in the discharge of their traditional feminine duties, in this case, household economy. The belief that women may aid each others' understanding and have a positive influence on one another is markedly different from the attitude of conduct books which often advised that as well as encouraging bad habits, friendship between women was unlikely to be genuine because they were effectively in competition with one another for male attention.⁷⁰ Such advice would suggest that female conversation had little to offer women. Burney's novels do not show any female friendship having a significant or positive impact on her heroines' lives. In *Evelina*, Miss Mirvan remains very much a background character, while in *Cecilia*, although the heroine may admire Mrs Delvile, the older woman's influence is a destructive one for most of the novel. In *Camilla* there is a supportive network of three sisters. Camilla, Lavinia and Eugenia offer each other affection, and when Camilla finds herself in debt, her sisters offer financial help. They do not, however, engage in meaningful dialogue, offer practical advice, or confide in each other about marital ambitions. In contrast to Austen's novels, Burney's could be interpreted as following a conservative ideology where women do not benefit from conversation with either sex.

⁷⁰ For example see the *Lady's Magazine*, 'As your whole study in the minutest article ought to be to make yourself an agreeable companion to the man who honours you with his affection, it must be your first care never to make a large acquaintance among women, for as they, in general, possess principles very different to what I wish to inculcate into your mind, it will not be safe for you to commence friendship with any, without great precaution' (1776, p. 314).

Our awareness of how restricted communication is in Burney's novels should be tempered by an understanding that this relates to a literature of sensibility which often emphasised physical manifestations of emotion over direct speech. As I have noted, by the time Austen was writing, the novel of sensibility no longer held the same influence in wider society, and, in contrast to Burney, the later novelist embraces the array of possibilities offered by rational discourse. Yet, Austen also acknowledges that conversation could be used to practice deceit, and demonstrates that in these circumstances, women require time and space to make accurate judgments. Bharat Tandon has argued that Austen, born one year after the publication of Lord Chesterfield's notorious letters to his son, belongs to an age which felt less assured that understanding could be obtained from outside appearances and which had less faith in the virtues of conversation.⁷¹ Tandon notes that Chesterfield recommended to his son 'a frank, open and ingenuous exterior, with a prudent and reserved interior'.⁷² I believe that Austen's character depiction may well have been influenced by a similar understanding that outward appearances could be misleading. We see, for example, both Knightley in *Emma* and Anne in *Persuasion* show appreciation of frank and open temperaments, where emotional outbursts are welcome as proof that a prudent and deceitful inner self is not being hidden. More notably, Austen's repetitive characterisation of the charming man, who always turns out to be concealing secrets beneath an amiable surface, leads me to conclude that Austen was concerned about the discrepancy which so often existed between appearances and reality. On the other hand, however, dialogue allows Austen's female characters to exercise wit and engage in enjoyable repartee, while adhering to eighteenth-century notions about polite discourse. Crucially, propriety offers individuals a code of behaviour to which they may conform, protecting themselves as they gain the knowledge necessary to use their judgment and act accordingly.

In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot may voice opinions on human nature and demonstrate her capacity for rational thought, while conforming to an eighteenth century ideal of

⁷¹ Bharat Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem Press, 2003) pp. 15-16.

⁷² Tandon, *Jane Austen*, p. 16.

polite conversation. One particularly interesting dialogue that takes place with Captain Benwick displays the benefits of mutual exchange. Finding herself seated next to Benwick, a quiet man who is grieving after the death of his fiancé, Anne decides to initiate a conversation. She is 'well repaid the first trouble of exertion' for he is 'evidently a young man of considerable taste in reading' and she in turn enjoys conversing on a topic which suits her own sentiments. Adhering to the rules of polite conversation, Anne allows Benwick to articulate his feelings on the subject of his choice. Yet, although their discussion revolves around literary taste, the ensuing dialogue enables Anne to reach conclusions about his character and conduct, and, in doing so, adopt a less passive role in her belief that she can be 'of real use to him' by urging 'the duty and benefit of struggling against affliction'.⁷³ While her efforts for her young nephew after his accident, and for Louisa Musgrove after her fall at the Cobb, show Anne to be capable of helping others through practical actions, her rational discourse with Captain Benwick shows that she may also offer caring and helpful advice to somebody suffering from grief and depression. This makes it all the more interesting that Austen chooses this moment to disrupt traditional gender divisions. For Captain Benwick is exacerbating an already inflamed sensibility by his choice of reading material, a fault normally, at this time, attributed to women:

he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely;⁷⁴

Anne shows sensitivity to Benwick's vulnerable emotional state and, crucially, does not just offer unwelcome advice but takes her cue from him. He 'looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood' that she interprets this as an invitation to offer an opinion about the importance of not indulging sensibilities which affect one's ability to function adequately in the world. Having Anne express these views challenges the assumption that this is a fault peculiar to women. Anne may suggest to Benwick

⁷³ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 84

⁷⁴ Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 84-5.

within the boundaries of polite conversation that his reading material is encouraging an already inflamed sensibility, mirroring Wollstonecraft's opinion, not only on the dangers of cultivating sensibility at the expense of reason, but that men and women are subject to the same faults if exposed to similar experiences.

Through the character of Mrs Croft, Austen shows that women may be happy coping in the most difficult of circumstances, but made unhappy by forced idleness. Mrs Croft criticises her brother for treating women as if they 'were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures' and suggests that if women suffer from nervous complaints this is the result of inactivity. She tells the company:

'The only time that I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter that I passed by myself at Deal, when the Admiral (*Captain Croft* then) was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at that time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next'.⁷⁵

Mrs Croft renders these proto-feminist sentiments acceptable, by placing her story within the context of personal experience, and as such it adheres to the criteria of polite conversation, despite the radical implications which emerge from her dialogue.

Near the end of the novel Anne and Harville discuss the sudden engagement of Louisa and Benwick. When Harville laments that Benwick, who had been engaged to his sister, has recovered so quickly from her death, Anne takes the opportunity to make a wider evaluation of gender distinctions, insisting that women's emotional attachments last the longest:

'We certainly do not forget you so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the

⁷⁵ Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 61.

world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions'.⁷⁶

Anne can voice the experience of middle-class women denied the right to work, and having little to occupy their time. While Austen's characters never overtly engage in politics, much might be said within the context of their own lives. Perhaps one of the reasons Austen may express such views so openly is because they are presented in a respectable, non-confrontational manner. In an essay for the *Connoisseur* William Cowper advises that:

We should try to keep up conversation like a ball bandied to and fro from one to the other, rather than seize it all to ourselves, and drive it before us like a foot-ball. We should likewise be cautious to adapt the matter of our discourse to our company.⁷⁷

Anne lets others choose the topic of conversation and simply takes the opportunity, when it becomes available, to offer her opinion, whether it is to recommend to Benwick 'a larger allowance of prose in his daily study' or to claim to Harville that women's feelings last the longest. Even then, she does not dominate the conversation but allows others to offer their views. In fact the extended dialogue with Harville reads like an ideal discourse of mutual deference where each party is allowed to speak in turn.

Another significant conversation in which the participants educate each other on the rules of polite exchange is shared by Elizabeth, Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam during a visit to Rosings. The semi-polite surface teasing which Elizabeth exposes Darcy to barely conceals the hostility she feels towards him, both because of his arrogant behaviour during his stay at Netherfield and because of what she perceives as his ill-treatment of Wickham. Elizabeth may utilise her wit to prove her quick intelligence while conveniently communicating nothing. Darcy recognises this tendency in her and is not afraid to tell her so: 'I have had the pleasure of your

⁷⁶ Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 187.

⁷⁷ William Cowper, *The Connoisseur*, N^o 138 in *Johnson's Rambler and Idler* (London and Edinburgh: William P Nimmo, [1751] 1877) p. 232.

acquaintance long enough to know, that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own'.⁷⁸ Within the cover of surface politeness he may prod Elizabeth into conversing in a more worthwhile manner. Anger does not prevent meaningful dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*; as we saw previously, this may even provide a freedom to tell truths which would otherwise remain hidden. Yet, the polite conformity, made essential by Colonel Fitzwilliam's presence, also has a contribution to make, for the calmness of this dispute ensures that they respond rationally to one another. When Elizabeth accuses Darcy of unsociable behaviour during his stay at Hertfordshire he must defend himself:

‘I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,’ said Darcy, ‘of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done’.⁷⁹

Darcy tries to imply that he is not by nature of a sociable disposition. In fact, he and Elizabeth often seem to represent the difference between the learned and conversable worlds which David Hume argued should be united for the full benefits of each to be felt.⁸⁰ Elizabeth insists to Darcy that sociability must be learned in the same way as any other skill:

‘My fingers,’ said Elizabeth, ‘do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault – because I would not take the trouble of practising’.⁸¹

The analogy is clear, if Darcy finds it difficult to socialise with strangers, it is because he has never attempted to develop the skill. That he is more than capable of doing so is seen by his transformation at the end of the novel. I have tried to show

⁷⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 134

⁷⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 135.

⁸⁰ ‘The separation of the learned from the conversable world seems to have been the great defect of the last age, and must have had a very bad influence both on books and company’ (Hume, *Selected Essays*, p. 7).

⁸¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 135.

that this conversation started as witty and meaningless but through the polite exchange of viewpoints it became a worthwhile dialogue.

Austen's most overt comments on the effects of education, in both men and women, come in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny engages in a number of dialogues with Edmund that revolve around a moral assessment of Mary Crawford's character and behaviour. Yet, while this bears much similarity to the admonitions Beaumont's Mrs Affable gives to her students about the consequences of thoughtless behaviour, there is a noticeable difference. Through reasoned argument and the exercise of moral authority, Mrs Affable achieves a consensus of opinion among her pupils. However, even an agreement on the facts of the argument cannot bring this kind of resolution to Fanny and Edmund's conversations. Edmund's attraction to Mary clouds his judgment, allowing him to overlook all her faults. In turn, Fanny's scarcely acknowledged jealousy ensures that Mary's every fault is exaggerated. In his study of philosophical dialogues, Michael Prince argues that elements of character and setting are introduced 'in order to show why the contingencies of human desire and self-interest frustrate any move to forced consensus'.⁸² The portrayal of the 'contingencies of human desire' and the specific circumstances of a given situation characterise the novel as a genre and bring a new complexity to the educational dialogues of the period.

I wish to look particularly at Fanny's various attempts to exchange views on subject-based topics. As I have noted, in the dialogues which take place in the juvenile magazines there is a consensus of interest, and convergence of opinions. In contrast, we see interests compete with one another in *Mansfield Park*. We hear, for instance, that Fanny asked her uncle a question about the slave trade and longed to ask more but was intimidated because nobody else would participate in the exchange. She later finds herself sitting in the garden with Mary Crawford and tries to share her observations about the changes which have taken place:

⁸² Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue*, p. 19.

‘Every time I come into this shrubbery I am more struck with its growth and beauty. Three years ago, this was nothing but a rough hedgerow along the upper side of the field, never thought of as any thing, or capable of becoming any thing; and now it is converted into a walk, and it would be difficult to say whether most valuable as a convenience or an ornament; and perhaps in another three years we may be forgetting – almost forgetting what it was before. How wonderful, how very wonderful the operations of time, and the changes of the human mind!’⁸³

As I have previously noted, Fanny uses her observational skills both to educate and entertain herself but while she could engage Edmund in discussion on a range of subjects, Mary proves that not everybody embraces rational debate in this way. Not only is Mary uninterested in the wonders of nature, when Fanny moves on to consider the topic of memory, she remains equally unmoved. These subjects do not relate to Mary’s personal interests, and as such Fanny cannot even get a debate started. Only when the discussion moves to whether Mary could be happy in the country does she contribute to the conversation, but with the implications for her relationship with Edmund, Fanny finds herself reluctant to encourage her. Dialogue offers opportunities to learn through the exchange of opinion but willing partners are essential to this process. Although Austen appears to favour an education gained through direct participation in society, of which conversation was an important part, she shows in this dialogue between Fanny and Mary that learning in this way could be a difficult process, and that not all the ensuing conversations could be successful.

I am not trying to argue, by any means, that all dialogue is useless in *Mansfield Park*, but simply to note that relevant conversation is shown to be great deal more complicated than the ideal debates rehearsed in the juvenile magazines. Prince suggests that ‘Austen’s characters live in a world of surfaces, diminished prospects, broken dialogues, noise; yet the astute ones are able to piece the parts together into intelligible wholes and gain some measure of security’.⁸⁴ I have been trying to show that Austen’s heroines must piece together fragments of knowledge in various ways to make sense of their lives and take control of their future; a process which must be

⁸³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, pp. 178, 187-8.

⁸⁴ Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue*, p. 250.

mirrored by the reader interpreting the work. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen does not show a community in agreement, but rather depicts each individual character as motivated by their own considerations. If *Persuasion* shows the potential for polite conversation to express radical views in acceptable ways, *Mansfield Park* shows its limitations through its failure to achieve consensus between those with competing interests. Indeed we have shown that indifference often totally prevents conversation even taking place. Yet, it is interesting that of all Austen's heroines, Fanny is probably the one whose character development owes most to the benefits of rational discourse. Edmund, fond of his young cousin, encouraged her to express opinions, and he learns through this to respect her intelligence and good sense. Nevertheless, this open and honest communication is disrupted by a new emotional attachment.

Throughout this section I have demonstrated how important communication was for women at every level of their lives. Burney's and Austen's fictional representations of women show both the consequences of silence and the benefits of debate and exchange. Burney could take an ideology of silence to its logical conclusion and portray heroines trapped in a permanent child-like state, unable to change or progress. Austen, in contrast, shows that women may learn and develop as individuals through rational discourse. Yet, the representation of women and communication remains complicated. It is an irony in Burney's work that the epistolary method of narration actually gives Evelina a stronger voice, and more scope to tell her story, than the rational and intelligent Cecilia. The relevance of this ability to voice one's own experience is clear when we consider that both Cecilia and Camilla suffer episodes of illness because they are denied this right to be heard. Moreover, while good communication skills are central to Austen's heroines, the later author shows us, not only the benefits of conversation, but its failures. Where interests clash, polite conversation is shown to fail. Nevertheless, there is a continued emphasis on the need for women to understand their place in the world, and the study of human nature is shown to help this educational process. In one form or another, this is the subject which dominates many of the conversations in Austen's novels, and it is through conversation that her heroines can gather the information they require to mature as individuals and fulfil the role allotted to them in society.

As we have seen, neither Burney nor Austen directly tackled questions concerning the gender hierarchy, yet, both authors challenge notions of women's inherent inferiority by portraying intelligent and articulate heroines capable of assessing the world for themselves. It is through her heroines' conformity to an ideology of femininity, and consequent inability to articulate their thoughts, that Burney highlights the difficulties faced by eighteenth-century women. Austen contrarily shows her heroines engaging in rational dialogue in a way that allows them to exert influence over their wider environment. Yet, these intelligent, rational women often reveal the uses conversation could be put to in the fulfilment of traditional feminine duties, which remain a priority throughout the novels.

CONCLUSION

In the eighteenth century, as we have seen, questions concerning woman's 'natural' character, the part to be played by her in society, and the education she required for this purpose were debated across a significant body of literature. No aspect of her character or conduct escaped scrutiny. Appropriate gender behaviour became inextricably linked with social class and a key indicator of the moral health of the nation. Yet, women were by no means passive recipients of a male constructed ideology. Professional women writers put forward their thoughts on female learning, discussing and directing the education of their own sex; the ordinary middle-class woman had her say also, whether through private discussions and letters, or through contributions to the wider forum of the woman's magazine. No simple answer emerged for women as to what or how they should learn. Although ignorance was no longer satisfactory, continued anxiety existed about the feminine pursuit of intellectual study. Yet, that some form of education, which would prepare women to take their place in society, was desirable was rarely disputed. What has become clear over the course of this work is that many women welcomed the new emphasis upon domestic roles and the moral authority it offered to rule the home. Embraced as a way to make an important contribution to society, the importance attached to the duties of wives, mothers and mistresses of households also provided women with the opportunity to demand a wide-ranging education. There was broad acceptance that the lives of the female sex would continue to revolve around the domestic sphere. The insistence that women were rational, intelligent beings did not, therefore, lead inevitably to a rejection of female dependence. Nevertheless, a range of writing on female education demanded recognition of the skills and knowledge utilised by women in the home.

A range of strategies was available to eighteenth-century moderate writers who wanted to provide women with more space to manoeuvre for their own needs and desires without challenging the status quo. Questions about the ability of eighteenth-century women to gain direct experience, for instance, were a recurring issue in the

literature we have considered. While magazines and novels offered a vicarious alternative, a way for women to gain useful knowledge second-hand, this issue was also tackled in other ways. Haywood mounts logical arguments, stating the reasons why women should be allowed to participate directly in the world; Austen portrays the advantages gained by her heroines through their experiences; and Burney reveals the negative consequences when lack of such experience hinders the development of the individual. Yet the middle ground which these works occupy is by no means stable, the parameters of what was considered acceptable in women's education were subject to continual change and modification.

The moderate position in the eighteenth-century female education debate which I have been investigating does not reveal itself to be a stable, tidy avoiding of extremes. In fact, it is often inherently contradictory, incorporating apparently incompatible ideological stances. We have seen that rather than avoiding conservative and radical arguments, elements of both were adopted in ways that enabled them to act as a check on each other. Yet, this complicated combination of sentiments emerges in an effort to balance different pressures in women's lives. The magazines, in particular, represented an array of images for eighteenth-century women to emulate. The female sex had to negotiate expectations that they be emotional and rational, innocent and wise, intellectual and domesticated. A pragmatic, constantly evolving consensus emerges in the pages of the periodical which is focused on the practical and experiential aspects of women's lives.

The novels of Burney and Austen also portray the complexities faced by eighteenth-century women. Austen depicts heroines negotiating a range of choices; these women learn through their experiences and mature into responsible adults. From within the pages of this author's work it would have been possible for the eighteenth-century reader to extract a viable educational plan. In contrast, Burney's heroines are intelligent women who are kept in a child-like state as a consequence of their attempt to conform to an ideology of femininity. No coherent or explicit educational recommendations emerge from these novels, in which a range of contradictions are never completely resolved. Taken together, the novels of Burney and Austen seem

to epitomise the middle ground in the female education debate, sharing much in common with the eighteenth-century female miscellanies, which similarly fail to reconcile many contradictions.

In the process of delineating the moderate position, many possible different combinations of radical and conservative sentiments have been revealed and categorical distinctions between these positions have been shown to be problematic. This thesis has raised many questions about what the moderate position consisted of and how it was constructed, but these issues are worthy of deeper investigation. Eighteenth-century women's magazines, in particular, offer future researchers an extensive and largely untouched field for further analysis.

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