FACULTEIT LETTEREN EN WIJSBEGEERTE

FEMALE EDUCATION IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S NOVEL *BELINDA*

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Content

Introduction

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was a successful writer at the beginning of the nineteenth century who wrote both fiction and non-fiction. Since she was of Anglo-Irish descent, she wrote some tales about life in Ireland and today, she is best remembered for those stories.[1] In her own time, however, she was also praised for her other works of fiction. The novel *Belinda* (1801) is a typical marriage-plot novel, which depicts the struggle of a young woman to survive in London high fashion society and find the right husband. On the title page of the book, Edgeworth writes that *Belinda* is not to be read as a novel, but rather as a "moral tale."[2] This choice was undoubtedly influenced by the negative assessment of the novel at the time, but it also shows that Edgeworth wanted to stress the didactic merits of her work.

By showing both good and bad examples of education, Maria Edgeworth teaches young girls of a certain class how to behave. This aspect of the novel has not always been praised as some critics found the main character Belinda too perfect to be interesting and suggested that the protagonist should in fact have been the more colourful Lady Delacour.[3] However, the novel's heroine serves her purpose in the novel well. The intended audience for the work are young women who experience the same kind of moral dilemmas as the eponymous heroine. The ultimate goal for these women is to find a suitable husband and in order to accomplish this goal, they must behave with prudence and be careful not to make bad decisions.

Women who do not possess a big fortune can only attract men by showing off their accomplishments, e.g. playing the piano, dancing, dressing fashionably, being good at conversation or drawing. These skills could gain them respect and make them the centre of attention in fashionable society and thus increase their chances of finding a wealthy husband. However, Maria

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[1] Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, rebels and reactionaries : English literature and its background, 1760-1830*. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2010, 96.

[2] "The Following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale –the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel." This addition to the novel, titled "Advertisement" is dated 1802 and I took it from the 1821. I will, however, continue to call *Belinda* a novel throughout this paper. Edgeworth, Maria. *Belinda*. Printed for R. Hunter , etc., 1821. All further references to the novel, however, will be to the following edition: Edgeworth, Maria. *Belinda*. London:Macmillan And Co., 1896.

[3] Chalk notes: "Critics and readers alike have long found Belinda a frustrating character. Indeed, many have claimed that the novel should rightfully be called *Lady Delacour*, so much more dynamic a character is she compared to the eponymous heroine." Chalk, Dannie Leigh. "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 47, no. 2, Dec. 2015, 133.

Edgeworth shows that simply marrying a rich man is not enough. It is also important to find the right husband with whom they can live happily. Furthermore, they need to know whose advice to follow and whom to stay away from. A good chaperone (like Anne Percival in the novel) can help them make the right decisions, but a bad one (like Mrs. Stanhope or Lady Delacour) could be detrimental to their reputation. Every questioning of their virtue could be fatal for their reputation and thus for their hopes of finding a good husband. Good judgement, therefore, is vital. The example figure Belinda is the ideal marriageable girl, both accomplished and sensible. By carefully distinguishing between good advice and bad advice and by using her powers of rational thought, she eventually finds the right husband and in the process, she increases the domestic happiness of the people around her. The didactic novel *Belinda* teaches the reader that the use of rational thought is important. Belinda does not simply follow every advice she gets, she knows she has to think for herself.

Maria Edgeworth critiques the common female education of the time which solely emphasised the acquisition of accomplishments and shows how a heroine that uses her common sense and values the knowledge that can be obtained from books and science can make her own life and the life of the people around her happier. However, a very simplistic view of Edgeworth's feminism is ruled out by her complex stance towards the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft. The novel is inspired by Wollstonecraft's writing, but seems to critique it at the same time. The character Harriet Freke, a partisan of the rights of woman, is negatively portrayed as a brute and a disloyal friend. She is the villain of the novel and the direct cause of the novel's graver problems. This negative representation of a feminist has led critics to see Edgeworth as in some way un-feministic or at least opposed to the ideas of predecessors such as the famous Mary Wollstonecraft.

Even though *Belinda* was written less than a decade after the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's important treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the debate on female education had shifted by the time Edgeworth was writing her novel. After the French Revolution lost its British supporters, it was no longer possible to propose ideas like those of Mary Wollstonecraft[4] and after William Godwin's publication of Wollstonecraft's memoirs[5], she became a figure clouded in

[4] During the counter-revolutionary years the radical intellectual became a suspicious figure. Butler, *Romantics, rebels and reactionaries : English literature and its background, 1760-1830,* 55.
[5] William Godwin. *Memoirs of the author of A vindication of the rights of woman*. London:Johnson, 1798.

scandal.[6] In *A Vindication,* Wollstonecraft proposes a radical new gender theory, rejecting common assumptions about male and female behaviours as well as accusing contemporary society of deliberately supressing female intelligence by a false system of education.

It is interesting that Maria Edgeworth managed to keep producing liberal writing on education at a time when this was no longer socially and politically accepted. Edgeworth moved in a circle of radical thinkers. Her father was a liberal landowner in Ireland: he tried to run his estate in a humane way, offering an education to the village people so that they would be able to get more profit from the land and he tried to be impartial towards his tenants.[7] He had contacts in England with a group of scientists and was very interested in new technology.[8] Furthermore, he wanted his children -both boys and girls- to receive a scientific education. The education the Edgeworths propose is meant to apply both to boys and girls and includes subjects such as geometry, arithmetic, mechanics and chemistry.[9]

Maria Edgeworth not only contributed to the debate on female education by writing fiction, but also by writing the treatise *Practical Education* (1798) in cooperation with her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In this work, she expresses her opinion that both boys and girls need a thorough scientific education. Her conclusions are supported by evidence she gained from her experience in educating her own numerous brothers and sisters at home,[10] but she also uses the knowledge she gathered from reading books about education. In the preface of *Practical Education,* Edgeworth places her work clearly in the contemporary debate.[11] Reading *Practical Education* can help to understand Edgeworth's theory of education in her novel *Belinda* better because the arguments she uses in *Practical Education* can also be applied to the novel *Belinda.*

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[6] Butler, *Romantics, rebels and reactionaries : English literature and its background, 1760-1830,* 94.
[7] Butler, Marilyn. *Maria Edgeworth: a literary biography*. Clarendon Press, 1972, 85–87.
[8] The Lunar Society of Birmingham was a group of intellectuals. They regularly met from the 1760s to the 1780s. Chandler states that "the differentiation between what we now call literature and what we now call science remained productively messy." Chandler, James. "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 45, no.1, Oct. 2011, 88.
[9] 'Geometry', 'On arithmetick', 'On mechanicks' and 'Chemistry' are chapters in *Practical Education.* See Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth. *Practical education*. 1798. Eighteenth Century Collection Online.
[10] During his life, Richard Lovell Edgeworth married four times and got 22 children, 18 of whom survived infancy. Maria was a child of Richard Lovell's first marriage and had a total of 17 younger siblings. By the time *Practical Education* was published, 16 of the 22 children had already been born. See the list of children of the Edgeworth family in Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth: A literary Biography.* 1972, 489
[11] Edgeworth states that "we have perused with diligent attention every work upon education, that has obtained the santion of time or public approbation" Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical education* ix.

However, reading *Practical Education* does not resolve the contradictions within the novel that have been critically evaluated by numerous scholars.[12] Some recent critics have proposed a new interpretation of the character of Harriet Freke and Edgeworth's feminism as a whole. Iain Topliss states that Edgeworth tended to moderate the extreme views of Wollstonecraft.[13] According to Deborah Weiss, Edgeworth constructs her own theory of gender, with which she interacts with the philosophers of the previous generation.[14] This recent criticism gives a much more positive appreciation of Edgeworthian feminism. The question of female education does not always form a central part of this discussion. A notable exception to this is Nicole Wright, who highlights some passages from the novel that indicate a positive evaluation of scientific education in her recent article "opening up the phosphoric "envelope": scientific appraisal, domestic spectacle and (un)reasonable creatures in Edgeworth's *Belinda*."[15] However, Wright's argument is not focused on the question of the education of women.

The aim of this paper is to discuss Edgeworth's theory of female education with relation to the novel *Belinda.* Firstly, this paper will examine three chapters of the treatise *Practical Education* that relate to female education. Then, some examples of different kinds of education that can be found in the novel *Belinda* will be discussed. Finally, this paper will compare Edgeworth's theory of female education with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and explore how Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* contributed to the contemporary debate on the education of women by discussing some recent articles about the novel.

[12] See Butler, Marilyn, *Jane Austen and the war of ideas*. Clarendon Press, 1975, 127–128. about the various assessments of Edgeworth's feminism, but also more recent articles, such as Weiss, Deborah. "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher'*Eighteenth-Century Fiction*", no. 4, 2007.
[13] Topliss, Iain. "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth 's Modern Ladies." *Études irlandaises*, vol.6, no.1, 1981, 13–31.
[14] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda".
[15] Wright, Nicole M. "Opening the Phosphoric "Envelope": Scientific Appraisal, Domestic Spectacle, and (Un)'Reasonable Creatures in Edgeworth's Belinda." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, no. 3, 2012, 509-536.

1. A Practical Education for Girls

Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth published their treatise *Practical Education* in 1798. Because Maria Edgeworth's experience was mainly gathered from her own domestic experience, and the domestic teaching environment was most common at the time, it does not come as a surprise that her views on education mainly concern domestic education. Indeed, most girls of Edgeworth's social class were educated at home, even though the young Maria Edgeworth herself spent some time in a boarding school where she received a conventional education for girls,[16] she helped her father educate her younger siblings at home. The Edgeworths used their own experience for the text and their approach was almost scientific.[17]

The text *Practical Education* offers a glimpse into that typical education and Maria Edgeworth's own ideas on the subject. In the introduction to *Practical Education,* the Edgeworths point out which chapters were the work of Richard Lovell and which were written by his daughter. There is no reason to contest this attribution. They state that the largest part of the book was written by Maria.[18] All the chapters discussed here ("On Accomplishments", "On Temper" and "On Prudence and economy") are attributed to Maria and were chosen because they specifically relate to female education. Even though Maria Edgeworth argues for a similar education for boys and girls (most of the advice for the education of boys can also be applied to the education of girls[19]), she argues for some differences between girls' and boys' education. In the chapter "On Accomplishments", she acknowledges the usefulness of accomplishments to women, in the chapter "On Temper" she argues that it is important for women to learn how to control their temper and in "On Prudence and Economy", she argues that women need to learn how to be prudent more quickly than men. However, Maria Edgeworth does not seem to imply that there is a natural difference between men

[16] From 175-1782 Maria was educated at Mrs. Latuffiere's school at Derby where she "learnt the routine accomplishments of the better-taught upper-class women of the period, such as French, Italian, dancing, embroidery, and hand-writing." Butler, *Maria Edgeworth* 51–52.
[17] Chandler states that Maria Edgeworth "was participating in the dual Lunar ethos of experimental pragmatism and disciplinary syncretism." Chandler, "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment" 91.
[18] "All that relates to the art of teaching to read in the chapter on Talks, the chapters on Grammar and Classical Literature, Geography, Chronology, Arithmetic, Geometry and Mechanics, were written by Mr; Edgeworth, and the rest of the book by Miss Edgeworth." Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical education* x.
[19] In the chapter "On Accomplishments", when talking about the application of some other chapters to female education, Maria Edgeworth writes that "the masculine pronoun *he* has been used for grammatical convenience, not at all because we agree with the prejudiced, and uncourteous grammarian who asserts "that the masculine is the more worthy gender." " Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 552.

and women that explains the different education they require. On the contrary, the difference in education can be entirely attributed to the workings of society.

In the chapter "On Accomplishments", a clear picture is given of the typical education of girls at the end of the eighteenth century. Parents emphasised the importance of the acquisition of certain accomplishments because they would increase their daughter's position in society and thus their chances of finding a husband. Accomplishments include drawing, music, dancing, a superficial knowledge of modern languages and letter writing. Maria Edgeworth gives a nuanced view of the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of education. She states: "accomplishments, it seems, are valuable as being the objects of universal admiration. Some accomplishments have another species of value as they are tickets of admission to fashionable society."[20] Edgeworth does not deny the fact that the possession of certain accomplishments is beneficial to young ladies. She also feels that music and drawing can be useful as harmless diversions for women, they can be a pastime in domestic life. Women often led very secluded lives, and their occupations were limited. Edgeworth states that having some kind of occupation can help to make women's lives more agreeable. However, she notes that many women stop practising after they have found a husband and thus lose the art because once they are married, women often no longer have time to practise regularly. This could be an argument against acquiring the accomplishment in the first place.

A special place is reserved for dancing, an accomplishment mainly associated with youth and public life which is seen as a good way for young people to have fun. Edgeworth's concern about dancing is that a lot of girls try to attract the attention of men in ball-rooms and that the men who are attracted by dancing will not necessarily become good husbands. She says: "Girls, who dance remarkably well, are, it is true, admired in a ballroom, and followed perhaps by those idle, thoughtless young men, who frequent public places merely for want of something else to do."[21] Her argument about dancing bears some resemblance to the description of Clarence Hervey's fears and doubts about Belinda.[22] The men are trying to amuse themselves in the company of the young ladies, but they live in a constant fear of being tricked into an unequal marriage with one of them. Edgeworth states that "they set their wits against the sex in general and consider themselves as in danger of being

[20] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 522.
[21] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 6.
[22] This episode in the novel will be discussed below

jockeyed into the matrimonial state."[23] According to Maria Edgeworth, this attitude in men degrades women and makes them less respectable. Furthermore, Edgeworth notes that accomplishments are only useful if they complement an education which cultivates the female understanding. This is perhaps her most important objection to the traditional education of young ladies. Girls must not simply learn tricks, they must increase their understanding as well. "It is in all cases advisable to cultivate the general power of the pupil's understanding, instead of confining her to technical practices and precepts."[24] Women must exercise their mental powers: it is better to know one thing thoroughly than a number of things superficially. Once a woman has developed her understanding, it will become easier to acquire any accomplishment she wants to acquire: "let a woman learn any one thing completely, and she will have sufficient understanding to learn more."[25] The same principle applies to the education of men, but unlike women, men are already given the kind of education which cultivates the understanding.

A further warning against giving the acquisition of accomplishments too much importance is the fact that accomplishments are susceptible to change and thus a lady can become outdated. Even if fashion does not change, a future husband may have a different view of what kind of occupations are agreeable. Edgeworth's argument is not simply an argument against the teaching of accomplishments, but an argument for a thorough education with attention to mental powers rather than superficial skills. Edgeworth also gives a moral evaluation of the contemporary society: "if the system of female education, if the system of female manners, conspire to shew in the fair sex a degrading anxiety to attract worthless admiration, wealthy, or titled homage, is it surprising that every young man, who has any pretentious to birth, fortune or fashion, should consider himself as the arbiter of their fate, and the despotic judge of their merit?"[26]

A similar warning for the loss of respect from men is given in the chapter "On Temper". According to Maria Edgeworth, girls should be taught to control their temper when arguing. Edgeworth writes that "Girls should be more inured to restraint than boys, because they are likely to meet with more restraint in society."[27] This is a pragmatic approach to the problem, rather than letting girls fight for

[23] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 533.
[24] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 542.
[25] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 551.
[26] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 534.
[27] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 168.

their rights and possibly change society's restraints, she wants them to accept society as it is and behave accordingly. Maria Edgeworth seems to answer the question of whether women's rights are more important than their happiness with the following statement: "We cannot help thinking that their happiness is of more consequence than their speculative rights, and we wish to educate women so that they may be happy in the situations in which they are most likely to be placed."[28] There seems to be a contradiction between Edgeworth's proposal for female education and her ideas about what she calls women's "speculative rights." While she does elaborate on the former, she leaves the latter to be inferred from her statement that "we by no means wish that women should yield their better judgement to their fathers or husbands."[29] She does not argue that women should let go of their opinions. Women are entitled to their opinions as much as men, it is only society that commands women to be more restrained. When discussing Edgeworth's views about female education it is therefore important to distinguish between her views on the rights of woman and her views on what is most beneficial to a woman's happiness in life.

In the chapter "On Prudence and Economy", Edgeworth argues that the quality of prudence is more important for women than for men. Parents can teach children to be prudent by allowing them to make their own decisions. Experience will teach them the difference between good and bad decisions and will help them to be more prudent in the future. However, young women have less opportunity to make mistakes than young men. From a very young age, they are expected to act with prudence. For that reason, it is better for them not to make any rash or sudden decisions. They cannot be allowed to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes because the decisions they make at a young age could affect them for the rest of their lives. Edgeworth does not argue here that girls have more of a natural disposition for prudence than boys, or that they would be unable to learn things from their own experience. The difference in education she proposes can be attributed to the difference in society's demands with respect to men versus women. Her argument here is similar to her argument in the chapter "On Temper." She does not say that the current system of society is fair in demanding women to be prudent at a young age and not letting them learn by experience. Her

[28] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 168.
[29] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 167.

advice is practical advice. She says that "girls cannot always have resource to what *ought to be,* they must adapt themselves to what is."[30]

As the title of the work implies, Edgeworth gives practical advice. She thinks it is more important for women to control their temper than for men because in society, women are more easily criticized for being unrestrained than men. Her advice is meant to enable women to speak their minds without being judged for it. The same goes for her advice on prudence. It is more important for women than for men to learn how to be prudent at a young age because in society, girls cannot afford to make mistakes; their reputation is too important and too easily lost. In fact, a lot of the advice that is specifically directed towards the education of girls is meant to help girls protect their reputation. Her negative remarks on some accomplishments, like dancing, address the problem of girls losing their reputation (and by doing so, reflecting badly on the female sex as a whole.) Edgeworth does not assume a difference in natural disposition for learning between boys and girls; any difference in the education between boys and girls can be attributed to their different position in society. However, she does not advocate a change in the current order of society, only the current education for girls is challenged. At the same time one must conclude that she does not try to defend the inequality of women either.

[30] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical Education* 699.

2. A Caricature of the Common System of Education

The same critiques of the education that girls of Maria Edgeworth's class usually received can be found in the novel *Belinda.* Maria Edgeworth seems to put the educational theory into practice in the novel. In this chapter, different plotlines of the novel will be discussed that reveal Edgeworth's view on the education of women. Some characters assume the role of parent or guardian and other characters assume the role of student. The emphasis lies on the education of women. The parents or guardians have to teach the women and help them with good advice. In turn, the student has to rely on her own understanding to distinguish between good advice and bad advice and to protect herself from negative influences. In a way, the novel is the educating instance of its audience, as it is showing the young readers the example of Belinda, who is able to think for herself and who uses her powers of reason.

2.1 Belinda's bad reputation

The actions of Mrs. Stanhope are an example of bad guidance and Edgeworth uses the character to critique a common way of educating girls. The novel's heroine has the misfortune of being put under the care of this match-making and scheming woman. Even though Belinda's aunt only appears in the novel through the letters she writes to her niece, she has a lot of influence over Belinda's life. After a while, Belinda sees through her aunt Stanhope's tricks and cunning ways of securing advantageous matches for her nieces. These nieces have all found husbands with the aid of their aunt Stanhope. In a letter she writes to Belinda, urging her to marry the rich Sir Phillip Baddely, Mrs. Stanhope frightens Belinda by saying that those nieces have not found happiness in married life: "her sister and cousins, who had married with mercenary views, had made themselves miserable, and had shown their aunt neither gratitude, nor respect." This gives Belinda "the best possible reasons against following her advice with regard to Sir Philip Baddely."[31] Aunt Stanhope feels that Belinda's cousins have ended up unhappily because they did not continue to listen to their aunt after their marriage. Belinda sees that her cousins' mistake was to listen to their aunt in the first place. The implication is that hurried and unequal marriages could be dangerous. Belinda realizes that she should not listen to her aunt because her unhappy relatives all married under the guidance of Mrs. Stanhope.

[31] Edgeworth, Maria. *Belinda.* London:Macmillan And Co., 1896 221.

Another bad aspect of Mrs. Stanhope's guidance is the fact that she ruins Belinda's reputation by advertising her too much. Even before Belinda arrives in London, her reputation is severely tainted and she is the subject of gossip. The argument here is very similar to the argument made in the chapter "On Accomplishments" of *Practical Education*. Belinda's cousins are made an example to young girls like Belinda and a warning to young men like Clarence Hervey, Belinda's main suitor. The young men of Belinda's acquaintance are afraid that Belinda, who is "as well advertised as Packwood's razor strops,"[32] will try to ensnare them, like her cousins have succeeded in ensnaring other rich men. Mrs. Stanhope has made them suspicious of Belinda. They naturally assume that Belinda must agree with her aunt's methods: "Young ladies who have the misfortune of being *conducted* by these artful dames are always supposed to be partners in all the speculations, though their names may not appear in the firm."[33] From the first chapter of the novel, Clarence is often confused about Belinda because his expectations of finding in her a very cunning creature do not match his experience of seeing a very sensible young lady: "If he had not been prejudiced by the character of her aunt, Mr. Hervey would have thought Belinda an undesigning, unaffected girl; but now he suspected her of artifice in every word, look, and motion; and even when he felt himself most charmed by her powers of pleasing, he was most inclined to despise her, for what he thought such premature proficiency in scientific coquetry."[34] Clarence Hervey's great fear of Belinda drives the couple apart and almost results in Belinda marrying the wrong man (Mr. Vincent).

This example of Mrs. Stanhope's failed attempts to increase Belinda's chances of finding a husband, shows how parents and guardians often lay the emphasis on the wrong qualities. Belinda's bad reputation has nothing to do with her extremely accomplished nature. As discussed above, Edgeworth did not completely reject the importance of learning some accomplishments, but she does not see them as the most important qualities of a girl. From the very beginning of the novel, Belinda is described as an extremely accomplished girl. This aspect of her personality has drawn her to the attention of Lady Delacour and thus secured her an access to the highest circles of London society. Belinda's accomplishments are not problematic, the fault of Belinda's reputation lies with her aunt's way of advertising those accomplishments. The guardian clearly has a responsibility too. Belinda's reputation leads to her being humiliated by Clarence Hervey and his friends at a masked

[32] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 20.
[33] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 10.
[34] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 10.

ball. She has more sense than her aunt Stanhope and refuses to use her accomplishments in this way. At a later point in the novel, "she has the good sense and the good taste to avoid a display of her abilities and accomplishments."[35] In the episode in which she meets Dr X, she refuses to display her accomplishments because "a sensible man, who as any knowledge of the world an talents for conversation, can easily draw out the knowledge of those with whom he converses."[36] Instead of advertising herself, she allows the intelligent Dr X to discover her true character.

2.2 Clarence Hervey's Project

Driven by his fear of being trapped by a woman, Clarence Hervey, the main suitor of Belinda, has taken up the plan of educating a wife for himself. He selects a sweet, innocent and ignorant girl and shields her of from the world.[37] His innocent girl, Virginia St Pierre, resembles Rousseau's ideal Sophie.[38] Later in the novel, when the initial charm of the plan has faded away, he realises that he would much rather be with the sensible Belinda than with his homegrown ignorant girl, however lovely and loving she may be: "The virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment, those of Belinda from reason." Clarence Hervey realises that Belinda is superior to Virginia: "the one he found was his equal, the other his inferior; the one he found could be his companion, a friend to him for life; the other would merely be his pupil, or his plaything." [39] This episode from the novel mocks both Clarence's extreme fear of being trapped and the idea that a woman is best kept ignorant. Throughout the novel, Clarence Hervey gradually comes to the realization that a well-educated man like himself needs a well-educated woman like Belinda because husband and wife should be able to converse with each other on equal terms. Belinda will be a much better wife to him than Virginia because she has the advantage of a rational mind. Her superior understanding and reason will also make her better suited to take on the duties of married life.

2.3 Ideal children

As befits a moral tale, Edgeworth counters the instances of bad education in the novel by offering a glimpse into the lives of an ideal family: The Percivals. Chandler has noted that the domestic life of

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[35] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 113.
[36] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 113.
[37] Maria Edgeworth was inspired by Thomas Day, a friend of the Edgeworths who once did the same thing. Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 26.
[38] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 25-26.
[39] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 389.

the Percival family "may be understood as a somewhat idealized rendering of the Edgeworth family house in Ireland."[40] They even have enough time and love to take in the neglected daughter of Lady Delacour. The education that the Percival children receive resembles the education that Maria Edgeworth and her father proposed in *Practical Education.* Both boys and girls are encouraged to explore scientific subjects, this conforms with the Edgeworths' stress on the acquirement of a scientific mind. Maria Edgeworth had inherited her interest in science from her father, who was an active member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham.[41] The scientific knowledge of the Percival children helps Belinda to solve a mystery that is haunting the ignorant West-Indian servant Juba. The superstitious servant believes that he is haunted by an obeah-woman, a ghost from his home-country. They talk to Belinda about the reaction of phosphor and she, in turn, links this to the story of Juba. The only way to relieve Juba of his fear seems to be by showing and explaining him the workings of phosphor. In a recent article, Nicole Wright notes that in the novel, the older generation is prone to superstition and prejudice, while the younger generation "readily adopts the practice of empirical thinking."[42] Furthermore, she notes that "the household harmony is strengthened by the scientific education occurring within its walls."[43] The children are not actively trying to solve mysteries, they are encouraged to explore scientific subjects in a safe environment: home. This stress on the importance of scientific subjects in the domestic education of children can also be seen in *Practical Education.*

Teaching scientific subjects and encouraging empirical thinking does not only affect the "household harmony", Wright states that "Edgeworth illustrates the possibility that the scientific method can eradicate superstitions and liberate the disempowered from societal hindrances."[44] The incident with the servant Juba shows that both children, a woman and a servant are able to understand a scientific explanation. "Such characters", Wright states, "are furloughed not only from fear, but also from the traditional boundaries accorded to them by society, which fosters expectations about individuals and their capacities for reason based on readily apparent attributes such as race, gender, and age."[45] This

[40] Chandler, "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment" 95.
[41] Chandler, "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment" 89-91.
[42] Wright, "Opening the Phosphoric "Envelope": Scientific Appraisal, Domestic Spectacle, and (Un)'Reasonable Creatures' in Edgeworth's Belinda" 533.
[43] Wright, "Opening the Phosphric "Envelope"" 536.
[44] Wright, "Opening up the Phosphoric "Envelope"" 522.
[45] Wright, "Opening up the Phosphoric "Envelope"" 536.

fits in Edgeworth's educational theory and underscores the fact that men and women should receive a similar education as they are equally capable of using the scientific method.

2.4 The Exemplary Belinda

From the first page, Belinda is described as a girl "disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity" and "very fond of reading."[46] It is unclear why Belinda is able to act rationally and improve herself. Her other nieces, it seems, were not quite so successful. Deborah Weiss argues that Belinda is an extraordinary character because she is able to do what any young woman should be able to do. She is ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.[47] Chalk offers a similar explanation of the character *Belinda*; she states that Belinda is a very static character, an empirical observer amidst a number of characters with diverse gender identities.[48] Belinda's qualities of interpreting the world around her can also be seen in the episode with the phosphor mystery. Unlike irrational characters like Juba or Lady Delacour, she is not superstitious and she believes in science. Wright points out that both Belinda and her author Maria Edgeworth have received their scientific education at home, and in bits and pieces, because women were not generally taught science at the time.[49] Belinda uses the little information she gets in order to solve a mystery and get rid of superstition.

The novel teaches girls that they can act sensibly, even when their circumstances are not ideal, by introducing a perfect character like Belinda. She is an example to the readers of the novel, not only because she takes an interest in science and favours rational explanations, but also because she always thinks carefully before she makes a decision. Even though she is not always helped by sensible or rational-minded adults, she is able to make the right decisions. Both Mrs. Stanhope and Lady Delacour fail at their task of being a good chaperone and even Lady Anne Percival, in many ways the perfect mother-figure, wrongly advises Belinda to marry Mr. Vincent, a man from the West-Indies. Belinda prudently keeps Mr. Vincent at a distance. Eventually, he is found out to be a gambling addict. The exemplary Belinda has been able to make the right decision because she has thought for herself and not trusted the judgement of others entirely. Deborah Weiss notes that "the

[46] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 1.
[47] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda."
[48] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 133–134.
[49] Wright, "Opening the Phosphoric "Envelope"" 524.

meaning, if not the moral, is that, through the disciplined cultivation of the understanding, the readers themselves can become female philosophers."[50]

2.5 Lady Delacour's Reform

Throughout the novel, Lady Delacour is the character that undergoes the most changes. Dannie Leigh Chalk has argued that unlike the static Belinda, Lady Delacour is a dynamic character. Her function is to be "the object lesson in changing oneself for the better" and she is the true sentimental heroine of the novel.[51] Helped by her ward Belinda, Lady Delacour transforms from a deeply unhappy woman at the very top of society to a contented woman who understands what is most important in life: family.

In the beginning of the novel, Lady Delacour acts as the ideal hostess; she organizes many get-togethers for the most fashionable people of London and is universally admired. However, Belinda soon discovers that Lady Delacour's public vivacity is just an act: "she seemed like a spoiled actress of the stage, over-stimulated by applause, and exhausted by the exertions of supporting a fictitious character."[52] Lady Delacour masks her unhappiness, literally, with a large quantity of make-up: Belinda finds Lady Delacour's rouge "glaring" and her pearl powder "obvious."[53] Underneath the layers of make-up and the fake smiles, Lady Delacour is hiding a big secret: there is a hideous wound on her breast that causes her pain and leads her to believe that she is suffering from cancer. The wound was a result of an accident during a female duel. Apart from hiding an illness, Lady Delacour is also hiding an unhappy marriage and an estranged daughter. However, Lady Delacour decides to trust Belinda and tells her the whole story of her misfortunes. Guided by her good sense, Belinda is able to improve the lives of the Delacour household, but unfortunately, Lady Delacour's jealousy takes over and she accuses Belinda of trying to steal her husband. This incident brings Lady Delacour to a low point, but it also illustrates the extreme good nature of Belinda, who decides to stick by her chaperone's side regardless of the gross accusations. Eventually, Belinda is able to convince Lady Delacour that she does not want to marry Lord Delacour, and Lady Delacour decides to trust science and consult the very learned Dr. X about her illness. Dr. X finds out that Lady

[50] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 461.
[51] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 137.
[52] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 5.
[53] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 16.

Delacour is not suffering from cancer after all. The story of the brilliant Lady Delacour ends happily as she is reconciled with her daughter and husband.

The example of Lady Delacour shows how important it can be to trust science. Lady Delacour could have been cured much earlier had she only trusted a man of science like Dr. X. The same message is given here as in the episode of the obeah-woman mystery: science can help to make people's lives better and it is important to get rid of superstition. Lady Delacour's story also teaches the reader how important it is to have a good connection with one's family. At the beginning of the novel, Lady Delacour is alone: she hardly has any friends, she hardly ever speaks with her husband and she has sent her daughter away because she is afraid to be a bad mother. At the end, the Delacour family is reunited and reconciled. Lady Delacour's superficial brilliance from the beginning of the story has been replaced by true happiness.

In Lady Delacour's plotline, some elements typical of the conception of gender in the late eighteenth century can be found. In his book *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England,* Dror Wahrman points out that the novel *Belinda* conforms to the typical late eighteenth-century conception of gender. He indicates some profound changes that happened in the last decades of the eighteenth century and explains how it was perfectly possible to imagine the crossing of gender boundaries in the mid-eighteenth century, but an essentialist view of gender made any subversion of gender categories seem outrageous in the 1790s. The result of these changes was a very rigid categorizing of gender and a strict coherence between sex and gender.[54] The shift in gender perception was very sudden, it happened over the course of a decade. Wahrman exemplifies the sudden change through the figure of the Chevalier D'Eon. As gender categories became more fixed, the images of women that crossed gender boundaries became unpopular. The Chevalier D'Eon was an extremely popular figure in the 1770s, who hovered between the male and the female gender. He/she is also mentioned in *Belinda* [55], so it seems that he/she was still a well-known figure. This Chevalier no longer changed his/her appearance from 1785 onwards, but fixed on the female gender image.[56] The result of this shift in gender categories can be clearly seen in Lady Delacour's storyline: she is severely punished for her act of crossing gender boundaries in a

[54] Wahrman, Dror. *The making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England*. 1. publ. in paperback, Yale University Press, 2006: 7–44.
[55] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 207.
[56] Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* 29–33.

female duel and she nearly dies from an injury on her breast that she incurred during the duel. As Wahrman points out, Lady Delacour is meant to represent an Amazon in this episode.[57] Amazons had a negative connotation at the end of the eighteenth century. The word was no longer used as a compliment for strong women. Wahrman states that "One would be very hard pressed to find many writers in the 1780s and 1790s employing the epithet "Amazonian" in anything but a pejorative sense."[58] Lady Delacour is not only affected in her breast after a duelling incident, she also refuses to be a mother. It becomes physically impossible for her to hug her daughter because of her injured breast. She cries out with pain when her frightened daughter tries to display some affection towards her. This makes Lady Delacour an unnatural woman to late eighteenth-century standards . She is denying her gender's essential place, as a mother, and at the same crossing gender boundaries by fighting duels. According to Wahrman, the change of fate for the Amazonian woman occurred at the same time as a shift towards greater focus on the woman as a mother.[59] The whole novel centres around a plot in which Belinda has to find a husband. This will give her a permanent place in society, but more importantly perhaps, it will eventually result in her becoming a mother. The novel's most exemplary woman is perhaps Lady Anne Percival, who is, unsurprisingly, a very good mother.

Another aspect of Lady Delacour's story is her involvement in politics. Dror Wahrman has argued that "the relative good standing of the female politician was sharply reversed in the late eighteenth century."[60] The female duel in which Lady Delacour participates, was started over a political dispute with a former friend: Mrs. Luttridge. The political dispute was started because Lady Delacour spread a caricature of Mrs. Luttridge to which the latter took offence. Not only does Lady Delacour transgress gender boundaries by fighting, she also meddles in politics, a domain typically reserved for men, and she uses caricature to win a campaign. David Francis Taylor argues that a large part of the narrative of Belinda revolves around "the disastrous personal consequences that attend one woman's caricaturing of another"[61] and in his article "Edgeworth's *Belinda* and the Gendering of Caricature", he states that political caricature is an extremely gendered cultural practice because usually, women did not use the form. Furthermore, he argues that in political caricature, "bodies,

[57] Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* 11.
[58] Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* 11.
[59] Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* 15.
[60] Wahman, *The Making of the Modern Self* 35.
[61] Taylor, David Francis. "Edgeworth's *Belinda* and the Gendering of Caricature." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 26, no.4, 2014: 594.

not least women's bodies, are invested with complex moral and political symbolism."[62] Delacour's severe punishment resembles the typical caricatures of the time that often used a "grammar of physiognomic distortion and disfigurement."[63]

[62] Taylor, "Edgeworth's *Belinda* and the Gendering of Caricature" 595.
[63] Taylor, "Edgeworth's *Belinda* and the Gendering of Caricature" 595.

3. Traces of Mary Wollstonecraft

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that there is something wrong with the education of women of the time; there is a "false system of education" [64] which keeps women from realizing their full potential. In the introduction to *A Vindication* she writes: "I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result? –a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore."[65] Women spend a lot of time "acquiring a smattering of accomplishments"[66], but their education is of a fragmentary nature. Wollstonecraft proposes an education of women similar to the education men usually receive. The advantage men have over women is that their education is structured.[67] Wollstonecraft argues that without order and method, women can never go beyond an "instinctive common sense."[68] The current female education is flawed because it does not cultivate their understanding; it is focused on teaching them accomplishments in order to make them "alluring mistresses rather than affectionate wives and mothers"[69]. She argues that it would be better for society as a whole if women were educated so that they could perform their roles better. Women's lives do not end when they have found a husband. They also have to run a household and bring up their children. Marry Wollstonecraft argues that it is important that husband and wife should maintain a good relationship. The only possibility for a happy marriage is to become friends, Wollstonecraft states that "Friendship or indifference invariably succeeds love."[70] Education is important in this respect because the woman who "strengthens her body and exercises her mind will […] become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband."[71] Wollstonecraft also criticises Rousseau, who uses the character Sophie to explain his ideal of female education. Rousseau wants woman to be obedient, he wants her to be "the humble dependent of her husband"[72],

[64] Wollstonecraft, Mary. "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman."*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, vol. D, W.W. Norton, 2012: 213.
[65] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:213.
[66] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:216.
[67] "…what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgement." Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:220.
[68] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:220.
[69] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:214.
[70] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:226.
[71] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:225.
[72] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:225.

but Mary Wollstonecraft states that women's aim is not to serve their husbands[73]: women's aim and men's aim should be the same: to be virtuous [74].

Maria Edgeworth explores similar problems in *Belinda* and in the treatise *Practical Education.* Her concern about accomplishments resembles Mary Wollstonecraft's argument. There is no discussion about whether or not Maria Edgeworth really was influenced by her predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft because Edgeworth refers to the rights of woman movement in her novel: one chapter of the novel is entitled "Rights of Woman" and she introduces a character that calls herself a "champion for the rights of woman."[75] Furthermore, Iain Topliss has noted that Edgeworth probably read Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* as early as 1792. He also gives some circumstantial evidence of friends of the Edgeworth family at the time responding to the radical treatise.[76] Both Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth propose a similar education for boys and girls. Mary Wollstonecraft compares the education of boys with the education of girls and attributes the shortcomings of the education of girls to a lack of method. Edgeworth stresses the same problem when she talks about the importance of the development of an understanding. Edgeworth's practical advice is to teach the female student one thing very thoroughly so that she may find it easier to learn other things independently.[77] The opposite of this kind of education is the education women commonly received at the time: an education that was solely concerned with the acquisition of superficial qualities. Another resemblance between Wollstonecraft's and Edgeworth's line of thinking is the stress on women's roles in the family. Wollstonecraft wants women to learn in order to be better fit for their role as a mother, just as Edgeworth stresses the importance of family relations in *Belinda.* Indeed, functioning well as a mother is an important quality for the female characters in Belinda. A third resemblance between the two women writers is their attack on the educational theory of Rousseau. Edgeworth does not agree with Rousseau's idea that women should be educated for the purpose of

[73] "…their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles and have the same aim" Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:223.
[74] "Connected with man as daughters, wives and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue." Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" D:223.
[75] Edgeworth, *Belinda* 235.
[76] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 15.
[77] See the chapter "A Practical Education for Girls"

pleasing men either and responds to Rousseau's theory in *Belinda* with the episode of Clarence failed experiment with the innocent and ignorant girl as well as in *Practical Education.*[78]

Both Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft stress the importance of the use of reason. The development of their understanding is essential to the lives of women and without it, they cannot become successful in their adult lives. Wollstonecraft argues that men have an advantage because they receive an education which values the cultivation of their understanding. Edgeworth takes this emphasis on method further that Wollstonecraft. The Edgeworths stress the importance of scientific subjects in *Practical Education,* and in *Belinda,* Maria Edgeworth gives a positive evaluation of a family that includes scientific subjects in the education of their children. Furthermore, the Edgeworths decided to take an experimental, scientific approach on education, using empirical observations. As Chalk notes, this emphasis on empiricism can also be found in *Belinda*: the protagonist has "a form of "natural" empiricism."[79] If men seem to be more rational than women, the fault has to be found in the differences between male and female education rather than in a natural disposition. Women should not only be taught "accomplishments" and their role is not solely to please men. Edgeworth shows the advantages of reason in women, letting her heroine improve her own destiny and help her friends. She also shows examples of a good kind of education (the Percival children) and a bad kind of education (the education which Mrs. Stanhope gives to Belinda and the other nieces.)

Besides the similarities between *A Vindication* and *Belinda*, there are also some differences in the implied authors' approaches to female education. Deborah Weiss argues that even though both Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth separate manners from morals and view the feminine behaviours of women as cultural rather than natural, a distinction can be found between the positions of Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft in the fact that Edgeworth "was willing to consider the utility of many feminine behaviours."[80] Belinda uses her reason, but she does not behave in an unladylike manner. Unlike Harriot Freke, the evil woman in the novel, Belinda dresses and behaves like a woman of the eighteenth century. The behaviours of women may be dependent on the culture in which they live, but Belinda does not reject those societal codes. In his article "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria

[78] Anne Chandler writes that "relative to most child-rearing manuals of its time, *Practical Education* offered an unusually comprehensive response to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762)." Chandler, Anne. "Maria Edgeworth on Citizenship: Rousseau, Darwin, and Feminist Pessimism in Practical Education." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, no.1, 2016: 93

[79] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 134.

[80] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 450.

Edgeworth's Modern Ladies", Iain Topliss states that Edgeworth's "first impulse was always to moderate the more extreme suggestions offered by Mary Wollstonecraft."[81] According to him, the essential difference between Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth is that for Wollstonecraft, the ultimate value is "virtue", whereas for Edgeworth, the ultimate value is "happiness."[82] An important point in this respect could be the fact that Maria Edgeworth always gives practical advice that can help women; she has a pragmatic approach. As seen before, Maria Edgeworth mentions in *Practical Education* that she values the happiness of women over their speculative rights.[83] Topliss claims that Edgeworth's ideal of happiness means "happiness within the present arrangements of society."[84] Indeed, Belinda never breaks with the rules of society; she ends up marrying Clarence Hervey, the man Mrs. Stanhope wanted her to marry in the first chapter of the novel. There is no break with the normal course of events. Unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth lets her heroine perform her traditional role in society. By marrying a rich husband, Belinda lives up to people's expectations.

Edgeworth's stance towards the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft appears to be challenged by the seemingly contradictive negative representation of a feminist that resembles Wollstonecraft which could indicate a negative reception of Wollstonecraft's work and ideas. However, Iain Topliss has argued that the negative public perception made it almost impossible for women like Maria Edgeworth to give a positive evaluation of her predecessor's writings without being affected by the scandal too.[85] By introducing a character like Harriet Freke, Maria Edgeworth was able to shield herself off from the criticism that would otherwise befall her. This may explain the negative representation of Harriet Freke in the novel, and many recent scholars have seen this negative representation as a way for Edgeworth to be able to argue similar ideas as Wollstonecraft, yet shielding herself from the negative associations that came along with the figure of Wollstonecraft.[86] It was very important for her to make a distinction between arguing for a rational education for girls (which she does through the character Belinda) and wanting girls to behave like boys (dress and talk like men, as Harriet Freke does.) The negative character of Freke is thus contrasted with the positive

[81] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 19.
[82] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 20.
[83] Edgeworth and Edgeworth, *Practical education* 168.
[84] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 20.
[85] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 23.
[86] Iain Topliss, Deborah Weiss

character of Belinda. The example of Belinda shows how not all independent women need to be radical amazons like Freke.

Furthermore, Deborah Weiss has argued that Maria Edgeworth uses Freke to "lampoon the idea of Wollstonecraft that circulated in the culture."[87] In the novel, Freke appears as an evil person and a brute. She only ever tries to shock people, but claims to be a partisan of women's rights. She dresses up as a man and displays male mannerisms, like shouting and using crude language. As Deborah Weiss has pointed out, Harriet Freke's argumentation about women's rights does not conform to Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, even though she uses some phrases that appear in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication.*[88] Freke is not really meant to represent the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, but rather to caricature a false idea about Wollstonecraft that obscured the interesting arguments she makes. Weiss points out that a character like Harriet Freke was a common feature in many literary works of the time. She was known as "the female philosopher".[89] According to Weiss, Freke is a false female philosopher because she displays masculine mannerisms, but not masculine morals: "When Lady Delacour refers to Freke's "masculine understanding" she is, in effect, confusing manners with morals."[90] And for Edgeworth, as well as for Wollstonecraft,[91] it is important to separate "external characteristics from internal principles."[92] Unlike Harriet Freke, Belinda does possess a "masculine understanding", but she does not display male mannerisms.[93] Belinda dresses like a woman and she never displays typically male behaviours like cursing or shouting. She is "a heroine whose character is, according to the period's understanding, almost entirely masculine."[94] Weiss argues that Edgeworth attempts a "reform of the prevailing understanding of differences between men and women."[95]

Dannie Leigh Chalk takes the position that some aspects of the novel are contradictory because Edgeworth wants to "avoid being shoehorned into any one extreme position."[96] She agrees with

[87] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 446.
[88] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 445–446.
[89] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 444.
[90] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 447.
[91] Wollstonecraft criticises the fact that women "acquire manners before morals." Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication" 221.
[92] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 448.
[93] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 449.
[94] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 459.
[95] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 449.
[96] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 131.

Deborah Weiss on many points, but unlike Deborah Weiss, she argues that Edgeworth does have an essential view of gender.[97] However, she states that "Edgeworth's goal is to demonstrate not singularity but multiplicity of acceptable gender performances."[98] She argues that there are many different possible gender performances and many possible gender identities, but one's place on the gender spectrum is "innate, unchangeable by surface or circumstance."[99] Furthermore, she states that "Edgeworth explicitly embraces both gender and sex and even propounds the benefits of maintaining and expressing key public behaviours as indicative of a specific gender."[100] Thus, it can be noted that Edgeworth does propose a new conception of genre that agrees with her theory of education. Edgeworth makes a clear distinction between external characteristics and internal qualities, but she does not dismiss the importance of the public demonstration of gender. As mentioned before, there is a difference between Wollstonecraft's and Edgeworth's view on woman's place in society. Where Mary Wollstonecraft argues that virtue should be the ultimate goal of both women and men's lives, Maria Edgeworth argues that the ultimate goal should be to achieve happiness. The characters have to learn how to move in through a complicated world whilst staying true to their own gender identities, as has been noted by Chalk.[101] At the same time, Edgeworth separates masculine behaviour from masculine morals and argues that both men and women are capable of scientific thought and that what is commonly thought of as a "masculine understanding" is not a quality exclusively found in men.

[97] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 132.
[98] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 150.
[99] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 135.
[100] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 136.
[101] Chalk, "Comparative Gender in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda" 135.

Conclusion

In shorth, this paper has discussed the educational theory of Maria Edgeworth as seen in the novel *Belinda*. A few years before the publication of Belinda, the treatise *Practical Education* already explored the same problematic features of the common education of the time. It gives a warning for parents not to attach too much importance to the acquisition of superficial qualities and argues for a similar education for boys and girls which cultivates the understanding and includes the teaching of the scientific method. In the novel *Belinda*, Edgeworth's educational theory is made clear through positive and negative examples of education. The bad examples are caricatures of the common system of education at the time. Aunt Stanhope is a very bad guardian for Belinda: she furnishes Belinda with bad advice that only leads her to a mercenary marriage and ruins Belinda's reputation by boasting too much about her niece's accomplishments. Clarence Hervey tries very hard to avoid being tricked into marriage, and fearful of cunning ladies, he decides to pluck a girl from her home and bring her up in total seclusion for the purpose of becoming his wife. Belinda is an example of how to behave, and Lady Delacour is an example of how to reform. The intended audience of the novel, however, differs from the intended audience of the treatise. *Practical Education* was probably meant for people that were trying to educate their children in a domestic environment, whereas the novel was a genre that was very popular with young women. That is why the eponymous heroine Belinda is so perfect and well-behaved. Even though she has received a typical education which has some faults, she is rational minded and has developed a good understanding.

Edgeworth's theory of female education implies that women have the same capability for developing an understanding as men do. In this aspect, Maria Edgeworth seems to be rather progressive. However, Edgeworth advises some slight differences in the education of girls because society has different demands for women and men. Edgeworth does not admit to any difference in women's nature, but she acknowledges that women have to perform different roles in society. There can be found some differences between Edgeworth's educational theory, and her famous predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas. Iain Topliss has argued convincingly that Edgeworth favours happiness over virtue.[102] There seems to be a difference between the ultimate goal of Edgeworth's heroine and Mary Wollstonecraft's ideal for women. Furthermore, Maria Edgeworth

[102] Topliss, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth's Modern Ladies" 20.

seems to actively ward off all implications that she may have been influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas by introducing a negative caricature of the famous feminist. Moreover, examples of the shift in the perception of gender towards a more rigid categorizing of gender and a stricter coherence between sex and gender can be found in the novel. However, Deborah Weiss has argued that Edgeworth proposes a whole new theory of gender, which differs from Mary Wollstonecraft's theory but nonetheless "constitutes a contribution to Enlightenment moral philosophy that has not yet been recognized."[103] In short, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* succeeds in criticising the common system of education, proposing progressive ideas on how to educate girls, and exemplifying different ways of performing gender identity while at the same time remaining true to her period's conception of gender and staying well away from criticism that would link her to the ideas of the more extreme Mary Wollstonecraft. However, Maria Edgeworth did not just take a pragmatic approach because she wanted to prevent criticism that would attack her for being too radical and too close to Mary Wollstonecraft; her pragmatic approach was the result of a deep interest in science and an emphasis on the experimental and the practical.

[103] Weiss, "The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda" 443.

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