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**ACTS OF COERCION: FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS AND THE
PRESSURE TO CONFESS IN BRITISH WOMEN'S FICTION, 1778-1814**

by

SONIA KANE

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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Abstract

ACTS OF COERCION: FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS AND THE
PRESSURE TO CONFESS IN BRITISH WOMEN'S FICTION, 1778-1814

by

SONIA KANE

Adviser: Professor Rachel M. Brownstein

This dissertation examines the recurring motifs of interrogation, coercion, and confession in father-daughter relationships in British women's novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A consistent narrative feature in the novels I consider is a scene of confrontation in which a father or guardian interrogates a young woman upon the state of her affections. In the scenes, the fictional daughters must choose between conflicting directives of proper feminine behavior in the eighteenth century: to admit to feelings of desire for a man who has not made his own feelings known was to face censure and contempt, even from one's own father, but, on the other hand, to refuse a father the confidence he demanded was undutiful. In presenting father-daughter relationships as sites of distress, discomfort, and psychological coercion, the novels demonstrate women's lack of power within the family and should thus be read as feminist. The representations of daughters under duress reflect an anxiety on the part of the women writers not only over the uneasy status of daughters in the eighteenth-century family but also over the issue of what a woman could safely say--both as a daughter and

as a writer. The fictional daughters' dilemmas over whether or not to speak are analogous to the dilemmas faced by their creators, who wrote during a period in which it was considered somewhat daring for a respectable woman to publish.

My first chapter deals with the work of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, both of whom had complex and consuming relationships with their own writing fathers. In my second chapter, I treat the novels of the English Jacobin writers Elizabeth Inchbald and Eliza Fenwick. The third chapter looks at novels by Jane Austen and Mary Brunton, with particular attention to the authors' representations of the workings of sensibility--and the contagion of emotion it engenders--within the family. For all six of these women writers, I conclude, the depiction of the scene of father-daughter interrogation conveys a complex of unease, protest, and anger over the power relations between fathers and daughters--and, by extension, men and women--in their culture.

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* * * *

My love of words comes from both of my parents and I dedicate this dissertation to them: to my father, Larry Kane, and to the memory of my mother, Ruth Kane.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 “The Blush of Incapacity”: Deserving One’s Father	24
Chapter 2 “I Was Born to Think”: Defying the Father	56
Chapter 3 “Check These Tears; They Do but Exhaust You”: Self- Expression and Contagious Emotion	83
Conclusion	136
Works Cited	139

Introduction

This dissertation examines the recurring motifs of interrogation, coercion, and confession in father-daughter relationships in British women's novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With their depictions of scenes in which daughters experience psychological duress from their fathers, the novels under study here articulate an anxiety over the place of the daughter within the nuclear family as well as a protest against the limits of what a woman is permitted to say in a patriarchal society--both as a daughter and as a writer. Rather than functioning as a means of socializing women to accept their place within the domestic sphere, as critics like Nancy Armstrong and Caroline Gonda have maintained, these novels portray a particular kind of daughterly anguish, and in so doing, point out the costs for women of adhering to the expectations of their society.

Armstrong argues in Desire and Domestic Fiction that the domestic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, written largely by women, worked to promote a new female ideal--the domestic woman--that was inextricably linked to "the rise of the novel [and] the rise of the new middle classes in England" (8). Implicit in her argument is that this ideal, promoted in part by "the rise of female authority in the novel" (28) was meant to be attractive to women readers and to accustom them to a new and important role as custodians of middle-class values. Similarly, in Reading Daughter's Fictions, Caroline Gonda suggests that the father-daughter relationships depicted in British novels written between 1709 and 1834 function to educate the young woman reader in "the particular kind of female heterosexuality which her society requires of her" (xv). According to Gonda, these novels, and in particular their representations of father-daughter

relationships, actually worked to “bolster rather than undermine the familial and social order” (xvi). It is my contention that, in presenting father-daughter relationships as sites of distress, discomfort, and psychological coercion, the women writers in my study were in fact doing exactly the opposite--that is, rather than offering a comforting reaffirmation of the power of women within the family, the novels demonstrate rather starkly women’s lack of power. While some of the novels follow the structure of the courtship plot and provide the happy endings associated with successful courtship, the suffering that daughters endure within the family on their journey out of it into marriage, and particularly in their dealings with fathers, give the lie to the happy endings.¹

In the novels I consider, powerful and vivid confrontations occur in which fathers or father figures demand that their daughters confess secrets of their emotional lives. I look at these scenes of psychological coercion from several vantage points. What do they tell us about the story of the novel and about women writers staking a claim to be novelists? What do they tell us about father-daughter relationships in the eighteenth century, real and idealized? About the influence of the ideal of sensibility, and about the contagion of emotion associated with sensibility? What is the anxiety about speaking or not speaking, especially for women, that they convey? For example, in Frances Burney’s Evelina (1778), a scene occurs in which the heroine’s guardian and adoptive father, the Reverend Arthur Villars, pressures her to confide her apparent anguish to him. Because her distress is related to her feelings of amorous desire, Evelina demurs, adhering to the

¹ As Betty Rizzo points out in Companions Without Vows, women novelists in the late eighteenth century were for the most part careful to present indirectly rather than overtly their critiques of the constraints on women’s lives. (See page 5 and, for sources on the use of “indirection” among women writers, pages 330-331, note 10.) I see the scenes of father-daughter confrontation in the novels under study here as an example of the indirect critique that Rizzo notes; if one focuses on the overall narrative movement of the novels, the critique is perhaps not apparent, but an examination of the scenes yields a powerful pattern of protest.

contemporary code of female behavior that prohibited a woman from acknowledging feelings for a man who has not yet indicated his own. Evelina's reluctance to speak prompts Villars to declare reproachfully that he has "lost his child" (249). This statement, carrying as it does the implicit threat of abandonment, is enough to cause Evelina, "inexpressibly shocked," to agree to make her troubles known to her guardian (249).²

Confrontations such as the one described above are characterized by psychological coercion rather than the more direct methods of paternal control depicted by male novelists earlier in the century. Unlike Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* or Henry Fielding's *Sophia Western*, Evelina is not imprisoned by her father. Nevertheless, the scene of Evelina's interrogation, and others like it in the novels under study here, are occasions of terror for the heroines. These insistently repeated representations of daughters as the objects of paternal interrogation and scrutiny form a compelling narrative of anxiety that runs through the works of the six women authors I consider here, an anxiety that clusters around a series of related issues: the conflict between modesty and filial duty, the daughter's attempt to define and limit what she owes to a father; and the right of a young woman to own her thoughts and speak them as she chooses or not. These issues in turn broaden out into questions about sensibility, the eighteenth-century family, and women's sexuality. Further, the trope of the daughter under interrogation is important to our understanding not only of eighteenth-century women's lives but also of the place of the woman novelist in one of our favorite stories, the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century. The authors' portrayals of women characters struggling to negotiate a difficult path between saying and not saying, revealing and not revealing,

² All quotations from *Evelina* in this and subsequent chapters are from the 1965 W.W. Norton edition.

acknowledging desire or not, resonate tellingly with the decisions made by the authors themselves to write for public consumption during a period in which, despite the remarkable flowering of the work of women novelists from about the 1760s onward, it was still considered somewhat daring for a genteel woman to write for the public. As Jan Fergus notes, the “publishing explosion occurred despite the presence of many social obstacles. Publishing her own writing could threaten a woman’s reputation as well as her social position” (13). In some cases, notably those of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, the women writers were anticipating not just the condemnation of their social circle or a paternalistic literary establishment but the disapproval of their own fathers. Both Burney and Edgeworth were anxious to accommodate the directives of fathers who were also writers of some prominence. These writing fathers, the musicologist Charles Burney and the educationalist Richard Lovell Edgeworth, were dominating figures in their daughters’ lives, and both had strong opinions about what their daughters should and should not be publishing. Their attitudes toward their daughters’ writing were characterized by a pattern of somewhat erratic encouragement, varying according to their feelings about the appropriateness of women’s attempting certain genres rather than others, and also according to other, rather less ideological objectives—for example, Charles Burney put pressure on his daughter to finish her second novel, Cecilia, in time for it to be publicized along with his new volume on music. In the novels by Burney and Edgeworth, then, the scenes of interrogation in which fathers attempt to elicit an account from their daughters of particular kinds of feelings must be read as analogues for the struggles between writing father and daughter over the nature and content of the daughters’ utterances as writers.

In a more general sense, the scenes of confrontation in the novels examined here point us toward a sustained anxiety on the part of the novelists about the very nature of the father-daughter relationship. The scenes insistently invoke several questions in the mind of a reader, perhaps most prominently, the question of whether it is possible to be a good daughter; i.e., how can a daughter prove her love, duty, and moral probity to a father who always seems to want a different or greater proof, or a proof that conflicts with her own sense of what is honorable? In Mary Brunton's Self-Control (1810/11), for example, a dying father tries to browbeat the heroine, Laura Montreville, into accepting for a husband a man whom she loves but finds morally reprehensible; in effect, she tells her father, he is trying to make her into a whore. Laura's statement to her father brings us to another question implicitly raised in these father-daughter confrontations: Who owns a daughter's sexuality? If a father owns a daughter's most secret thoughts, as the fathers seem to assume, does he also in some way own her body? The threat--or attraction--of incest is suggested to varying degrees in each of the novels discussed here.

The frenetic energy that the daughters throw into their encounters with their fathers can only be described as sexualized. The daughters blush, tremble, weep, fling themselves upon a father's bosom or fall at his feet. Parting from her father at a crucial point in the narrative, the eponymous heroine of Burney's Camilla (1796) "kissed [her father's] hands with fervour, kissed every separate finger, rested upon his shoulder, hid her face in his bosom, caught and pressed to her lips even the flaps of his coat, and scarce restrained herself from bending to kiss his feet; yet without uttering a word, without even shedding a tear" (792)³. Never do we see a hint of such physicality toward the man the heroine desires as a husband. The fathers are similarly physical with their daughters; as

Irene Fizer points out, in Evelina, the heroine's eventual meetings with her natural father, Sir John Belmont, are characterized by "his aggression and physicality toward her" (95). Fizer describes Belmont as a "spouselike father, . . . [a] tremendously dissettling figure, who assigns Evelina an improper name and whose love for her is adulterated with desire" (97).

Spouselike fathers, fatherlike spouses. The question of incestuous feelings between fathers and daughters, suggested by the extreme physicality of these encounters, as well as by the incidents in which fathers pressure their daughters to confess sexual desire, is also unavoidably suggested by the way that fathers, both natural and surrogate, replicate the roles of suitors--and vice versa--in these novels. Thus, Inchbald's Dorriforth in A Simple Story (1791) falls in love with and eventually marries his ward, Miss Milner. In Burney's Camilla, the heroine strives to accommodate her judgmental suitor Edgar's rigid standards in the same way that she strives to please her father. Clarence Hervey, the heroine's suitor in Edgeworth's Belinda (1801), is at first destined to be the husband of his young ward Virginia, whom he has raised in Rousseauian isolation. Interestingly enough, although Hervey's relation to Virginia is that of a guardian, the rumor is that the woman he sees in secret (Virginia, that is) is his mistress.

These highly fraught representations of father-daughter interactions reflect an insistent anxiety on the part of the women authors about father-daughter relationships. One source of that anxiety may be particular kinds of changes in the structure of the middle- and upper-class eighteenth-century family in Britain and in the ways that people conceived of family and family relationships. We might ask, did father-daughter relationships in particular become more troubling, more threatening somehow? Some

³ All quotations from Camilla in this and subsequent chapters are from the 1972 Oxford UP edition.

historians, notably Lawrence Stone, have argued that over the course of the eighteenth century, relations within the family grew less formal and more expressively affectionate.⁴ As part of this transformation, Stone argues, the figure of the harsh, authoritarian patriarch gave way to the understanding, loving father who could tell his daughters, as Sir Richard Steele did, that “my soul is wrapped up in your welfare” (qtd. in Stone 414). A benign patriarch is not without power, however: As Margaret Doody notes, the eighteenth-century model of “daughterly piety,” while allowing the father to be “familiar, soft, and tender,” in response to the daughter’s attitude of “trust, devotion, [and] submissiveness,” also allows the father to “gain authority (even authority to destroy) through tenderness; a sort of emotional blackmail is substituted for more straightforward authoritarianism” (24). Or, in Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s words, “new-style patriarchy no longer operates according to the fear of punishment but according to the more psychologically compelling themes of guilt and obligation” (110). A loving and tender father may be more difficult to resist or oppose than a dictatorial one, as many of the father-daughter confrontations in the novels I discuss would seem to demonstrate.⁵ Further, a daughter’s dealings with such a father, in fiction if not in life, may verge

⁴ See Stone, chapters 6 through 9, for a description of the “trend toward greater freedom for children and a rather more equal partnership for spouses,” accompanied by “much warmer affective relations between husband and wife and between parents and children” (221).

⁵ Susan Moller Akin makes the related point that the ideal of the companionate marriage can be seen as providing “a new rationale for the subordination of women,” since “the legitimacy of male rule both within and outside the family is reinforced . . . on the grounds that the interests of the family are totally united, that family relations, unlike those outside, are based only on love, and that therefore husbands and fathers can be safely entrusted with power within the house and with the right of representing their families’ interests in the political realm” (qtd. in Skinner 95-96). One thinks in this connection of Frances Burney’s brother and father making deals on her behalf with publishers for the copyrights of her first two novels, deals that were less than advantageous for her. In the case of the first novel, *Evelina*, Burney had asked her brother to act for her; with the second novel, *Cecilia*, her father apparently sold the copyright without even consulting with her. It was not until Burney was in her early forties, with an impoverished husband and a son whose future she was anxious to provide for, that she insisted on negotiating with the publishers herself over the rights to her third novel, *Camilla*.

uncomfortably on the erotic: these novels are preoccupied with, among other problems, that of distinguishing fatherly love from sexual advances, and of defining the appropriate daughterly response to a father's affection.

But was this newly tender and loving father a reality of life in the genteel classes⁶ in eighteenth-century Britain, or a figure that the fiction writers needed to construct, for varying reasons? Lawrence Stone's conclusions about the rise of the nuclear family in England (and, particularly, the timing and pace of the changes) have been vigorously contested by other historians such as Peter Laslett and Amanda Vickery.⁷ Further, as Ruth Perry points out, there is a tendency among some historians, including Stone, to draw on literary sources for their conclusions about social history, in ways that literary critics may want to question. As Perry usefully reminds us, "literary representation is never simply mimetic" ("De-Familiarizing" 167). Discussing Stone's interpretation of early eighteenth-century amatory fiction by Haywood and Manley as revealing a supposedly coldblooded and cynical social climate, particularly with regard to gender relations, Perry warns against the tendency for Stone and other historians to

[take] at face value the descriptions of society available in literary texts, as if the historical age were transparently rendered by its contemporary authors and could be directly apprehended by twentieth-century readers, without the benefit of critical interpretation of idiosyncratic usages, literary conventions and traditions, or contextualized vocabularies. ("De-Familiarizing" 167-168)

⁶I am using "genteel" in the sense that Amanda Vickery uses it; that is, to describe "families headed by lesser landed gentleman, attornies, doctors, clerics, merchants, and manufacturers," families in which the daughters might have considered themselves " 'polite,' 'civil,' 'well-bred,' and 'polished' " (13).

⁷ See Vickery, 40, and Perry, "De-familiarizing," 165, also 165 n. 8

Perry suggests that instead of examining literary texts for evidence of lived reality, we look for the “structures of feelings” (she borrows this terms from Raymond Williams) displayed in these texts. In this kind of interpretation, she notes, “texts do not record behaviors but structures of feeling about social practices--as these are condensed into topoi and formulas with their own history of use, refinement, and parody. . . .

According to this way of thinking, art converts lived experience into formal tropes that derive from lived experience but are not reducible to it” (“De-Familiarizing” 168-169)

Perry’s suggestion, derived from Williams, of looking for tropes within literary texts that transform lived experience yet refer to it is relevant to my reading of the father-daughter interrogation scene that is repeated again and again in women’s novels of the late eighteenth century. Speaking of an ancient literary convention that reappears in novels of the second half of the eighteenth century, the cri du sang, in which family members previously unknown to each other are drawn instinctively to each other, Perry asks,

Does the reappearance of this plot device mean that biological lineal ties assumed a greater importance in English society during the second half of the eighteenth century? Or was the late-eighteenth-century emphasis compensatory, as blood ties lost importance? Were consanguineal relationships gaining strength, or were they weakening? What culture would produce an image of family members mysteriously drawn to one another: one that did or one that did not believe in the force of blood? (“De-Familiarizing” 164)

Similarly, I would ask, what does it mean that women writers of the late eighteenth century made use almost obsessively of a particular trope of interrogation and

psychological coercion between fathers and daughters? Did the women writers experience in their own lives this kind of interrogation, ranging from kindly to menacing, from their fathers? Was there indeed an experienced or observable “new-style patriarchy” that women found more insidious, more difficult to resist, than the older model of the authoritative patriarch? Or does the use of these scenes represent a particular kind of narrative trope within the novels’ stories of courtship and domesticity, serving variously to advance the conventional marriage plot or to cast a troubling shadow over its completion?

Other critics besides Perry have pointed out the divergence between what actual conditions within the eighteenth-century family may have been, particularly for women, and the picture presented in novels and other imaginative literature. Gillian Skinner notes,

Since the publication of Lawrence Stone’s The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (1977), the eighteenth century has been seen as the period during which the ideal of the companionate marriage took hold. There have been plenty of cavils and caveats in the twenty-odd years since Stone’s book appeared, but there is broad agreement that, whatever the lived reality, the representation of marriage certainly moved towards such an ideal in the literature of the period.

(92)

In a similar vein, Christopher Flint points out that “. . . simply to say that the prose fiction examined the family with a new intensity does not necessarily prove that the family itself experienced profound historical changes in organization” (16).

Whether or not the eighteenth-century family experienced the kind of profound changes in organization described by Stone and others, it seems clear, as Flint notes, that the prose fiction of the eighteenth century, and particularly of the later eighteenth century, was preoccupied with family relationships. In Flint's words,

The extramarital affairs in the scandal chronicles, the antisocial behavior in criminal literature, the exoticism of the travelogue, the random behavior of the picaresque, the complex erotic alliances of the romance--all fictional subjects and forms that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth century--were gradually replaced or absorbed in the eighteenth century by narratives dealing with the affective experiences of young adults seeking conjugal bliss in a domestic environment. (15)

For a young woman in the eighteenth century, "seeking conjugal bliss" was not an uncomplicated endeavor. Whatever movement there may have been toward an ideal of marriage based on mutual affection, a daughter's ability to exercise her own volition in picking a partner was limited not only by the still-pressing obligation to form an alliance that would benefit or reflect well on her family, but by ideas of feminine decorum that dictated that a woman not divulge her feelings toward a man until he had indicated his own. It is this last difficulty, and particularly its ramifications within the family in terms of what a daughter is bound to reveal to her father, that the novels under study here return to persistently.

In the fictional representations of scenes of father-daughter interrogation, the anguish of the daughter derives in part from her struggle to keep her amorous desires secret not just from their object but from the father figure who is demanding that she

share them. Although the father insists he can be trusted, the daughter, the novels seem to be saying, knows this is not true. In the world of the novels, confessing amorous desire to a father exposes the daughter to a range of unwanted or inappropriate or simply unhelpful responses from the father, the very least of which is disapproval. In Burney's Camilla, for example, after Camilla's father manages to wring from her a confession (partly expressed in words but mostly in physical gesture) of her love for the seemingly indifferent Edgar, he subjects her to a lecture on the contempt the world reserves for the "discovery of an unreturned female regard," a contempt that, by implication, her father would seem to share. He then gives her advice--to above all keep her feelings secret from their object--that will impede rather than advance her prospects with Edgar, who has been advised by his mentor, the woman-wary tutor Dr. Marchmont, to await some evidence of Camilla's preference before declaring his own. Further, Camilla, rather than feeling safe because her father knows her secret, is made to feel exposed and threatened everywhere she turns, even--or especially--within the family. She cannot so much as look out her bedroom window to see if Edgar is all right after a tumble from his horse without meeting the anxious eyes of her father looking up at her, upon which "shame was her only sensation" (347).

For daughters in these novels, it is tricky getting out of the family, and, in particular, extricating oneself from the emotional intimacy demanded by fathers or surrogate fathers. This is, of course, not a new theme in literature. One has only to think of Shakespeare's Cordelia, staunchly resisting her father's demands that she verbalize and quantify her love for him, wondering aloud as she does so how her falsely effusive sisters can love their husbands when they claim to love their father all. And yet, as

familiar a theme as the daughter's need to separate herself from a father may be, there is clearly an escalating preoccupation with it in the prose fiction of the eighteenth century, and particularly in the cluster of novels by women under study here. The place of the daughter within the family structure, and particularly her relationship with the father, is supremely troubling in these novels. The very definition of what makes someone a father or a daughter is in question, as evidenced by the proliferation of surrogate fathers, some related to the heroine by blood and others not: Mr. Villars in Evelina, Dorriforth in A Simple Story, Mr. Valmont in Secresy, Sir Thomas Bertram in Mansfield Park.

Paraphrasing Perry's questions regarding the reappearance of the plot device of the cri du sang, we might ask: What kind of culture would produce narratives in which father-daughter relationships are seen as consuming, threatening, all-important, and at the same time uncertain, in need of continual redefinition? Perry herself offers one answer in her essay "Women in Families: The Great Disinheritance," in which she describes the "tragic displacement of daughters" (113) that is the result of changes in laws of inheritance, which, by the mid-eighteenth century, had been "restructured so as to concentrate rather than redistribute wealth in families--usually in the male line. . . ." (112). These changes, Perry notes, were accompanied by a "psychological downplaying of [the] bilateral, cognatic kindred system"; that is, "a person's blood relations became less important . . . [than] conjugal relations . . . in determining his or her place in the world" (112). As a result of these changes, there is a "reconception of the daughter's place in the family as temporary, partial, and burdensome" (114). Perry sees this "banal truth" as the source of the "compulsively repeated plot premise" (114) of scores of eighteenth-century novels in which "daughters are somehow forced out of their families

of origin at the beginning of the story but relocated again in time to claim their rightful names and fortunes” (113).

I find persuasive Perry’s claim of a connection between the “tragic displacement of daughters” and the proliferation of novelistic plots in which disowned daughters search for and eventually reclaim, or are reclaimed by, their rightful families. I find even more profound enactment of the trope of the dispossessed daughter, however, in the psychological turmoil that invariably accompanies the scenes of confrontation between father (or father-substitute) and daughter in the novels under study here. The anxiety over a daughter’s place in the family is expressed most powerfully, that is, in the depictions of daughters under psychological duress from their fathers. Scenes that feature a daughter’s anguished desire to please a father even when it seems impossible to do so surely reflect what Perry refers to as the new position of the daughter in the middle-class or genteel eighteenth-century family: that is, “temporary, partial, and burdensome.” The insecurity or uncertainty about retaining a father’s love, and the fear of losing one’s father, are dramatically displayed in Camilla’s oddly tortured leavetaking of her father, described above. These fears also appear in Burney’s autobiographical writings, for example, in the incident recorded in her journal in which she describes a fear of her father’s disapproval so extreme that she considers herself bound to marry her undesired suitor, Mr. Barlow, because she thinks her father wants her to. In the young Frances’s own words, “To unite myself for Life to a man who is not infinitely dear to me, is what I can never, never consent to. Unless, indeed, I was most strongly urged by my Father” (Early Journals 2: 120). Frances’s dread of marrying Mr. Barlow is related not just to lack of affection for the young man but to misery over separating from her cherished

father and indeed, to feelings of being cast aside by him, as the following exchange makes clear:

“O Sir!”--cried I-- “I wish for Nothing!--only let me Live with you--”

“My life!”--cried he, kissing me kindly, “Thee shalt live with me for ever, if Thee wilt! Thou canst not think I meant to get rid of thee?”

“I could not, Sir! I could not!” cried I, “[I could not outlive]⁸ such a thought--” I saw his dear Eyes full of Tears! a mark of his tenderness which I shall never forget!

(Early Journals 2: 147)

The fear of being superfluous, the insecurity about one's place in a father's heart, are features, thus, of the fictive daughters created by Frances Burney as well as of the daughterly self she presents in her autobiographical writings. The excessively anxious postures of insecurity and dependence of the daughters in Burney's novels toward their fathers are reiterated in the novels by other women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as my study shows. Like Ruth Perry, who notes the connection between certain plot premises and changes in the laws of inheritance, Janet Todd finds a connection between the novelistic depictions of father-daughter relationships and prevailing social and economic conditions.

nothing . . . mitigated the daughter's absolute dependence on her father. In the ordinary course of things, this dependence would be expected to give way to a new one, on a husband. But towards the close of the eighteenth century, improvements in hygiene and living standards increased the hardier female

⁸ The editors of The Early Journals use square brackets to indicate emendations made in the journal by Burney in later life. In this case, the phrase in brackets was substituted for an earlier, obliterated one.

population disproportionately, so that it grew to contain a greater number of spinsters. In the middle and upper classes these unattached women had little opportunity for activity beyond the family and they could only hold to the daughterly role or imitate the wife as nurse, governess or companion. In sentimental literature the father-daughter tie would be shorn of its social and economic problems and be marvellously extolled. (17-18)

I agree with Todd that the social and economic problems are reflected in the novels; certainly a novel such as Mary Brunton's Self-Control presents very clearly the dire economic situation of the unmarried and unprovided-for daughter. I differ, however, with Todd's perception of the father-daughter relationships' being somehow extolled or celebrated; if on one level, the relationships are sentimentalized, so that daughters declaim glowingly and at length about their fathers' place in their hearts, the corresponding anxiety about losing the father's regard seems to be the real issue for these novelistic daughters. Rather than presenting father-daughter relationships in a way that counters and provides a fictive refuge from the harsh economic realities facing unmarried daughters, the novels discussed here depict father-daughter relationships as a source of pain and conflict for the daughters.

The novels produced by the women writers in my study reflect and comment not only on their culture's preoccupation with family issues, and particularly the place of women in the family, but on the debate over sensibility, a concept crucial in eighteenth-century life and letters, and again, one with specific ramifications for women. The concept of sensibility was so important during this period that historians and critics use phrases like "the cult of sensibility" or "the culture of sensibility" to describe its esthetic

productions. While the term itself had an ever-shifting range of meanings and inflections, meanings that were the subject of debate even at the time, in general, a person of sensibility was considered to have heightened reactions--particularly physical reactions such as blushing, trembling, or fainting--to various kinds of emotional and perceptual stimuli, and also to have the capacity to imagine and sympathize with the feelings of others. (Dr. Johnson defined sensibility as “quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy” [qtd. in Barker-Benfield 1]).

The concept of sensibility derived originally from sensational psychology--that is, from theories of John Locke and Isaac Newton describing how the senses receive and process information or “impressions.” It gathered a range of philosophical meanings from Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume and Francis Hutcheson, whose works postulated that humans have an innate moral sense and that it is through our ability to identify with the feelings of others--an important aspect of sensibility--that we derive pleasure from benevolent action. And, while sensibility was initially considered admirable in both men and women (indeed, the “man of feeling” is an eighteenth-century paradigm), it gradually came to be powerfully associated, in both positive and negative ways, with patterns of feminine behavior (especially in terms of the somatic reactions described above).⁹ Ann Van Sant’s “working definition” of sensibility usefully lays out the various aspects of the eighteenth-century understanding of the term:

an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and

⁹ See Barker-Benfield, The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction, and Van Sant, Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context, for discussions of the origin and development of the term.

physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passionate arousal. Though belonging to all, greater degrees of delicacy of sensibility--often to the point of fragility--are characteristic of women and upper classes. Excessive delicacy or acuteness of feeling produces an impaired or diseased state. (1)

From the period of about 1740 to 1820, poets, novelists, and periodical writers in Britain (not to mention private citizens in their letters) debated not only the definition of sensibility but its value as an ideal. These writers questioned not just sensibility's benefits to the individual man or woman but to the functioning of society.¹⁰ The women writers in my study were no exception: almost every single novel discussed here grapples in some way with the issue of defining positive and negative aspects of sensibility, and especially with the ways that excessive sensibility can be a liability for women. In Burney's Camilla, for example, the narrator laments that the heroine is "at the mercy of wayward Sensibility--that delicate, but irregular power, which now impels to all that is most disinterested for others, now forgets all mankind, to watch the pulsations of its own fancies" (680). Paradoxically, as this quotation points out, sensibility--particularly its aspect of sympathizing with the feelings of others--could lead to benevolent social behavior but it could, on the other hand, lead to solipsistic (and therefore antisocial) overindulgence in one's own feelings. The narrator comments here on the general properties of sensibility but also on the fact that Camilla's "impetuous sensibility" (however appealing it may make her to readers) is a major source of the many problems that beset her in the novel. For Camilla, sensibility is a liability because she acts on her generous and loving impulses without thinking about how the world, and in particular her

judgmental and fatherlike suitor Edgar, will misinterpret her actions variously as coquetry, as licentiousness, and even as venality. An excessive sensibility can also make a heroine vulnerable to the danger of seduction, as Brunton's Laura Montreville (Self-Control), and Austen's Marianne Dashwood (Sense and Sensibility, 1811) both exemplify. Indeed, Brunton's heroine is vulnerable not just because of her own emotional responsiveness but because her seducer invokes the guise of the "man of feeling," ostentatiously displaying his charitable acts toward the poor.

If the novels point out ways in which sensibility makes women vulnerable outside the family, they also show that it is perhaps within the family that sensibility--and the contagion of feeling it facilitates--has its most profound effect on women. In the scenes of confrontation between fathers and daughters, it is often the daughter's ability to imagine and indeed, to feel, her father's distress at her own suffering that makes it so hard to resist his demands for confession. At the same time, the desire to avoid causing pain to a much-loved father may cause the heroine to strive even harder to hide her feelings, to "exert" herself (in that most eighteenth-century usage) to remain cheerful. Thus, Evelina notes, writing to her female friend, that Mr. Villars's eyes "glisten with affectionate concern," and declares resolutely that, for his sake, she will conquer her mood: "I will not," she writes, "with ungrateful indolence, give way to a sadness which I find infectious to him who merits the most cheerful exertion of my spirits" (244).

In Chapter 1, "The Blush of Incapacity," I look at scenes of father-daughter interrogation and confrontation in the novels of Frances Burney (1752-1840) and Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), specifically in Burney's Evelina (1778) and Camilla (1796) and

¹⁰ The questioning of the values of sensibility became especially intense at the end of the eighteenth century, as the historian Barker-Benfield notes: "the ambiguous values of sensibility to women and men . . .

Edgeworth's Belinda (1801). Because both of these authors had complex and consuming relationships with their fathers, and because these relationships revolved to a large degree around textual matters--that is, both fathers were writers who exerted influence over their daughters' writing selves--I rely on biography in this chapter to a much greater extent than in my later chapters. Both women left ample autobiographical and biographical records in the form of letters and journals and also, interestingly enough, in the form of memoirs about their fathers. These records attest to, among other aspects of the father-daughter relationships, the anxiety to please--and to deserve the father's regard--that characterizes the attitudes of both Burney and Edgeworth toward their fathers.

Chapter 2, "I Was Born to Think," takes up the work of Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821) and Eliza Fenwick (1766-1840). Although the two novels I consider, Inchbald's A Simple Story (1791) and Fenwick's Secresy (1795) appeared during roughly the same ten-year period as Burney's Camilla and Edgeworth's Belinda, their authors are usually considered as part of a separate and more radical group of writers of the 1790s, the English Jacobins. In Fenwick's novel, whose heroine declares in a remarkable manifesto, "I was born to think," the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft, Fenwick's close friend and the author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), is apparent. Both novels present a starker and more pessimistic view of the power relations between men and women than do the Burney and Edgeworth novels. They also present heroines who are openly rebellious toward domineering father figures, although neither Inchbald's Miss Milner nor Fenwick's Sibella are able ultimately able to sustain their rebellions. Miss Milner's spirit is quashed by a marriage that destroys her, while Sibella's attempts to

became critical problems for many writers during [the century's] last fifteen years" (359).

stand up to her despotic uncle and with her dying in childbirth, estranged from her family and abandoned by her lover.

One cannot discuss ideology in these two novels apart from form; that is, if the novels are revolutionary in their politics, particularly their gender politics, they are also experimental in their use of narrative. A Simple Story, with its omniscient narrator, ostensibly happy ending and nod to the marriage plot, is coming out of the tradition of the courtship novel as practiced by Burney and others. Secresy, told in letters and with a tragic ending, seems to borrow much of its structure from Richardson's Clarissa. Its epistolary patterns are strikingly reminiscent of those in Richardson's novel: the correspondence of two devoted women friends, one of whom is imprisoned by her family, alternates with the correspondence of other figures in the story, including that of the seducer/rake figure and his comrades.

As related as A Simple Story and Secresy may be to earlier works, however, they diverge from these models in striking ways. Inchbald's novel features an abrupt seventeen-year gap in the narrative, an emptiness which nevertheless feels tangible and invites speculation from the reader about what was lost during that time. Secresy plays with elements of various genres, ranging from fairy tale to Gothic terror to rueful satire. In this chapter, I am interested precisely in these issues--politics and form--and in the ways that the trope of the father-daughter interrogation scene functions in relation to them.

In Chapter 3, I deal with two novels by Jane Austen (1775-1817), Sense and Sensibility (1811) and Mansfield Park (1814), and one by Mary Brunton (1778-1818), Self-Control (1810/11). All three novels treat the themes of interrogation, coercion, and confession, particularly within families, that I am concerned with in this dissertation.

Unlike any of the other novels I discuss, however, Sense and Sensibility presents a family where there is no patriarch to interrogate the daughter. Mrs. Dashwood will not attempt to force Marianne's confidence, and in that she is strikingly different from the fathers or father figures who are in charge in the other families.

The issue of sensibility--and particularly the contagious quality of unspoken emotion--figures importantly in these three novels. In Sense and Sensibility, the transmission of emotion is all between women. Because Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor refrain from asking Marianne directly about her situation, their (and our) attention is focused minutely on the nonverbal manifestations of her emotion. There is also a story here, however, about the contagion of emotion between authors and readers. Although both Austen and Brunton take pains to disavow the literature of sensibility, they make use of its devices and conventions to evoke a particular kind of emotional response in their readers.

In terms of ideology, the novels in this chapter lead us back into the marriage plot and a seemingly conservative viewpoint, in contrast to that of Fenwick and Inchbald. The heroines end up exactly where they belong, in the arms of their good but somewhat drab suitors. But we also get a vision of the turbulence and power of emotions between women in Sense and Sensibility and a portrait of female resourcefulness in Self-Control. In Mansfield Park, Austen brings back in the person of Sir Thomas Bertram the stern patriarch who was absent from Sense and Sensibility, but he is subdued at the end of the novel and must learn from his mistakes. Fanny, the outsider, by dint of behaving like a daughter, becomes the daughter he has always wanted. There is a meeting here, a significant reconciliation between father (and to all intents and purposes Sir Thomas is

Fanny's father) and daughter that occurs in none of the other novels discussed in this dissertation.

Sense and Sensibility presents a glimpse of what happens when women are in charge of the family. Although we are meant to think Mrs. Dashwood is perhaps culpable in not questioning Marianne more closely, we forgive her. We know that Marianne is loved by those in charge of her care, while Fanny Price is not, for the most part. In Sense and Sensibility, the women take care of each other; Marianne is always treated with kindness by her family. Fanny, on the other hand, is misunderstood and verbally attacked by her caretaker, Sir Thomas, and it is because of his remoteness as a father that his own daughters suffer. In the end, in Austen's fiction, as in the several novels by other women writers treated in this dissertation, the patriarchal model causes more damage than it seems capable of preventing.

Chapter 1

“The Blush of Incapacity”: Deserving One’s Father

Both Frances Burney (1752-1840) and Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) had complex, consuming, and psychologically dependent relationships with their fathers, and their careers as authors were indelibly influenced by those relationships. “The blush of incapacity”--a quotation from Burney’s dedication of the anonymous first edition of *Evelina* (1778) to the “author of [her] being” (that is, her father, Charles Burney)--is a phrase that captures the anxiety to please and the feelings of unworthiness that characterize the attitudes of both Burney and Edgeworth toward their fathers. Both Burney and Edgeworth lost their mothers at early ages, and both remained strikingly dependent on their fathers for emotional support well into adulthood. The young heroines in novels by the two women betray similar feelings of dependence and fear of abandonment toward their fathers (or father substitutes), and the novels often depict relationships between daughters and fathers as highly emotional, if not anguished.

This anguish appears most vividly in scenes of confrontation in which a father or father figure demands that his daughter confess a secret of her emotional life, in particular, one having to do with amorous desire. This demand poses almost intolerable conflicts for eighteenth-century daughters who have been educated under strictures of modesty that absolutely forbid acknowledging feelings for a potential suitor before he has articulated his own. At the same time, equally strong precepts of filial duty require that the daughter comply with the father’s request for an accounting of her feelings. The conflict over whether to speak or not is extreme, and often the daughter can only speak in the gestures of sensibility: weeping, blushing, trembling.

These highly fraught encounters between fathers and daughters reflect aspects of the two authors' own emotional interactions with their fathers. In addition, with their depiction of these scenes, the novelists convey vividly the predicament of young women living within a patriarchal culture that demanded adherence to rigid and often impossibly conflicting codes of feminine behavior. Finally, these scenes are paradigmatic of the conflicts experienced by the women authors themselves as they struggled to find their public voices in a milieu in which the very act of publishing one's work could be considered unladylike and therefore dangerous. As Claire Harman writes of Burney's decision to publish her first novel, Evelina, "She certainly could not have thought of openly adopting a career as a novelist in 1776--for a middle-class woman it was simply not respectable--but anonymous publication was a possibility" (87). The scrutiny that the young women heroines in the novels endure from their fathers and the pressure of having to decide between saying the truth, saying what is expected and desired of them, or saying nothing and facing paternal anger or even abandonment is a microcosm of the scrutiny faced by their creators--the novelists--as they tested the limits of what a woman could or could not articulate as a published writer.

Questions of modesty created significant psychological and logistical barriers for women authors. A woman writer (especially a daughter of a family that held or aspired to genteel status, as both Burney's and Edgeworth's did) had to be careful that the content of her work didn't betray an inappropriate knowledge of certain topics or language. As late as 1814, Maria Edgeworth, well into her writing career, had to defend her use of the word "spittle" in her novel Patronage against Elizabeth Inchbald, a fellow female author, who wrote that this was a word she thought Edgeworth "could not have written and ought

not to have known how to spell.” Edgeworth wrote back, “I tried if saliva would do, but it would not: so you must bear it as well as you can, and hate his Grace of Greenwich [the male character who uses the word] as much as you will--but don’t hate me” (qtd. in Butler, Maria Edgeworth 297-298). Perhaps because she is by now an established and admired author, Edgeworth feels confident enough to insist on the importance of letting a character speak for himself. She makes the distinction (one with interesting theoretical repercussions) between her identity as author--and, specifically, an author who is a woman--and that of her characters. (The fact that a male character speaks the offending words might have made it easier for his female creator to distance herself from him.) That her critic was another woman writer only makes more glaring how great the pressures were to stay within bounds and not risk one’s reputation. Women clearly felt a responsibility to police one another’s behavior. As someone who had acted and written for the stage, activities considered even more questionable for a respectable woman than novel writing, Elizabeth Inchbald knew something about staying within boundaries.¹ Her rebuke to her fellow woman writer reflects how much she has internalized the warnings and prohibitions her society put forward against certain kinds of self-display.

A female author had to be careful not only about using language that might be considered vulgar but about the kinds of situations she let her heroine get into, lest she be seen as advocating immodest or improper behavior. Thus, reviewers criticized Edgeworth for letting the heroine in Belinda (1801) form an attachment to one man, consent to marry another, and then withdraw her consent and marry the first one. One critic wrote that the heroine’s first attachment should have been “an almost sacred bond”

¹As Jane Spencer notes, “As a woman and a writer, the author of A Simple Story was used to treading with utmost care the narrow line between permissible and forbidden female behavior” (viii).

(qtd. in Butler, Maria Edgeworth 494). In later editions of the novel, Edgeworth made it clear that Belinda would never have turned away from her first love, Clarence Hervey, if he had declared his affections. She also changed the text so that Belinda does not in fact consent to marry her flawed suitor, Mr. Vincent, as she did in the first edition (Butler, Maria Edgeworth 494-495). Burney, for her part, feared that her highly satirical depiction in Evelina of the lower-class family the Branghtons and their associates would make her own class identity suspect. Writing to her father of his desire to make her authorship known to Hester Thrale, a prominent hostess to literary figures (including Samuel Johnson):

But,--if you do tell Mrs. Thrale,--won't she think it very strange where I can have kept Company, to draw such a family as the Branghtons, Mr. Brown & some others?--Indeed, (thank Heaven!) I don't myself recollect ever having passing half an Hour at a Time with any one person quite so bad;--so that, I am afraid she will conclude I must have an innate vulgarity of ideas to assist me with such coarse colouring for the objects of my Imagination.

(Early Journals 3: 50)

If Burney and Edgeworth had to deal with scrutiny and judgment from the world at large regarding their writing, that scrutiny was even more pronounced within the confines of the father-daughter relationship. Both Charles Burney and Richard Lovell Edgeworth were writers themselves, Burney on music and Edgeworth on education, and both had strong ideas about what their daughters should be reading and writing.

Although the two women intermittently had the endorsement and support of their fathers for their writing careers (and indeed Edgeworth and her father wrote several works on

education together), this support was not unconditional and involved a great deal of intervention. Burney went to great lengths to keep the impending publication of her first novel, Evelina, a secret from most of her family but especially from her father, enlisting her brother to act as her agent with the printer, and letting only a few select family members in on her plans. Even after the novel was published and had received positive reviews in the press, Burney was afraid to let her father know she had dared to write and publish a novel--that she, in fact, was the author of the much-talked-about Evelina. Clearly, in addition to her desire for her father's approval on an emotional level, she felt that his censure would have been the death knell to her aspirations as an author. As Burney's biographer Claire Harman notes, "If she had conceived an illegitimate child she couldn't have tried harder to cover it up, and yet at the same time there is a perverse sense in which she was longing to 'come clean' with him about her authorship, and justify her efforts by openly winning his approval." (105).

Charles Burney was in fact so enthusiastic about his daughter's literary abilities and her success with the reviewers that he at first encouraged her in her chosen next project, which was not a novel but, even more daringly for a young woman writer, a play. As Margaret Doody notes, "For a well-bred and marriageable young lady to write for the stage was unusual, so daring as almost to rank with sexual activity--it needed sanctions, the approval of the masculine guardian, to make it licit" (78). Frances Burney embarked upon writing her play, a comedy, partly at the suggestion of the playwrights Richard Sheridan and Arthur Murphy. Her initial efforts were supported by not only her father but the family friend and additional paternal figure Samuel (or "Daddy") Crisp and by Hester Thrale, who had by this time taken Burney on as a protégée. When Burney's play,

titled The Witlings, was finished, though, both daddies apparently became alarmed at what seemed to be a lampooning of the powerful blue-stocking circle led by the “Queen of the Blues” Elizabeth Montagu. Margaret Doody speculates further that “Charles evidently had not imagined that his Fanny’s comedy would be satiric. He disliked anything in her that seemed self-opinionated, too robust and bold” (96). Whatever the reason, Charles Burney and Crisp between them effectively forbid Frances from having her play staged; as Frances puts it, “my two Daddys put their Heads together” (Early Journals 3: 350). In one of his letters, Charles Burney advised Frances to take “the Novel Way, [where] there is no danger” (qtd. in Doody 96). And in fact, when Frances Burney began writing her next novel Cecilia, Charles put enormous and uncomfortable pressure on her to finish it in time to bring it out together with the next volume of his history of music--apparently he thought this would be good publicity for both of them.²

In a somewhat similar pattern of erratic encouragement, Edgeworth’s father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, was the one who first gave the young Maria literary assignments. While Maria was only 11 or 12, away at school, he asked her to write him stories, seemingly as a way of encouraging her to express herself, because her letters seemed so shy and wooden. He expresses frustration with her letters, chiding her, “Your last letter appeared to more en fille d’Ecole than your former letters--Indeed it is impossible to write without having something to say: at least it ought to be impossible”--and, even more pointedly, “I wish to have letters from you familiarly” (qtd. in Butler,

² See Gallagher, Chapter 6, for a discussion that figures Burney’s relationship with the literary marketplace--and with her father--in terms of debt. “In the period between her first two novels, Frances Burney was living on the credit of her name, a credit she had done much to increase, but a mere credit nonetheless. And credit, of course, implied debt. Burney was obliged to write another novel for the ‘public,’ for her father, for the wits and hostesses who had encouraged and patronized her--in short, for Everybody. The daughterly debt she acknowledged in the dedicatory poem to Evelina had not been repaid by that novel’s success; it had rather been multiplied and dispersed into the world at large” (231).

Maria Edgeworth 57). Later, when she was around 14 and living at home, he set her the task of translating a French work on education, Adèle et Théodore, by Madame de Genlis. There was talk of getting Maria's translation published, but because Richard Edgeworth's great friend, the educationalist writer Thomas Day, disapproved violently of women publishing, Richard suspended his efforts to "turn Maria into an authoress" (Butler, Maria Edgeworth 149) until after Day's sudden death in 1789, when Maria was around 21. The possible publication of Maria's translation of Madame de Genlis had in fact been preempted by a rival translation by Thomas Holcroft, but Day's "shocked" reaction to "even this oblique approach to authorship" (Myers 133) on Maria's part was enough to warn Richard Edgeworth away from further cultivation of Maria's aspirations toward publication. Thus, just as with the Burney family, an additional paternal figure who is something of a surrogate parent plays an important role in regulating the writerly daughter's self-expression.

Day was a contradictory and eccentric figure, a "pioneering juvenile author, writer of sternly reformist political tracts, and antislavery propagandist, . . . the daughter's mentor, the father's best friend, and the patriarch who stopped the young woman's career cold until his 1789 fall from a barely broken horse freed Maria Edgeworth to be what Day deplored, a published authoress" (Myers 105). If Day's views on the need to abolish slavery were progressive, his ideas about the education of women were hardly so forward-looking; a follower of Rousseau, he "accept[ed] Rousseau's argument in Emile that women do not participate in the public sphere and, because modern girls' education is trivializing and corrupting, that they should have less rather than more instruction than at present" (Butler, "Edgeworth's Stern Father" 80). Day in fact went so far as to try to

implement the wife-rearing scheme outlined by Rousseau in Emile, adopting (or rather, taking on as “apprentices”) two young girls aged 11 and 12 from branches of the London Foundling Hospital and attempting to raise them in isolation, with the view that one of them would become his wife. This well-known episode in Day’s life would be prominently--and negatively--featured in Maria Edgeworth’s first novel, Belinda. As both Mitzi Myers and Marilyn Butler demonstrate, much of Maria’s early published work--children’s stories, the didactic Letters to Literary Ladies, which contains a representation of a discussion between two “gentleman” of whether women should be allowed to publish or not, and Belinda in 1801-- responds to the influence of Thomas Day, recirculating and often rebutting or parodizing his themes. As a child, Maria, who was in boarding school between the ages of seven and fourteen, occasionally spent time in Day’s household on her vacations from school (he had eventually married in 1778--not, however, either of the two orphans). Despite Day’s attitude toward education for young women, his intellectual intensity appears to have been an inspiring example for the bookish and socially awkward Maria: “ ‘the lofty nature of his mind, his romantic character, his metaphysical inquiries, and eloquent discussions took her into another world. . . . His severe reasoning . . . awakened all her powers, and the questions he put to her, and the working out of all the answers, the necessity of perfect accuracy in all her words, suited the natural truth of her mind, and though such strictness was not always agreeable, she even then perceived its advantage, and in after life was grateful for it’ ” (qtd. in Myers 132).³ As strongly as Day might have opposed education for young

³ Myers quotes here from a memoir accompanying a selection of Edgeworth’s letters, written and privately published after her death by her third stepmother Frances Edgeworth and two of her stepsisters. The third-person account of the 14-year-old Edgeworth’s reactions to Day’s tutelage seems oddly immediate and intimate, considering that it was written some eighty years after the fact. Even, however, allowing for

women in principle, then, he could not refrain from imparting a kind of intellectual training to the young Maria that was to be invaluable to her career as a writer. He also was solicitous toward her, “dosing her with kindness and nauseous tumblers of Bishop Berkeley’s tar water” (Myers 132) during the difficult summer of her fourteenth year when, far from her family and feeling neglected, she suffered from an eye ailment that doctors predicted might leave her blind.

* * * * *

Burney

From the evidence of Frances Burney’s journals, her attitude toward her father was loving, adoring, exorbitantly appreciative:

How strongly, how forcibly do I feel to whom I owe All the happiness I enjoy!--it is to my Father! to this dearest, most amiable, this best beloved--most worthy of men!--it is his goodness to me which makes all appear so gay, it is his affection which makes my sun shine. (Burney, Early Journals 1: 61)

If Burney adored her father, however, she also feared his disapproval. The sense of obligation the young Frances’s words express toward this “best beloved” of men is overwhelming--“forcible,” as she herself puts it. If all happiness is owing to this loving father, then happiness can be revoked if the father is displeased.

possible problems with the accuracy and emphases of the memoir (see Butler, Maria Edgeworth 4-6), and for a family prejudice toward the much-revered memory of Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s best friend, the account is so forceful and detailed that one assumes the essence of it to have come from Maria Edgeworth’s own stories of her youth.

Margaret Doody characterizes Charles Burney's relations with his daughters as "unusually kind, friendly, and familiar for his period" (11), but as friendly as relations might have been in the Burney family, the father's word was still final. Doody notes that the eighteenth-century model of "daughterly piety," while allowing the father to be "familiar, soft, and tender," in response to the daughter's attitude of "trust, devotion, [and] submissiveness," also allows the father to "gain authority (even authority to destroy) through tenderness; a sort of emotional blackmail is substituted for more straightforward authoritarianism" (24).

Burney's feelings of helplessness before the will of this tender but powerful father are well illustrated by the incidents surrounding her courtship by a Mr. Barlow when she is in her early twenties. The young Frances has absolutely no interest in marrying this young man, but because her father suggests that perhaps she should consider his suit, she feels that all is lost, that she must throw her life away in an unhappy marriage.

I was terrified to Death--I felt the utter impossibility of resisting not merely my Father's persuasion, but even his Advice--I felt, too, that I had no argumentative objections to make to Mr. Barlow, his Character--Disposition--situation--I knew nothing against--but O!--I felt he was no companion for my Heart!--I wept like an Infant--Eat nothing--seemed as if already married--& passed the whole Day in more misery than, merely on my own account, I ever did before in my life--except upon the loss of my own beloved mother--& ever revered & most dear Grandmother! (Early Journals 2: 146-147)

Among the many strong feelings expressed in this affecting quotation are the young Frances's utter horror of being forced into marriage before she is ready and where

she has no inclination. As much as she abhors this idea, however, her enormous sense of obligation and duty toward her father and her fear of displeasing him lead her to the conclusion that if he advises her to marry the unappealing Mr. Barlow, she has no choice but to do so. Her misery over this prospect is related to grief at the thought of separating from this cherished father; tellingly, Frances remembers the loss of her mother and grandmother as she contemplates losing in a very real way the bond with her father, which, as Margaret Doody has pointed out, is her great consolation in the wake of those early losses (24). In the subsequent exchange between father and daughter, Frances's fears of rejection find expression in an impassioned outburst:

“O Sir!”--cried I-- ”I wish for Nothing!--only let me Live with you--”

“My life!”--cried he, kissing me kindly, “Thee shalt live with me for ever, if Thee wilt! Thou canst not think I meant to get rid of thee?”

“I could not, Sir! I could not!” cried I, “[I could not outlive] such a thought--” I saw his dear Eyes full of Tears! a mark of his tenderness which I shall never forget!

(Early Journals 2: 147)

After some more reassuring words from her father, Frances “went to bed as light, happy & thankful as if Escaped from Destruction” (Early Journals 2: 147).

In Burney's first novel, Evelina, the eponymous heroine, who has been abandoned by her real father and whose mother has died in childbirth, experiences feelings of dependence upon and reverence toward her adoptive father, the Reverend Arthur Villars, similar to those of Frances Burney toward her own father. Echoing Burney's accolades to the “most worthy” and “best beloved” of men, Evelina refers to Villars as “the best of men.” “What would become of me,” she writes to him, “were it not for you, my

protector, my friend, and my refuge?" (40) On another occasion, she names Villars the "Protector of my youth,--by whom my helpless infancy was cherished, my mind formed, my very life preserved" (332)

Evelina's sense of duty--of responsibility--toward Villars causes her to try to conceal from him her deep depression when she returns home after a visit to London convinced that the man she loves, Lord Orville, has insulted her with a suggestive letter. She has difficulty eating, talking, working; friends remark upon her "gravity," her "dejection," and, in a particularly telling phrase, her "falling away" (245).

Because she desires to spare Mr. Villars unhappiness, Evelina makes heroic efforts not only to hide her own pain, but to overcome it. Her efforts are unavailing, however, and Mr. Villars several times tries to get her to unburden herself to him. In a highly emotional encounter, Mr. Villars, moving from gentle concern to reproach, accuses Evelina of not trusting him, and thus manages to wring from her an account of what has been troubling her.

Most striking here is the emotional pressure Villars exerts upon his ward. At one point, Evelina is on the verge of sharing her thoughts but suddenly panics. She begs Villars, "Dear Sir, ask me nothing more!--for I have nothing to own,--nothing to say;--my gravity has been merely accidental, and I can give no reason for it at all" (249). Mr. Villars's response to this is grave and reproachful, accompanied, "with a deep sigh": "I see,' said he, 'I see but too plainly, that though Evelina is returned,--I have lost my child!'" The effect of this remark upon Evelina, predictably, is wrenching. She is, in her words, "inexpressibly shocked." If Villars has lost his child, then she has lost him, also, and she is abandoned once again.

Anguished and in tears, Evelina pleads with Mr. Villars to accept her confidence once again. When he demurs, expressing a reluctance to “compel” her, she begs him in the most emotional terms to “forgive” her for withholding her “most secret thoughts”:

“Say then, cried I, kneeling at his feet, “say then that you forgive me! that you pardon my reserve,--that you will again suffer me to tell you my most secret thoughts, and rely upon my promise never more to forfeit your confidence!--my father!--my protector!--my ever-honoured,--ever-loved--my best and only friend!--say you forgive your Evelina, and she will study better to deserve your goodness!”

(250-251)

Because Evelina has kept her own counsel (and that with the idea of sparing Mr. Villars’s feelings) she fears that she no longer deserves--and has forfeited--Mr. Villars’s care. Her guardian’s reproaches to her only serve to stoke these fears.

Mr. Villars knows exactly what pressure to apply to get Evelina to confide in him. The plaint of being abandoned (“I have lost my child”) not only makes a claim on Evelina’s sense of duty and responsibility toward her guardian but also contains a fear-inspiring counterthreat to abandon her. The dynamic here is very similar to that between Frances Burney and her own father when she fears that he means to marry her off and thereby get rid of her.

In Frances Burney’s Camilla (1796), the heroine, like Evelina before her, must endure scrutiny and interrogation from a father who notices her barely concealed distress and surmises its cause--that is, her affection for a man who seems not to be returning it. In this case, unlike that of Evelina and Mr. Villars, the confrontation takes place between a young woman and her actual father, not a guardian or adoptive father, and the dynamic

is therefore different. Camilla doesn't suffer quite the same fear of being abandoned, but her feelings of shame and of not wanting to disappoint the father to whom she is connected by blood and whose "kindness" she finds almost suffocating are extreme.

Camilla's lack of privacy is startling to a modern-day reader, and again, is much more pronounced than that of Burney's earlier heroine Evelina. Everything takes place within the family; the man she loves, Edgar, has been a ward of her father's since his infancy, and thus has occupied a brotherly or cousinly role toward Camilla. Part of Camilla's father's concern when he interrogates her is to know whether Edgar has behaved in some way dishonorably toward Camilla--that is, whether he has led her to believe that he will marry her and then retreated from that position. At issue, then, is not just Camilla's desire to deserve her father's approbation but her desire to protect Edgar from her father's disapproval or anger, although in her heart she does feel that Edgar has misled her.

In their scene of confrontation, Camilla's father, Mr. Tyrold, speaking to her with great gentleness, tries three times to get her to divulge the cause of her sadness. Camilla's response is to remain "mute and confounded," since "speech and truth were always one with [her]" and "she could not in this instance declare what were her feelings" (343). She trembles, she cannot look up, she hides her face, she breathes a "suffocating sigh." Mr. Tyrold presses on, nevertheless, justifying his "investigation" by stating that he must know whether she is "called into any action"--that is, whether Edgar has actually committed some wrong toward her. It is only when he touches on the issue of Edgar's behavior toward Camilla, asking her if "any deception, any ungenerous art[.]" has created her pain, that his daughter finally responds:

“Oh no, no! . . . he is incapable . . . he is superior . . . he . . .” She stopt abruptly; shocked at the avowal these few words at once inferred of her partiality, its hopelessness, and of its object.

She walked, confused, to a corner of the room, and leaning against the wainscot, enveloped her face in her handkerchief, with the most painful sensations of shame. (344)

Camilla, in spite of herself, has “declare[d] her feelings.” In this father-daughter confrontation, unlike that between Mr. Villars and Evelina, the pressure that the daughter can finally no longer withstand is not the threat of abandonment but the threat to the reputation and perhaps bodily well-being of the man she loves. In both cases, guardian and father seem to know exactly how to extract the daughter’s revelation.

At the end of their conference, Mr. Tyrold adjures Camilla as follows: “Dry up your tears then, my Camilla, and command your best strength to conceal for ever their source, and, most especially . . . from its source” (345). In instructing Camilla to hide her feelings from Edgar (after forcing her, interestingly enough, to reveal them to him), Mr. Tyrold is ensuring his daughter’s continuing suffering, since Edgar, following the advice of his woman-wary tutor Dr. Marchmont, wants to see some evidence of Camilla’s feeling for him before he articulates his own.

Camilla is thus in the extraordinarily painful position of being under scrutiny by the two men she most wants to please, and of not being able to please one without incurring the anger or disapproval of the other. If she betrays her feeling to Edgar, she disappoints her father, and according to him, risks attracting the particular contempt the world reserves for the “discovery of an unreturned female regard” (361). By struggling

to keep her feelings hidden from Edgar, Camilla risks losing him. Camilla, of course, has no idea that Edgar is awaiting some sort of proof of her love; she only knows that he seems always to be judging her and finding her behavior at fault in one situation after another.

Camilla's actions, her carriage, her demeanor, are observed and commented on not just by her father and Edgar, but by other family members, by the servants, and by the spiteful Miss Margland, governess to Camilla's cousin Indiana, who Miss Margland hopes for her own reasons will marry Edgar. The day after Camilla's conference with her father, she betrays her feelings once more by showing her alarm when Edgar is kicked by his horse. She jumps up and runs halfway outside, but her father manages to stop her before she throws herself at Edgar in her concern. All of this takes place while the family is at breakfast, and thus any such action of Camilla's would be public. Mr. Tyrold sends Camilla away from the table, suggesting as a pretext that she go visit her ailing uncle in his room, but she, wanting to compose herself, retreats to her own room. She immediately looks out the window to see if Edgar is all right, but upon looking out, "the first object that met her eyes was her father, who was anxiously looking up" (347). When she meets her father's gaze, "shame was her only sensation." There is no place Camilla can go to avoid scrutiny. Further, and curiously, her father seemingly can do nothing to protect her from "humiliating surmises": "I had hoped, in this house at least, you would not have been misunderstood; but I have this moment been undeceived: Miss Margland has just expressed a species of compassion for what she presumes to be the present state of your mind that has given me the severest pain" (348).

Camilla's sense of being exposed is magnified when she overhears the servants gossiping about her lovelorn state. Desperate to get away from the household, especially since Edgar is now staying with them, she begs her father's permission to go visit her friend Mrs. Arlbery. It is the only escape she can think of, even though she knows that Edgar disapproves of Mrs. Arlbery and this visit is likely to alienate him. While at Mrs. Arlbery's, Camilla receives a long letter from her father, which admonishes her about proper female conduct. Among other things, the letter warns her that a woman with an "unreturned . . . regard" for a man will be subject to a "species of compassion" from the world that is "far from soothing"--i.e., to contempt. The implication here is that her father will share in that contempt, and it is partly her fear of such an outcome that drives Camilla away and into a series of misadventures that end with her lying near death in a hotel, alone and estranged from her family.

Edgeworth

Like those of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth's statements of her feelings toward her father are often tinged with reverence and awe, and especially a sense of great and seemingly unfulfillable obligation and gratitude. In 1798, she writes to Frances Beaufort, the woman a year younger than she who would become her father's fourth wife, "It is indeed the fast, and warmest wish of my heart to please him--, for never father could deserve more, or exact less, from a daughter" (qtd. in Butler, Maria Edgeworth 134). In 1805, her father becomes frighteningly ill, and Maria writes, "Where should I be without my father? I should sink into that nothing from which he raised me" (qtd. in Butler, Maria Edgeworth 207). Throughout her life, Maria insisted that her father was

responsible for her successes as an author and otherwise, although she eventually came to be much more popular and well regarded than he. By 1810, as Edgeworth's biographer Marilyn Butler writes, "the trail of visitors who came to see [Maria] . . . were increasingly inclined to sum [Richard Edgeworth] up as a meddlesome old man bent on exploiting Maria's success" (Maria Edgeworth 215).

In Edgeworth's first fiction written for adults, the 1801 novel Belinda, the most telling father-daughter relationship occurs in a subplot involving the heroine's suitor Clarence Hervey, who has become ambiguously entangled with another woman from whom he must separate himself in order to marry Belinda. The woman is his ward Virginia, who he has been raising in isolation as an experiment influenced by the teachings of Rousseau. Hervey first discovered Virginia (then called Rachel) as a young girl living alone with her grandmother in a pastoral setting, seemingly the perfect child of nature for his Rousseauian experiment. Upon the grandmother's death, he arranges for Rachel to be taken care of by a Mrs. Ormond and rents a house for the two of them, where they will continue to live in isolation. He also immediately renames Rachel Virginia because she reminds him of the heroine of Bernardin de St.-Pierre's romance Paul et Virginie (1788)--and because he cannot "endure" the name Rachel.

Hervey's renaming of his ward is an indication of his plan to mold her according to his desires. Influenced by Rousseau's ideas about education as expressed in Emile (1762), and disgusted with the affectation and vanity characterizing the women he has met in society, Hervey had been ardently searching for a woman like Rousseau's Sophy, possessing "an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction; a heart wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility, capable of all the

enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational consistency.” In the innocent Rachel/Virginia, Hervey thinks he has found the object that will serve his “romantic project of educating a wife for himself” (343).⁴

The experiment is a miserable failure. Virginia resists the kind of cultivation Hervey has in mind for her. She knows how to read but it is only with difficulty that she learns to write (she had been prohibited from learning earlier because her grandmother feared that writing would lead to amorous correspondences with men). Her lack of early education handicaps her and renders her unable to provide the kind of intellectual partner Hervey comes to realize that he wants as a wife, especially once he meets Belinda, a woman who possesses both sensibility and the power of reason.

As Mitzi Myers points out, the Hervey/Virginia episode and its eventual outcome embody Edgeworth’s critique and resounding refutation of Rousseau’s (and Thomas Day’s) ideas about education, and especially about the education of women.⁵ Virginia’s inability to write, although imposed on her by her well-meaning grandmother and not by the Rousseau/Day stand-in Clarence Hervey, is a sly allusion to Rousseau’s objections to the idea of “little girls” learning to read and write, as expressed in *Emile*:

After all, why should a little girl know how to read and write? Has she a house to manage? Most of them make a bad use of this fatal knowledge, and girls are so full of curiosity that few of them will fail to learn without compulsion.

(397)

⁴ All quotations from *Belinda* in this and subsequent chapters are from the 1993 edition published by J.M. Dent.

⁵ See Myers, “My Art Belongs to Daddy?” for an extended reading of the importance of Thomas Day’s influence on Edgeworth’s early writings.

In the odd double-negative construction in the last sentence quoted above, Rousseau implies that is only by “compulsion”--or restraint--that a little girl can be prevented from acquiring the “fatal knowledge” of reading and writing. This implication is of a piece with Rousseau’s insistence elsewhere in the “Sophy” chapter of Emile on the need to impose “restraint” on little girls as they grow up.

Girls should be attentive and industrious, but this is not enough by itself; they should early be accustomed to restraint. This misfortune, if such it be, is inherent in their sex, and they will never escape from it, unless to endure more cruel sufferings. All their life long, they will have to submit to the strictest and most enduring restraints, those of propriety. They must be trained to bear the yoke from the first, so that they may not feel it, to master their own caprices and to submit themselves to the will of others. (398)

Edgeworth refutes Rousseau’s--and Day’s--judgments about the proper limits on women’s intellectual activity with her decision to write for publication in the first place and also with the depictions of women in her fictions. The eponymous heroine of Belinda, rational and educated, is Edgeworth’s model of a woman with the ability to think for herself who also has qualities men find attractive in a wife, such as a kind and affectionate nature. It is in Virginia’s story, however, that Edgeworth most strongly responds to Rousseau’s notions, by giving the supposedly pliable Virginia strong desires and preferences of her own, and ultimately allowing her to articulate and pursue those desires. Further, in the working out of the Clarence/Virginia subplot, Edgeworth clearly delineates the injustice and folly of Clarence’s Rousseau-influenced scheme.

When Clarence Hervey realizes that he wants to marry Belinda, not Virginia, he decides to “change the nature of his connexion with Virginia, and to appear only in light of a friend or benefactor” (345). This proves to be problematic, however, since Virginia to all appearances has fallen in love with him; she is silent, uneasy, tearful in his presence. When Hervey finds out that the well-meaning Mrs. Ormond has assured Virginia that Hervey plans to marry her, he feels bound as an honorable man to follow through.

Virginia has indeed fallen in love, but not with Hervey. Despite her grandmother’s best intentions to protect her from all contact with men, she had seen a picture of a man, a sailor in full-dress uniform, long before meeting Hervey. Like a girl in a fairy tale, Virginia is helplessly besotted with her first view of manhood: “her imagination, exalted by solitude and romance, embodied and became enamoured of a phantom” (443). At night Virginia dreams of this sailor kissing her hand, and even worse, sees him dressed as a knight and fighting chivalric battles with Hervey over her. Like Edgeworth herself, whose father forbade her to read novels as a young woman, Virginia has been forbidden by Hervey to read “common” novels, but she is allowed to read chivalric romances. She has also managed to get her hands on Paul et Virginie, which, “though it was not an ancient romance, . . . did not exactly come under the description of a common novel,” and thus is not denied to her by Hervey’s proxy Mrs. Ormond (360). Virginia is particularly attracted to this story, because she knows Hervey has named her after the heroine. The ideas and images in these stories form a vehicle for her desire for a romantic object, and that desire is centered not on the man who has been a fatherlike benefactor to her but on the figure of the handsome young sailor she knows

only from his picture. In Virginia's dreams, this sailor is named Paul, just like the romantic hero of Paul et Virginie.

Virginia feels guilty that she doesn't love Hervey the way she thinks he wants her to, and she is afraid to tell him the truth. The fear of seeming ungrateful to the man who, young as he is (Hervey is perhaps ten years older than his ward), has performed the role of a father to her is expressed vividly in her dream, in which Hervey, defeated by the knight who is her champion, lies "weltering in his own blood," and calls her "perfidious, ungrateful Virginia." Virginia's melancholy is caused, however, not only by her feelings of guilt and her pain at not being able to feel what she thinks she should toward her benefactor. She has also come to realize that there is such a thing as a woman's reputation, and that hers is in danger because of the ambiguity of Hervey's relationship with her. This was impressed upon her by a visit from two of Hervey's boorish former friends, Sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochfort, who, piqued to think Hervey is hiding something from them, climb the garden wall to get a glimpse of Hervey's supposed mistress. Once they have broken into the garden and found Virginia, they taunt her with being Hervey's prisoner and object of sexual sport and suggest that she come live with one of them. When she recoils in horror, they revenge themselves with ominous statements to the effect that, yes, perhaps, she should reserve herself for Hervey, and that maybe if she "behaves" he will even marry her.

As the narrator informs us, these men's manner and language are so different from that of the only man Virginia has ever talked to--Hervey--that she can barely understand what they are saying or even what kind of "animals" they are:

they seemed to her a species of animals, for which she had no name, and of which she had no prototype in her imagination. That they were men she saw; but they were clearly not Clarence Herveys; they bore still less resemblance to the courteous knights of chivalry. (364)

The import of these men's roughness and insulting manner is not lost on Virginia, however; their intrusion into her garden forces her into an awareness, however vague, that men may be sexual predators, that she is vulnerable to such predation, and that she may need to protect herself by marriage to Hervey, if he will have her. The fact that she does not desire such a marriage only adds to the burden of fear and anxiety her situation has engendered. As Myers notes, "The Clarence-Virginia relationship is a sexual tease as well as a textual mystery, for Virginia is at once Hervey's daughter, pupil, wife-to-be, and reputed mistress" (111). If the relationship is a textual mystery to readers, it is a source of confusion and distress to Virginia, as her dream makes apparent. The dream features not only the mortal combat between Hervey and the man Virginia prefers, but a preceding sequence in which she is being led unwillingly to church to marry Hervey, but is carried off by the rough men who entered the garden just as Hervey is about to put the ring on her finger. The dream is an extraordinarily plain rendering of Edgeworth's vision of the limited options available in her society to a young woman of beauty and no property or family: sexual exploitation or marriage to an undesired suitor. The dream makes clear as well Virginia's loathing of either option, but Mrs. Ormond, to whom she confides, is too lost in her own daydream of Hervey and Virginia's marrying to read Virginia's dream correctly.

After the revelations of her dream, it is no wonder that upon Hervey's next visit, Virginia cannot bring herself to look directly at him, approaching him only with "extreme timidity." Her voice falters when she tries to articulate her feelings of "gratitude" to him, she trembles, she is silent when questions are put to her or else clings to Mrs. Ormond, sobbing. Virginia is convinced that Hervey is angry with her and terrified of offending him further. When he refers to her by her supposed last name, "Miss St. Pierre," she turns to Mrs. Ormond mournfully.

‘He used to call me Virginia,’ said she, . . . ‘he is angry with me--he used to call me Virginia.’

‘But you were a child then, you know, my love,’ said Mrs.Ormond.

‘And I wish I was still a child,’ said Virginia. (377)

Significantly enough, Virginia herself connects her sense of wrongdoing and Hervey's imagined or feared anger toward her to her status as a sexually maturing or knowledgeable woman, no longer a child.⁶ Earlier, she has confessed to Mrs. Ormond that when she thinks of Hervey, she feels fear, and that she would not want him to express his love to her the way Mrs. Ormond does, that is, with caresses. Virginia's fear is, therefore, not just that Hervey will abandon her if she displeases him by confessing her love for another man, but that in order to keep his fatherly love she will have to comply with unwelcome sexual attention. The fear of seeming ungrateful is integrally related to the fear of what she might have to do to prove her gratitude.

Virginia's distress is apparent to both Hervey and Mrs. Ormond, but neither of them can get her to articulate it. In addition to her fear of offending Hervey, Virginia

knows perfectly well, despite her limited education, that to confess feelings of love and desire for a man (albeit one she has seen only in a picture) is a transgression against the ideals of propriety a virtuous woman is expected to uphold. In response to prodding by Mrs. Ormond for a “confession” of her feelings, Virginia bursts out with the following:

“Confessions! I do not wish to conceal any thing, but I think sincerity is not always in our sex consistent with--I mean--I don’t know what I mean, what I say, or what I ought to say,” cried Virginia; and she sunk down on a sofa, in extreme confusion. (379)

Here Virginia articulates perfectly the dilemma of a daughter trying to fulfill conflicting dictates of feminine behavior: she wants to please the parental figures who are demanding her confidence, yet she also knows that strictures of modesty forbid her revealing her desires. And yet, tormented and confused as she is, Virginia insists on the authenticity of her own emotions. When Hervey attempts to soothe her, and at the same time rebukes Mrs. Ormond for “working on [Virginia’s] sensibility,” (378), Virginia reacts strongly:

“Oh, I am--I am--I am ungrateful to you,” cried she, sobbing, “but Mrs. Ormond never told me so; do not blame her: she has never worked upon my sensibility. Do you think,” said she, looking up, while a transient expression of indignation passed over her countenance, “do you think I cannot feel without having been taught?” (378)

Virginia has been denied an education, but that does not mean she has no sense of self or that she cannot articulate her feelings. Like Victor Frankenstein’s creature, in

⁶ This exchange between Clarence and Virginia echoes the one between Villars and Evelina in Burney’s novel, in which Mr. Villars fears that he has “lost his child.” In a sense he has, of course, since the

1801 still several years away from its birth, Hervey's creature has awakened and dares to talk back to its creator. Virginia has begun to realize and resent the fact that she has been the object of an experiment in female education. She also objects to the implication that Mrs. Ormond and Hervey between them somehow own her thoughts. When Mrs. Ormond tries to get Virginia to talk about her terrifying dream, Virginia is offended and leaves the room: " 'It is easy to force my thoughts from me,' said Virginia, withdrawing her hand from Mrs. Ormond; 'but it is cruel to do so' "(380).

Hervey can make no sense of Virginia's cryptic utterances about not wanting to seem ungrateful. He allows himself to be convinced by Mrs. Ormond that Virginia, who has become wan and despondent, is literally pining away for him, and, prompted by his sense of responsibility, writes a letter in which he proposes marriage. Virginia, in her turn, feels equally obligated to accept the offer, and things stand at this unhappy pass until, through a series of very unlikely plot developments, Virginia is forced to confront a lifesize portrait of her dream-hero, in the presence of Hervey, to whom she is now betrothed, and promptly faints, after "uttering a piercing shriek."

When she is revived, she is left alone with Hervey and must finally face his questions about her emotions. In this scene of interrogation between a father-turned-fiancé and his former ward, the two talk at cross-purposes, with Hervey becoming impatient at what he takes to be Virginia's evasions and Virginia almost hysterical with fear that Hervey's impatience will turn to anger, that he will call her "perfidious, ungrateful Virginia" as he did in her dream. She tells him the figure in the picture has kneeled to her and kissed her hand, and Hervey abruptly walks away from her, withdrawing "his arms, which had supported her, and plac[ing] her upon a sofa" (440).

unacknowledged occasion for their discussion is Evelina's maturing into a woman with sexual desires.

The mere suggestion of Hervey's displeasure is terrifying to Virginia. When Hervey once again calls her by her last name, she experiences this formality as a sign of anger, and bursts into tears, "sobbing so violently for some time, that she could not speak" (441). When Hervey asks her again who the man in the picture is, and she says she does not know, he becomes exasperated: "You do not know. You will not trust me. Then I must leave you." To which Virginia replies, clinging desperately to Hervey, "Do not leave me -- oh, do not leave me in anger! . . . I do not know who this man is, I assure you; nor where he is to be found" (441-442). Like Burney's Evelina, Virginia fears more than anything the withdrawal of affection from a surrogate father and sees that this affection must be purchased with a painful confession of intimate feelings.

At last Hervey begins to ask more particular questions, and Virginia answers them: no, she has never seen the sailor in real life, she has only seen his picture, he has only kneeled to her and kissed her hand in a dream. Then she relates her "frightful dream" to Hervey, the dream that explains everything. Virginia's manner while she is talking about her dream is so agitated that Hervey begins to think she is mad: he "marked the wild animation of her eyes, the sudden changes of her countenance; . . . every feeling of his mind gave way to terror and pity" (442). Hervey drops his impatient manner and approaches Virginia with great calmness and gentleness; speaking soothingly and addressing her as "my dear Virginia," he assures that he is not displeased with her. Taking her hands, he begs her to compose herself. To which she replies, "I am quite composed, now you again call me dear Virginia" (443). Virginia's deep fear of losing the regard of her benefactor is conveyed most wrenchingly in her statement, and again, it is reminiscent of Burney's Evelina begging Villars to forgive her for withholding her

confidence. That Virginia longs for Hervey to call her by the name he has invented for her reminds us how much she is still his creature, even as she painfully articulates her own desires.

With this “denouement” (the name Edgeworth in fact gives to her final chapter), Hervey is free to marry Belinda, the woman he loves. Virginia is freed from an obligation to marry a man for whom she feels only gratitude and the affection of a daughter. Further, her friends among them have managed to locate in the flesh Virginia’s phantom hero, who turns out to be, as Myers puts it, “just like Jane Austen’s real sailor brothers and fictional Wentworth, . . . an entrepreneurial sea captain in the Revolutionary wars” (112). The fairy-tale aspect of Virginia’s improbable fixation becomes transformed into a more matter-of-fact courtship sequence; Captain Sunderland is set to sail again right away, and so Virginia will have time to “become accustomed to the idea of a new lover” (449). Also found is Virginia’s real father, who had abandoned her as a baby and has since repented and has been searching for his lost daughter.⁷ Hervey renounces his folly publicly: “All this has arisen from my own presumption and imprudence. Nothing could be more absurd than my scheme of educating a woman in solitude to make her fit for society. I might have foreseen what must happen, that Virginia would consider me as her tutor, her father, not as her lover, or her husband; that with the most affectionate of hearts, she could feel for me nothing but gratitude.” (428).

⁷ In an example of the late eighteenth-century return of the plot device of the “cri du sang” discussed by Ruth Perry (see introduction), Virginia, fittingly enough since her reading has consisted of ancient romances, anticipates confidently the feelings of filial connection her rediscovered father’s presence will inspire in her: “The belief in what the French call la force du sang was suited to her affectionate temper and ardent imagination, and it had taken full possession of her mind. The eloquence of romance persuaded her, that she should not only discover, but love her father with intuitive filial piety, and she longed to experience those yearnings of affection, of which she had read so much” (387). Edgeworth’s use of this convention is of course tinged with some irony here. When Virginia eventually meets her father, she does feel great affection but also some resentment—which she does not articulate to her father—at his abandonment of her.

The plot of the Hervey/Virginia sequence is indisputably based on events in Thomas Day's life. One nineteenth-century review of the novel remarks, "The story of Virginia and Clarence Hervey was suggested by the circumstances of Mr. Day's educating Sabrina for his wife; and many other hints for invention were furnished to Miss Edgeworth by the incidents and characters which her father had met with in his youth, and which he related to her" ("Maria Edgeworth and Her Critics" 464-465). In her essay "My Art Belongs To Daddy?", Mitzi Myers notes the correspondences between the details of Thomas Day's attempt to educate two young orphans as possible wives and Hervey's similar endeavors with regard to Virginia. As bizarre as some of the incidents in Belinda may seem, the true story of Thomas Day and the two orphans almost outdoes them. Day became disenchanted early on with one of his wards. He kept the other one, whom he had renamed Sabrina Sidney, in his care for a longer time, but eventually became convinced of her unsuitability as well. As Myers notes, the two girls were not in danger of being exploited sexually, "thanks to Day's Stoic disdain for passion and pleasure rather than to institutional precaution" (122-123). Sabrina did, however, experience what can only be described as psychological abuse in addition to physical cruelty. As part of his attempt to enact Rousseau's belief that children could be taught not to regard pain and not to feel fear, Day subjected Sabrina to such experiments as shooting off a pistol right next to her ear and dripping hot sealing-wax onto her arms. Because she was supposed to learn to disregard fashion, he also demanded that she throw "a box of finery" into the fire. In the end, she seemed not to have internalized the precise attitude toward fashion that Day demanded: As Richard Lovell Edgeworth writes in his memoirs, "She did, or she did not, wear certain long sleeves, and some handkerchief,

which had been the subject of his dislike, or of his liking; and he, considering this circumstance as a proof of her want of strength of mind, quitted her for ever! . . . I could not have acted as he had done” (qtd. in Myers 129-130).

Considering the treatment Sabrina Sidney received in Thomas Day’s household, one wonders whether “quitting her for ever” was not the kindest thing he could have done for her. In abandoning her, though, he condemned her to a life of poverty. He arranged for her to have a small yearly income, which was, however, subject to being rescinded if she married. At the age of 30, tiring of her life of “respectable spinsterhood,” she married a much older man, John Bickford, who had in fact been the one to accompany Day when Day picked her out at the foundling hospital. When Bickford died after three years, she was left with two small children to support on a very small allowance from Day (Bickford had left her no money). Many years later, when Maria Edgeworth was working on her continuation of her father’s memoir, she sought out the former Sabrina Sidney to read to her (Sabrina’s eyes were bad) the portions of the memoir that told of Sabrina’s childhood connection to Thomas Day. In a letter describing the visit, she writes,

It was disagreeable to me as you may guess--especially to read about the foundling hospital. . . . I was struck with a great change in Mrs. Bicknell’s manner and mind. Instead of being as Mr. Day thought her helpless and indolent she is more like a stirring housekeeper--all softness and timidity gone! She spoke . . . of Mr. Day as having made her miserable--a slave &c! It was a very painful visit to me. (qtd. in Myers 132-33)

Myers writes of Maria Edgeworth's reaction to Mrs. Bickford's anger that she was "surprised as a biographer by what she had implied as a storyteller" many years earlier in Belinda, i.e., that the seemingly helpless and inarticulate female object of Thomas Day's experimentation has a voice and feelings of her own.

Myers insists that the Clarence Hervey/Virginia subplot in Belinda refers most emphatically to the story of Thomas Day and the two orphans and that its function in the novel is a refutation of the ideology that fed Day's actions. Further, she notes, the patriarchal figure that Edgeworth resists through this tale is not her own father but Day: "More important than Edgeworth's own father to this tale is Day, the bad surrogate dad" (106). Without disclaiming the obvious biographical connections to Thomas Day's life in the tale of Clarence Hervey and Virginia, I would argue that the story's emotional source is Maria Edgeworth's history with her own father. Virginia's terror of losing the father figure's affection, regard, protection makes us think of the motherless child Maria Edgeworth, away at boarding school, trying to write the perfect letter or story that would win her father's approbation. Further, although Virginia's inability to write is presented in the text as a form of deprivation, on some level it signals a resistance to Richard Lovell Edgeworth's directive to his young daughter to write letters "familiarily." Virginia's insistence on her right not divulge her own thoughts is also a kind of resistance to such a directive, which after all is nothing less than a demand for confession.

In Belinda, Maria Edgeworth uses the Clarence Hervey/Virginia subplot, which involves a relationship between a fatherlike figure and a young woman who is not his daughter, to bring into relief an anxiety about what happens between fathers and daughters, and about what it means to express feeling as a daughter. Like Burney's

novels Evelina and Camilla, Edgeworth's novel examines the nature of the loyalty a daughter owes to a father. Does a young woman have to earn a father's love, to somehow deserve it, or is it a blessing freely given? Does fatherly love have to be fed with unwillingly shared confidences? In addition, the Virginia-Clarence Hervey subplot can be read as an attentive exploration of the difference between sexual and filial love, with Virginia struggling to come to some kind of understanding of her powerful feelings and to find the words to articulate them. There is also the suggestion, in Virginia's final confrontation with Hervey, that the desire to please a father can lead to madness. Finally, in all three novels, these scenes of confrontation or interrogation between fatherlike figures and young women in their care reflect the sense of conflict that these two women authors, both of whom identified extremely with their strong-willed fathers, experienced over their own decisions to speak their feelings and thoughts as writers in the public forum.

Chapter 2

“I Was Born to Think”: Defying the Father

Like Frances Burney's and Maria Edgeworth's, the novels of Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821) and Eliza Fenwick (1766-1840) use relationships between fathers or father figures and daughters to highlight issues of female obedience, patriarchal power, and the constraints patriarchal expectations placed on a young woman's ability to speak or be silent as she wished. The novels by Inchbald and Fenwick I will consider in this chapter, A Simple Story (1791) and Secresy (1796), feature heroines enmeshed in complicated and anguished relationships with powerful, sometimes loved, sometimes merely feared father figures. The heroines struggle, as Burney's and Edgeworth's do, with the dilemma of whether to share intimate thoughts and feelings with these figures.

In the novels by Burney and Edgeworth, the scenes of father-daughter interrogation stand out as vivid and subversive enactments of female anguish in novels that otherwise seem to uphold the conventional domestic resolution to a woman's story--marriage to the right suitor. In Inchbald and Fenwick, the scenes register differently. Rather than standing out, they are of a piece with the narratives in which they are embedded, narratives in which female anguish is the dominant feature. Both A Simple Story and Secresy engage openly with the topic of women's defiance against a capricious and emotionally forbidding father figure. The novels suggest that there is no escape and no happy resolution for a daughter's dilemma, certainly not within the conventional marriage plot. In their depiction--or rather their insistence--on the daughter's suffering and defiance, both these novels must be considered revolutionary.

And yet, if the novels by Inchbald and Fenwick have in common their revolutionary engagement with female defiance, at the same time they are quite different from each other in form, style, and overall effect, as well as in the levels of radical thought they propound. Both authors have been described as English Jacobin writers, that is, members of a loosely defined group of English thinkers and intellectuals, who, influenced by and sympathetic to the initial promise of the French Revolution, pushed for reforms that would make English society more egalitarian. The group included writers such as William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Holcroft, and Robert Bege. Among the chief concerns of writers in this circle, according to Gary Kelly, “was simply that reason should decide the issue in human affairs and human government, not power based on money, age, rank, sex, or physical strength” (8). A Simple Story (which Kelly refers to as a “pre-Jacobin” novel), in some ways seems to violate Kelly’s definition of the English Jacobin novel. It features a heroine, Miss Milner, who is governed not by reason but by her emotions, who is vulnerable to her own need for adulation from men and whose transgression is that she dares to desire her handsome young guardian. Secresy, by contrast, is more overtly revolutionary. Sibella, the heroine, has no female vanity, and, in a remarkable manifesto, declares that she was “born to think.” Eliza Fenwick was a close friend of Mary Wollstonecraft, and her heroine’s manifesto clearly reflects the influence of Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Sibella’s belief in reason is her creed, and she clings to it despite the efforts of her despotic uncle, who has kept her isolated on the grounds of his castle and attempted to deny her an education.

There are many other profound differences between the two novels, among the most notable those of narrative and form: A Simple Story has an omniscient narrator while Secresy is epistolary. Despite these differences, however, the novels have in common a glaring divergence from the conventions of the narrative models that they ostensibly follow. Both works, in fact, can be seen as misshapen, flawed, distorted, in their use of narrative--A Simple Story with its abrupt abandonment of Miss Milner's story and its 17-year gap in the middle of the novel, and Secresy with its jarring combination of genres and moods, ranging from Gothic terror to rueful satire. In a perfect example of this clashing of genres, Sibella, naïve and unworldly, described as a "wood-nymph" by one of the other characters, resembles a figure from a romance, locked away in her secret wood. At the same time, however, she is too smart and rational to believe in ghosts, so she is not fooled by her admirer Arthur Murden, when he, disguised as a hermit, pretends to be a messenger from the ethereal.¹ In both instances, I would argue, it is the great anguish embodied in these stories that puts pressure on and distorts the form of the novel. Not only do these heroines' stories not end happily, but their suffering seems in some measure too weighty for the traditional structure of the novel to contain, and thus the structure simply break down. The particular kind of suffering that daughters experience in their relationships with their fathers, contained within concentrated scenes in Burney and Edgeworth, bursts from the scenes and takes over in the novels of Inchbald and Fenwick.²

¹ Julia Wright notes that Fenwick "interweaves" the elements of various popular genres, "forming a mosaic of the gothic, the romantic, the libertine, and the didactic (of various ideological stripes) under the general rubric of the epistolary" (153).

² Christopher Flint remarks on the preponderance of narratives in "the latter part of the [eighteenth] century . . . that scrutinize the psychological, social, and political consequences of kinship in fundamentally skeptical ways. . . . Though family serves patriarchal society, its weaknesses become so apparent that

Secresy, with its heroine's Wollstonecraftian manifesto and her demands to be taken seriously as a thinking individual, can be linked fairly obviously to the radical political thought of the 1790s. A Simple Story, however, must also be read as radical--as, indeed, shocking--in its depiction of the destructive power of the father-daughter relationship, and most particularly the destructiveness of the erotic bond between father or father-surrogate and daughter. The permutations of the father-daughter relationship are examined in almost intolerable detail in this story of a young woman who falls in love with and marries her guardian, who is not just her surrogate father but at the outset of the story a Catholic priest, and thus another kind of symbolic father.³ Their marriage does not end happily, and the father-daughter story is played out again in the second half of the novel, in which the daughter of this marriage, left motherless, is effectively renounced by her father, forbidden to enter his presence--in part because she reminds him too much of her mother.

Much more than Burney or Edgeworth, Inchbald literalizes the erotic bond between father and daughter by suggesting that the same man, Mr. Dorriforth, can be "deputed father," object of desire, and ultimately husband, to the same woman. The power of this figure over the young woman in his care, Miss Milner, is multiplied greatly. Where, in Evelina, Burney splits her heroine's father figures into the "physically, legally, and sexually abusive" natural father (Fizer 99) and the benevolently asexual guardian Mr.

patriarchy itself appears to be intrinsically and fatally flawed" (30). Both A Simple Story and Secresy fit into his characterization of many of these narratives as "aesthetically and ideologically fragmented, . . . exhaust[ing] themselves in confronting antithetical impulses about the family and fiction" (30).

³ As Eleanor Ty notes, "By making Dorriforth at once the father, the legal protector, and the priest, Inchbald unites three representative figures of authority in one character." Further, although Inchbald's heroine, with only one Catholic parent, her father, has not been raised as a believer, the author's choice of a Catholic priest as her heroine's guardian gains additional resonance if one recalls that Inchbald herself was Catholic.

Villars, in A Simple Story these figures are collapsed into one dangerously attractive object.

A Simple Story highlights not only the emotional terror a daughter must endure from a capricious father figure, but the related issues of power, obedience, and a woman's freedom to speak or be silent as she wishes. Like similar scenes in the novels of Burney and Edgeworth, the scenes of interrogation between Dorriforth and his ward Miss Milner raise questions concerning a young woman's obligation to obey a father or guardian, especially when that obligation conflicts with the demands of modesty and the desire for privacy. That is, what does a young eighteenth-century woman do when her father interrogates her regarding the secrets of her heart? Lying is undutiful and undaughterly, but acknowledging desire is unseemly, even unthinkable for a properly brought up young woman. As Burney's Mr. Tyrold tells his daughter in Camilla (1796), the world holds a special kind of contempt for a woman who is known to have an unrequited attachment. The unspoken threat here is that the father will share in the world's contempt. In Burney and Edgeworth, the daughters do not speak their secrets but rather communicate them through the gestures of sensibility: blushing, weeping, averted eyes. In A Simple Story, however, as Jane Spencer points out, "the bodily signs which usually in the literature of sensibility, speak more truly than words, are radically ambiguous. . . . [The] characters misread each other" (xvi).

This misreading is necessary because to read the signs properly (and Spencer is speaking here of Dorriforth's reading of Miss Milner's blushes) would wreak havoc. Miss Milner's secret is not just that she loves, but that she loves the man who is asking the questions about her most intimate feelings, and who is not only her surrogate father

but a priest sworn to celibacy. With all her lack of education and sense of what is proper (and the narrator makes much of this, indicating that if Miss Milner had had a better education, she would not have let herself even think of Mr. Dorriforth), Miss Milner knows that this love is forbidden, and it is only with great shame that she acknowledges it to her confidante Miss Woodley. Further, Mr. Dorriforth's eventual confession to the same intermediary of his own love for his ward (after he is no longer a priest and it is safe to acknowledge these feelings) imbues the earlier interrogation scenes between guardian and surrogate daughter with another layer of erotic tension. The scenes, already thus highly fraught, are even more charged if one recollects that, in his identity as a Catholic priest--one who deals in confession--Dorriforth would seem to have an additional, powerful claim on his ward's confidence despite the fact that she has been brought up as a non-Catholic (their religious differences indeed become another source of tension between them).

Dorriforth, upon taking on the guardianship of Miss Milner, had agreed to her dying father's request that he would never attempt to impose his religious views on his ward. Dorriforth's governing of Miss Milner is thus characterized by a kind of exquisite restraint, not only with regard to their religious differences but extending to the way he attempts to set the tone for their interactions by his own example of reserve and distance. As the narrator laments repeatedly, Miss Milner has not been educated properly. Associated with this lack of education is a lack of decorum on Miss Milner's part, an impulsiveness and a willingness to indulge herself in various ways, among them a propensity to joke and be familiar. The narrator informs us that "from some volatile thought, or some quick sense of feeling, she had not been accustomed to subdue, she was

perpetually on the verge of treating [her guardian] with levity; but he would immediately recall her recollection by a reserve too awful, and a gentleness too sacred for her to violate” (23-24).⁴

If Dorriforth tries to control Miss Milner’s behavior with his awful reserve, Mr. Sandford, Dorriforth’s former tutor and fellow priest, who is often present in the household, takes a completely different, more overtly aggressive--if not abusive--tack. Convinced that Miss Milner is “incorrigible” and disapproving of her vanity and her love of the pleasures of fashion, he sees in her heart “a weight of folly he wished to see eradicated.” He therefore begins to “toil in the vineyard, eager to draw upon him her detestation, in the hope he could also make her abominate herself” (39). Sandford slights Miss Milner socially, ignoring her where she is used to being the center of attention. Miss Milner feels humbled and humiliated by this treatment, but her response is to fight: “She felt an inward nothingness she never knew before, and had been cured of all her pride, had she not possessed a degree of spirit beyond the generality of her sex, and such as even Mr. Sandford with all his penetration did not expect.--She determined to resent his treatment, and entering the lists as his declared enemy, give reasons to the beholders why he did not, with them, acknowledge her sovereignty” (40).

Miss Milner and Mr. Sandford, referred to by the narrator somewhat ironically and insistently here as “the holy Father,” trade insults with a heartiness that is almost shocking. During one conference, when Sandford implies in front of others that Miss Milner is deceitful, she retorts, “Deceit? In what am I deceitful? did I ever pretend, sir, I had an esteem for you?” (43) If Miss Milner is defiant toward this holy Father,

⁴ All quotations from *A Simple Story* are from the Oxford World’s Classics edition, edited and with notes by J.M.S. Tompkins, introduced by Jane Spencer.

however, she is most often submissive toward her “deputed father,” that is, Dorriforth, who chastens her with his unspoken requirements. This leads to a rather striking doubleness in her behavior when the three of them are in a room together; like an actress practicing different moods or attitudes (and Inchbald was of course an actress and a writer for the stage before she became a novelist), Miss Milner in one instant trades barbs with Sandford and in the next assures her guardian of her continual obedience and respect. In this odd triangle, both comic and tragic, Dorriforth feels torn and exhibits doubleness as well. When Dorriforth registers a “piercing look” of anger that his ward has directed at Sandford while she accuses him of turning Dorriforth against her, Dorriforth “looked confused--but the concern which she had so plainly evinced for his [that is, Dorriforth’s] good opinion throughout what she had said, silenced any rebuke he might else have been tempted to give her, for this unwarrantable charge against his friend” (43).

Dorriforth is often “confused” about his ward’s feelings. Long before the acknowledgment of their mutual feelings for one another, he attempts to manage her flirtatious behavior with a man whom he doesn’t trust, Lord Frederick Lawnley, by marrying her off to another man, Sir Edward Ashton. The first of several interviews in which Dorriforth demands to know the state of his ward’s heart thus takes place early in the novel. Dorriforth wonders why Miss Milner will not consider Sir Edward as a husband, and Miss Milner responds that she will not marry a man whom she could never love. Dorriforth probes further:

“Unless your heart is already given away, Miss Milner, what can make you speak with such a degree of certainty?”

He thought on Lord Frederick when he said this, and he fixed his eyes upon her as if he wished to penetrate her sentiments, and yet trembled for what he might find there.--She blushed, and her looks would have confirmed her guilty, had not a free and unembarrassed tone of voice, more than her words, preserved her from that sentence.

“No,” she replied, “my heart is not given away, and yet I can venture to declare Sir Edward will never possess an atom of it.” (25)

With her “free and unembarrassed tone of voice,” Miss Milner obtains some temporary relief from her guardian’s inquiries into her private thoughts. She is not to be left alone for long, though. Dorriforth’s frustration at not being able to control or fathom her behavior toward Lord Frederick grows, abetted, of course, by his unacknowledged jealousy, and he gathers a virtual tribunal to bear witness to his further questioning of her. The group is made up of Sandford and the two women who live in the house, Mrs. Horton, a widow, and Miss Woodley, her spinster niece, who has become Miss Milner’s friend and confidante. There is some preliminary bickering between Miss Milner and Sandford, and Sandford threatens to leave.

“Stay now,” cried Dorriforth. “And Miss Milner,” continued he, “I not only entreat, but command you to tell me.--Have you given your promises, your word, or your affections to Lord Frederick Lawnly?”

The colour spread over her face, and she replied-- “I thought confessions were only permitted in secrecy; however, as I am not a member of your church, I submit to the persecution of a heretic, and answer -- Lord Frederick has neither my word, my promise, nor any share of my affections.” (56-57)

Miss Milner's resentment at being subject to this "interrogation" (as she herself calls it in another one of her remarks) is fierce, as this spirited retort shows. Her references to confession and to her being a heretic are pointed, and speak to her feelings of being bullied by the two priests who, with their widely differing methods, try to control her behavior and also elicit unwilling confidences. Her resentment seems to be aroused as much if not more by the fact that Sandford and the others are present as by the questions themselves, however. In an odd way, her contentious relationship with Sandford enables her to talk back to her guardian as she wouldn't if she were alone with him. When the two are alone, as she reports to Miss Woodley, Mr. Dorriforth's "tenderness frightens [her], . . . intimidates, and strikes [her] dumb" (49).

The spectacle of a father controlling a daughter through tenderness, through a kind of loving reproachfulness, is a familiar one in the novels of late eighteenth-century women writers. In this story, however, as noted earlier, the tenderness is freighted with an erotic charge, and it is this erotic charge that effectively silences Miss Milner. As Jane Spencer points out, despite the narrator's oft-repeated claim that Mr. Dorriforth is a good and generous man, we never see him behaving with any particular solicitude toward Miss Milner except when she is "submissive or miserable" (xviii). Dorriforth rules Miss Milner capriciously, commanding that she stay home from a ball, and then suddenly changing his mind when she seems willing to comply. Moved, as it were, by her submissiveness, he commands her to go. He comes home to dinner on one occasion, and finding her obviously depressed and unable to eat because of his absence and her fear of his anger, he very solicitously places a piece of fowl on her plate (although without, as the narrator make sure to tell us, checking first to see if she wants anything to eat).

Gestures, reversals, like these bring Miss Milner to tears, and help keep her in the position of abjection that, as George Haggerty points out, is the central feature of both her and later her daughter's relation to this figure who is both fatherlike and husbandlike.⁵ Further, as Terry Castle notes, there are aspects of the relationship between Dorriforth and Miss Milner that seem oddly linked to the "conceptualization of the erotic" found in the Marquis de Sade's Justine, which appeared the same year as A Simple Story. Castle writes, "In Inchbald, too, the forbidden is sought--and found--over and over again. Desire constructs itself in relation to an endlessly self-extending set of prohibitions; there is always another 'sober man,' another proscribed object or activity to spur passion" (304). Castle's point is striking, although I see the erotic tension not so much in Miss Milner's always desiring what is forbidden but in Dorriforth's repeatedly giving and withdrawing his affection, so that Miss Milner never knows whether to expect punishment or tenderness.

The tension of the first half of A Simple Story finally finds overt expression when Miss Milner confesses to Miss Woodley that she loves Dorriforth, declaring, memorably, "Oh, Miss Woodley! I love him with all the passion of a mistress, and all the tenderness of a wife" (72). This confession sets in motion a series of slippages of identity. Receiving the erotic secret, Miss Woodley, heretofore unassuming and unobtrusive, gains new power over Miss Milner. She first takes Miss Milner away to Bath and then, when it

⁵ Haggerty notes that it is precisely the position of desiring the father as romantic object that guarantees the abjection of both mother and daughter: "The novel to a certain extent reenacts the unthinkable desire for the father in its curious doubling of mother and daughter, and it insists on the paternal as the inaccessible, the unsatisfying, but the only choice for the desiring female" ("Female Abjection" 658). For Haggerty, the suffering both Miss Milner and her daughter Lady Matilda endure through their connection to the combined husband/father figure of Dorriforth/Elmwood is part of Inchbald's indictment of patriarchy: "By falling in love with the man who is literally her father-surrogate, who is at the same time because of 'orders' as inaccessible as a father would be, Miss Milner exposes the particular virulence of a patriarchal system" ("Female Abjection" 660).

is safe, after Dorriforth has given up his holy orders because of a change in the family succession, brings her back, and eventually intimates to Dorriforth the long-mysterious secret of his ward's heart. Dorriforth, now metamorphosed into Lord Elmwood, is overjoyed because, as he now confesses, he loves Miss Milner. In another series of slippages of identity, he shifts--in relation to Miss Milner--from father to suitor to husband.

The shift is not without bumps, however. The cycle of rebellion, regret, forgiveness, continues. Miss Milner defies Dorriforth once again while they are engaged by going to a masquerade after he has forbidden her to do so. He renounces her and calls off the marriage, but Sandford, in another startling reversal, steps in when he sees how miserable they both are, and commands them to marry or part forever. He marries them, hastily, and the first half of the novel ends with Miss Milner's shocked realization that her husband, unprepared for the ceremony, has placed on her finger a mourning ring.

The prophecy of suffering is fulfilled in the second half of the book, which picks up about seventeen years later. We learn that about four years into the marriage, Lord Elmwood had gone to the West Indies to settle some business and stayed away for three years. Lady Elmwood, left alone without an explanation, is "at first only unhappy, [but] becomes at last provoked" (196) and gives in to the addresses of the persistent Lord Lawnley. Her husband returns to England; ashamed, she flees their home before he arrives. She leaves their young daughter there, painful though that is for her, because she thinks her husband will protect and take care of the child. But Lord Elmwood, who will not forgive this last transgression, wants neither to be reminded of his wife nor to form an attachment to his daughter, and sends the latter after her mother.

As the second part of the story opens, Lady Elmwood is dying. Upon her death, Sandford (who has now become her ally) delivers her dying letter to her husband, which entreats him to make some provision for their daughter. The letter begs Lord Elmwood not to think of Matilda as his daughter or hers, but as the granddaughter of his deceased friend Mr. Milner, that is, the former Miss Milner's father, who originally put Miss Milner under Dorriforth's protection. In doing this, of course, Lady Elmwood is trying to give her daughter the greatest chance of survival. But there is also the suggestion, especially resonant given her own experience, that a father-daughter relationship is too close, too dangerous, too powerful, and that it must be denied acknowledgment in favor of other, more distant relationships.

Lord Elmwood in a sense enacts the spirit of his wife's letter. He certainly keeps Matilda distant from him. He agrees to provide for her and to allow her to live in his home under one condition, which is that she will not allow herself to be seen by him. Matilda accepts her situation uncomplainingly for the most part. Despite the cruelty of her father's renunciation, Matilda longs for him and takes bittersweet pleasure in whatever vicarious connection she can establish with him, whether by wandering through the house after he has left and touching the places his body has touched, or by begging her attendants for anecdotes of him.

As numerous critics have noted, the relationship between Lord Elmwood and his daughter bears remarkable resemblances to that of Dorriforth and Miss Milner. Matilda's obsession with her father, her fear of displeasing him, her yearning for his presence, all call to mind her mother's obsession with the same man. Arriving at the magnificent estate that is to be her new home, she cries out, "shall I live to sleep under the same roof

as my father?" (219) At the first sight of a full-length portrait of Lord Elmwood, Matilda "shrunk back with fear, and it was some time before she dared venture to cast her eyes completely upon it." When she does so, finally, it is to "sigh and weep to [the] picture." (220) Alerted that Lord Elmwood's arrival is expected within a few days, Matilda "started, and looked just as her mother at her age often times had done, when, in spite of her love, she was conscious she had offended him, and was terrified at his approach" (222). As George Haggerty notes, "Lady Matilda find herself in a situation strikingly similar to that of her own mother: she is rejected by a stern father-protector for no reason that she can discern, and she must puzzle out how to please him--for his pleasure motivates all action in the novel--without overstepping her severely circumscribed bounds" (664). This identity between Matilda and her mother--and Lord Elmwood indeed confuses them, calling the grown-up Matilda by her mother's name when he comes face to face with her for the first time--serves to underscore Inchbald's depiction of the uneasy collapsing of identity between father, guardian, lover, husband, that is enacted in the person of Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood.

In the first part of A Simple Story, that is, the narrative of Miss Milner and Dorriforth, communication between father-surrogate and daughter takes place in a variety of ways: verbal confrontations, meaningful looks, and "bodily signs," sometimes misread. In the story of Matilda and her father, because Matilda's very presence is outlawed, communication takes place for the most part only through inanimate objects or indirectly through intermediaries. Matilda weeps to her father's picture and reverently touches the chair in which he recently sat. When Miss Woodley, who has become Matilda's companion as she was her mother's, returns from having dinner with Lord

Elmwood, Matilda kisses her hand because her father touched that same hand and begs to know details of her father's demeanor. Lord Elmwood, for his part, accepts Miss Woodley into his presence as his daughter's unacknowledged ambassador. In the library, he guides Miss Woodley's selection of books because he knows the books are for his daughter--yet Matilda is never named.

Matilda eventually makes a mistake, accidentally defying her father's orders that she be invisible to him. Thinking Lord Elmwood away for a week of hunting, and herself "at large" (a phrase, used by the narrator, that amply conveys the oppressiveness of her usual situation), Matilda descends the stairs to join Miss Woodley, whom she has just glimpsed outside the window walking on the grounds. It is a "beautiful forenoon," and in her eagerness to be outside and free of her prison, Matilda grabs her hat but doesn't bother to put it on. The picture of Matilda descending the stairs with her hat in her hand is a most poignant one; with one detail, that is, Matilda's hatlessness, the narrator makes the reader aware of the heroine's vulnerability, her unreadiness for what awaits her. In a house momentarily populated by females and servants, Matilda thinks herself safe in all the ways a woman can be--from male scrutiny, from her irascible father's edicts, from sexual predation (the detail that she believes her father away hunting must not be forgotten)--and thus she ventures out uncovered.

Matilda, however, encounters danger on the stairs. The man who confronts her on the second landing is a stranger, but she knows it is her father "by an air of authority in his looks" and most of all by "her fears." "She gave a scream of terror -- put out her trembling hands to catch the balustrades on the stairs for support--missed them--and fell motionless into her father's arms." Her father catches her instinctively, but then, holding

her in his arms, “gazed on her attentively--and once pressed her to his bosom.” After some time (“at length”), he hopes to slip away, to leave her on the stairs in her swoon, so that he may escape banishing her. But Matilda, as if sensing incipient abandonment, opens her eyes and utters, ambiguously, “Save me.” This is too much for Lord Elmwood.

Her voice unmanned him.--His long-restrained tears now burst forth--and seeing her relapsing into the swoon again, he cried out eagerly to recall her.--Her name did not however come to his recollection--nor any name but this--“Miss Milner--
Dear Miss Milner.” (273-274)

When Matilda swoons again, Lord Elmwood remembers that “he wished to leave her in this senseless state, that not remembering what had passed, she might escape the punishment” (274). The unexpected entrance of two servants (and this is a scene that could have been written for the theater) prevents him from pursuing this scheme, and he thrusts his “apparently dead child” into the arms of the horrified steward, “without one command respecting her, or one word of any kind; while his face was agitated with shame, with pity, with anger, with paternal tenderness” (274),

This highly eroticized scene expresses perhaps the essence of Inchbald’s vision of the danger and destructiveness of the father-daughter bond. Here the “bodily signs” do speak more truly than words, to use Spencer’s formulation. Matilda’s terror of her father and her simultaneous desire to be embraced, accepted, rescued by him, speak through her swoon, which is also, of course, a figure for sexual surrender. For Lord Elmwood, Matilda’s body itself is the sign; her physical presence, which he has tried to erase, overpoweringly evokes the feelings he once had for her mother. The elision of daughter, lover, wife, which characterized the relationship of Dorriforth and Miss Milner is

reenacted as Matilda faints in her father's arms. The incestuous quality of Lord Elmwood's feelings toward his daughter is suggested not just by his behavior and his identifying her with his wife but by the peculiar detail that he wishes her to have no memory of their encounter.

Because Matilda does remember, however, she cannot "escape the punishment." Again, here, the language seems unavoidably to suggest the enactment of the father's sexual desire upon the daughter. The notion that remembering what happened will entail suffering for Matilda dovetails strikingly with late twentieth-century discourse on sexual abuse, as does the father's implicit assertion that the daughter is somehow responsible for his aggressive actions toward her. Matilda, who has done nothing but go down the stairs with her hat in her hand at the wrong time, is now to be banished to a remote farmhouse with the faithful Miss Woodley. The absurdity of Lord Elmwood's dictum--and his insistence on following through on it although he knows his daughter has not wilfully defied him--reinforces Inchbald's portrait of the capriciousness of the domestic tyrant.

Matilda never does articulate her anger or her need for her father or her anguish. When she is finally taken in and acknowledged by her father, it is because she has been kidnapped and threatened with rape and he, galvanized by her danger, has decided to "be a father," as one of the other characters puts it, and has come to her rescue. She is happy to accept his love just as she endured his renunciation without complaint for the most part. The one reproachful thing she says to her father after they are reunited occurs in an attempt to defend her cousin Harry Rushbrook from one of Lord Elmwood's fits of unreasoning rage.

“Mr. Rushbrook is my relation,” she cried in a pathetic voice, “my companion, my friend--before you loved me he was anxious for my happiness, and often visited me to propose some kindness.--I cannot see him turned out of your house without feeling for him, what he once felt for me.” (335-336)

This outburst has its desired effect. Lord Elmwood stops Sandford from turning Rushbrook out of the house and says he will allow Matilda to talk to Rushbrook and see if she can help him out of his predicament, which is that he is in love with Matilda and wants to marry her. (His confession of this to Lord Elmwood is what has provoked the latter's rage.) Matilda, all unknowing, asks Rushbrook what he has asked of her father, and Rushbrook tells her. The narrator leaves it to the reader to imagine whether or not she consents. We are led to believe that she will consent and also that this will be a happy turn of events, but perhaps typically for this daughter who does not have a voice in her own story, she never says the words. In a gesture that reinforces Matilda's helplessness, the narrator makes her submissive to the desires not only of Harry Rushbrook but of the readers, who get to decide whether or not she does indeed marry him.

Secresy

Eliza Fenwick's Secresy (1795) takes further and literalizes the themes of female imprisonment that feature so prominently in A Simple Story. The novel's heroine, Sibella, a ward of her uncle Mr. Valmont since her father died when she was six, has been confined by her uncle to the grounds of his gloomy, forbidding castle, which has all the features of a Gothic estate, including a ruined hermitage, a moat and drawbridge, an

armory with a secret passageway leading to it, and a general lack of light and cheer. Because of disappointments early in life, including his marriage to a vapid and sickly woman, the misanthropic Mr. Valmont, we eventually find out, feels supreme disgust with the ways of society and has retreated to his estate, where he has little interaction with his wife and enforces solitude on his ward Sibella. He attempts also to enforce ignorance--mental imprisonment--on Sibella, by denying her an education, because he believes that women do not have the capacity to think or reason and should not be encouraged to believe that they do.⁶ Sibella, however, has managed to capture some education from sitting in on the lessons of Clement Montgomery, her childhood playmate and eventual lover who for some years lived in the castle as another ward of her uncle. Introduced to Sibella as the son of one of the local cottagers, Clement is in reality Mr. Valmont's natural son and thus Sibella's cousin, a secret--one of the many in this novel--that does not become known until late in the story.

The novel opens with a letter to Mr. Valmont from Caroline Ashburn, a young woman of the fashionable world. Caroline, who despises the shallowness, artifice, and flattery of those in her circle, has met Sibella on a visit to Valmont Castle. Enchanted by Sibella's ethereal beauty, her intelligence, her utter lack of artifice, and her strange habits (walking in the woods in the middle of the night without fear, for example), Caroline had hoped that Mr. Valmont would allow Sibella to leave the castle and visit Caroline at her mother's home in London.⁷ This request denied, Caroline has written to Mr. Valmont to

⁶ Like Virginia in Edgeworth's *Belinda*, Sibella is a victim of a misguided attempt by a male guardian to enact Rousseau's ideas about the education of women. Where Hervey was largely a benevolent and affectionate caretaker, Mr. Valmont is despotic and cold to his ward. Fenwick's critique of patriarchal subjugation of women's intellects is a much angrier one than Edgeworth's.

⁷ It is worth noting that even Caroline, who claims to love Sibella, would like to perform social experiments on her. She writes to Sibella, "I thought I might embrace you as the first choice of my affections; but I

appeal for his permission to correspond with Sibella. "A letter, Sir, cannot waft down your drawbridges; the spirit of my affection breathed therein cannot disenchant her from the all-powerful spell of your authority" (39).⁸

One of the questions the novel grapples with is whether the "spirit of affection" between two women, conveyed passionately in writing, is indeed strong enough to overturn the authority of a tyrannical patriarch.⁹ Sibella's literal imprisonment is affirmed at the outset by Mr. Valmont's refusal to let her leave with Caroline. Much of the novel deals with her attempt to remain whole mentally in the face of this subjugation of her will. One of her most anguished moments come when she realizes that her mind cannot free her from her physical situation, that she cannot will herself into transcendence: "Is the mind so much fettered by its earthly clog the body, that it cannot long sustain these lofty flights, soaring as it were into divinity, but must ever sink back to its portion of pains and penalties?" Sibella's question, reflecting powerfully one of the chief preoccupations of the Romantic era, is a poignant foreshadowing of the role events of the body--that is, sexuality and pregnancy--will play in her fate.

The letter from Caroline that opens the novel sets up the conflicts, themes, and scenarios that will recur throughout it: female rebellion, male despotism, the power of reason, questions of permission and speaking (will Mr. Valmont allow the exchange of letters that will give Sibella her voice?), the erotic joy of letter-writing, and the drama of openness versus secrecy. Caroline, an articulate and intelligent young woman who takes

doubted whether you might not, if exposed to the glitter of the world, lose that vigour of feeling which in solitude made you appear so singular, so attractive. I longed to make the experiment, for my hopes of you were stronger than my fears" (55).

⁸ All quotations from *Secresy* are from the 1994 Broadview Press edition, edited by Isobel Grundy.

reason as her guide in all things, pits herself against the authority of a much older, powerful male figure who believes his gender and his position in society render him accountable to no one. Interestingly enough, although Mr. Valmont will not allow Sibella to enter into the world in person, he does consent to the correspondence with Caroline, perhaps swayed by Caroline's confidence and self-assertion as she writes, "you surely will not forbid an indulgence so endearing to us, while unimportant to yourself. Already I feel assured of your consent; and, with my thanks, dismiss the subject" (39).

Valmont's consent, reported to the reader in a rhapsodizing first letter from Sibella to Caroline, is thus the device that, as it were, allows the novel to happen. Ironically, then, it is only with the tyrannical father figure's permission that the story of the daughter's rebellion or attempted rebellion gets to be told, that we get to hear about it in Sibella's letters to Caroline. Sibella gains a confidante and a link to the larger world through writing to Sibella. The narrative features a building tension between Sibella's physical confinement and her emotional and intellectual flight from Mr. Valmont. Eventually she does escape physically with the aid of Caroline and Arthur Murden, but only when she is in desperation: pregnant, abandoned by Clement, and further mistreated by her uncle.

Fenwick's heroine, Sibella, is outspokenly defiant toward her guardian in a way that neither Miss Milner nor her daughter dare to be. Or rather, the defiance is of a different quality. While Miss Milner can be fiery and passionate, her rebellious gestures are impulsive, not thought out, and seem always to be related to her desire for adulation. In Fenwick's heroine, Sibella, we have, by contrast, a heroine who thinks, and who takes

⁹ This question, and the depiction of Caroline and Sibella's passionate and devoted epistolary relationship, is one of the many ways in which this novel is influenced by Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, in which

pride in her ability to do so, in the face of her tyrannical uncle's insistence that reason is beyond the capacity of women. Her every act of rebellion is thought out: when she takes the radical step of having sex with Clement Montgomery, the man she loves (and whom her uncle has forbidden her to think of as a potential husband), it is because she has decided that, for Clement's sake, it is time to consummate what she believes to be a marriage in the eyes of Heaven. Her confidence in the purity of her and Clement's intentions (unfortunately, she will prove to be mistaken in Clement) is enough to render her indifferent to what the world will think.

Unlike Miss Milner, who tells her female confidante that it is her guardian's tenderness that "frightens [her], . . . intimidates, and strikes [her] dumb," Sibella is afraid not of her guardian's "tenderness" but of his frowning, angry manner. As a thinking heroine, however, she struggles to reason herself out of these fears, as indicated in the following excerpt from one of Sibella's letters to Caroline Ashburn.

I feel every day bolder and bolder. I can speak to him when I first meet him, as calmly as I can to Andrew [a servant]; and I can oppose him a little. And when I have not opposed him as much as I wish to do, and have ran away from the sight of his face, and the sound of his voice, I take myself to task, and say, foolish Sibella! Can a frown kill you? -- Can your uncle, though he should be tenfold angry with you, do more to you than he has already done? And, when my throbbing heart denies the possibility of that, I resolve the next time to tell him everything I feel: and then I want, and long, and wish that the next time would arrive. When it does arrive, I begin without fear; or, at least I have only a weak trembling, which I should soon lose if he did not call up one of those frowns

Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe carry on a similar correspondence.

which infallibly condemn to silence and terror. But I know, and he knows too if he would but own it, that I do think; that I was born to think: -- and I will think.

(43)

In this defiant declaration, we see the heroine's struggle to marshal the powers of reason to resist the emotional force of her uncle's oppressively punitive and unloving mien and his absolute power over her. In contrast to this depiction of the thinking heroine, Inchbald's Miss Milner, whose sensibility outweighs her ability to reason, is depicted as too lost in the emotional turbulence of her relationship with her guardian to try to step out of it and analyze or try to change her own behavior. Further, because Secresy, in contrast to A Simple Story, is an epistolary novel, we are privy to the heroine's thoughts in a way that we aren't in Inchbald's novel. We see the results of Miss Milner's fear: we see that she trembles and is pale and submissive or unable to eat, but we don't overhear her private thoughts about what it is that makes her feel fear or what she feels when she prepares to confront her guardian.

Unlike daughters in the other novels I have considered, Sibella wants to confess, but her confession--or her accounting of herself--is not desired by her guardian. This is apparent in the passage quoted above, and again later, when Sibella wants to tell Mr. Valmont how she has entered what she thinks of as a "contract marriage" with Clement. Secrecy is alien to her nature; she has only held back from telling Mr. Valmont because the more worldly--and self-serving--Clement has asked her to conceal their union for fear of Mr. Valmont's reaction. At one point, Mr. Valmont tells Sibella he is writing to Clement, who is away in London, and asks her if she has any messages for her "friend and play-fellow." (This is a particularly ironic appellation since Sibella has just described

to Caroline feelings of being giddy and unwell, clear signs to the reader that she is now pregnant with her playfellow's child, although she herself perhaps does not know this.)

Sibella replies,

“Such, Sir, as most befits a wife to a husband.” Encouraged by the complacency of his eye, I threw myself at his feet; and assuredly reserve and concealment would in that moment have vanished, had not Mr. Valmont placed his hand on my mouth. “Hush, hush, child! -- You know I will be obeyed! -- Happiness ceases to be a blessing, if disappointment does not precede, to stamp its value. Go, Sibella. Your fate in the husband I ordain for you may not be as desperate as you, at present, perhaps, imagine.” (251)

Mr. Valmont has planned all along for Sibella and Clement to be together, in part for mercenary reasons (he wants Sibella's fortune--another secret, since she thinks herself penniless--to stay in his family). He wants their marriage to take place on his terms, however, and when he is ready for it to happen, which is not before Clement has been tested by poverty and Sibella by the suffering she experiences at their separation. Blind to everything but his own scheme, Valmont thinks he knows already what Sibella wishes to tell him, which is merely that she loves Clement, and he wants to hear nothing of it. The secret of Clement and Sibella's union, when he eventually learns it, will enrage him. Sibella, however, raised in isolation and untutored in the ways of what her world considers female delicacy, is unashamed of not just her desire but its enactment. In the encounter described above, she strains to share her secret, but is rebuked by this father figure who wants only silence from her, who literally stops her mouth.

Another remarkable element in the construction of the father-daughter pairs in this novel is that the heroine herself decides who deserves to be called a father and who doesn't. In Inchbald's novel, the idea of defining a father is present, but only implicitly--Miss Milner would never dream of questioning whether Dorriforth deserves to be called her father. But Sibella says, all but directly, that Mr. Valmont does not merit the name:

Mr. Valmont calls himself my father; and calling himself such, he rests there satisfied. Cold in his temperament, stern from his education, he imagines kindness would be indulgence, and indulgence folly. Ever on the watch for faults, the accent of reproof mingles with his best commendations. (73)

According to Sibella, it is not Mr. Valmont who should be named father, but the kind old tutor, Bonneville, who allowed her to share in Clement's lessons when they were children. It is only because of Bonneville that Sibella has any formal education at all; it is Bonneville, she tells Caroline, who introduced her to the "vivifying principle of intellectual life . . . who called the powers of my mind forth from the chaos, wherewith Mr. Valmont had enveloped them" (74). Because Bonneville has been kind and because he showed respect for Sibella's mind despite her being a woman, she names him her father: "I hailed him by the name of father. He called me his child." Bonneville in fact has gone to great lengths to give Sibella the instruction she craves: "Still, would he endure the damps of evening, and tremble under the cold blast, rather than Sibella should be sunk in ignorance and sloth; for her cruel uncle had forbidden her an entrance into that apartment where Bonneville gave Clement his daily instruction." When the old man becomes ill and is about to die, Sibella calls out to him, "My father! my father! . . . You

will not leave us! We are your children! Better were it that we should die with you than be left without you.” (75).

Sibella responds to a question about why she submits to Mr. Valmont’s will with the following statement: “I am not yet convinced that time is arrived when my submission ought to cease.” And, invited to try to escape secretly, she replies,

“I am not weak enough to descend to artifice. Did I think it right to go, I should go openly. Then might Mr. Valmont try his opposing strength. But he would find, I could leap, swim, or dive; and that moats and walls are feeble barriers to a determined will.”

Secrecy is repugnant to Sibella’s nature, but in the end, pregnant and even more strictly guarded by her uncle, she does resort to secrecy to escape. Her mismanaged escape throws her first into the arms of a would-be seducer and later into the horror of being confronted unexpectedly with the sight of her Clement Montgomery married, for money, to Caroline’s rich mother. This is a sight and an event that Sibella cannot survive. In an ending that seems particularly crushing, given Sibella’s attempts to live outside the rules of convention, Fenwick reserves for her heroine the conventional tragic death of the fallen women.

Both Inchbald’s A Simple Story and Fenwick’s Secresy delineate in imaginative form the constraints and psychological pressures experienced by eighteenth-century daughters at the hands of paternal custodians. In A Simple Story, the pressures are deeply linked with the erotic desires of the father or father figure, while in Secresy, they take the form of attempted suppression of the heroine’s intellect and outright suppression of her physical liberty. Both novels are powerful critiques of the workings of patriarchy

within the late eighteenth-century family, but Secresy, whose heroine's ability to think is in the end no match for the combined forces of her lover's duplicitousness, her guardian's intractability and adherence to social code, and her body's betrayal, is by far the more devastating one.

Chapter 3

“Check These Tears; They Do but Exhaust You”:

Self-Expression and Contagious Emotion

In April 1811, the Scottish writer Mary Brunton exulted in a letter to a friend about the success of her just-published first novel, Self-Control. Despite the “faults” many readers and critics found, she wrote, the book had been selling well; in fact, there was “not a copy to be had in either Edinburgh or London” (qtd. in Spender 334). Brunton was not exaggerating, as a contemporaneous letter of Jane Austen’s indicates. On April 30, 1811, Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra: “We have been trying to get Self-control, but in vain.” She adds “[I] am always half afraid of finding a clever novel too clever--& of finding my own story and my own people all forestalled” (Austen, Jane Austen’s Letters 186).

In her combined eagerness and trepidation regarding the prospect of an encounter with the work of a fellow writer, Jane Austen exhibits a mixture of attitudes that must be familiar to anyone who writes--for pleasure or publication. In April 1811, however, Austen had particular reasons to be curious about Brunton’s novel, since she was during that very month engaged in correcting proofs for what would be her own first published novel, Sense and Sensibility, a project with which, as she wrote Cassandra, she felt as preoccupied as a mother with her “sucking child” (Austen, Jane Austen’s Letters 182).

Moreover, Self-Control, as its name indicates, would turn out to explore many of the themes important to Austen’s novel. Both of these works, published during the twilight of the age of sensibility, dwell deeply in that era’s major preoccupation: feeling

and its expression. The novels develop similar themes: the dangers of excessive sensibility, particularly for women (and by this point sensibility had been coded largely as a female trait); the need to avoid self-indulgence and practice “exertion” in controlling one’s feelings; the difficulty of overcoming a misplaced passion; and the pain of filial devotion in the face of ingratitude, nonrecognition, or other forms of psychological abuse from a parent or parent figure. Among the dangers sensibility poses for a young woman, according to these novels, is that of seduction; Marianne Dashwood in Austen’s novel and Laura Montreville in Brunton’s are both vulnerable on that score because of their emotional responsiveness. Even more striking is the novels’ rendering of another consequence faced by the person of sensibility: the powerfully contagious quality of feeling, even--or perhaps especially--unspoken feeling.

Both novels treat the themes of interrogation, coercion, and confession, particularly within families, that I have been concerned with in this dissertation. These two novels, and the other Jane Austen novel I will discuss in this chapter, Mansfield Park, present, as did the novels I treated in earlier chapters, the trope of the scrutinized and harangued daughter who must defend her privacy from paternal or other interrogation. In previous chapters, my interest has been in the scenes of father-daughter interrogation. These scenes remain important here, especially in Self-Control and Mansfield Park, but in Sense and Sensibility, where there is no patriarch, Austen presents an alternative to the model of paternal interrogation. An added dimension, therefore, in this chapter will be the discussion of what happens when the gender of the would-be interrogator is changed. In Sense and Sensibility, there is no father or even father figure to ask Marianne

Dashwood the status of her relationship with Willoughby--there is only Mrs. Dashwood, who will not assume the authority to confront her daughter.

All three of these books focus on questions about privacy and intrusion. Does a daughter have the obligation to confess her private thoughts to the parental figure who demands them in the name of love or duty? Do such questions constitute an intrusion--an assault--if they are meant kindly? What about unwanted confessions made to the heroine?--another form of intrusion, surely. For example, in Sense and Sensibility, Lucy Steele imposes her unwanted confidence on Elinor, forcing Elinor, who is keenly observant of social form, to keep her secret, even though that secret--and the need to withhold it from her family, especially her closest confidante, her sister Marianne--is a source of pain and irritation.

The heroines in the novels considered here--especially Laura in Brunton's novel--struggle with the competing moral directives their society imposes. With their depiction of these heroines, Austen and Brunton convey vividly the difficulties for an eighteenth-century woman of emulating what were considered ideal feminine virtues. Telling the truth is, without question, an absolute priority for the moral heroine of this period, as is the duty to obey one's father or mother. And yet, as the novels show, there are situations in which other directives, other codes of behavior, take precedence for daughters. These other codes include not only the imperative to avoid acknowledging even the possibility that, as a genteel young woman, one might experience feelings of amorous desire, but also that of protecting a loved and revered father or mother from psychological or physical harm.

This latter motivation for silence, the impulse to protect, relates in these novels to the daughter's status as a heroine of sensibility. The ability to empathize with what a father or other family member is feeling--particularly pain or sorrow--is presented as a source of anguish for daughters and also as a motivation to shield the loved parent from difficult knowledge. The influence of the culture of sensibility is also represented in these books by the centrality of nonverbal communication. The daughters may try to hide their secrets, but the father or other questioners can read the bodily signs that form the language of sensibility: blushes or sudden paleness, trembling, sighing, tears, fainting. Sometimes the fathers misunderstand the factual import of these manifestations--they don't get the reasons right--but the feelings are transmitted nevertheless. And, as noted above, the daughters are highly attuned to what their fathers--or sisters or mothers--are feeling, and act (with the notable exception of Marianne Dashwood) to minimize unnecessary suffering of their guardians or siblings.

Both Sense and Sensibility and Self-Control take on in a direct way the culture of sensibility and the liabilities it poses for women. The novels have in common, despite their vast differences in tone and style, a critique of the culture of sensibility, in particular its consequences for women. At the same time, the authors make it clear that sensibility in moderation is a socially useful and humane quality. Mansfield Park, published three years later, is less preoccupied with the various terminologies and qualifications associated with the eighteenth-century concept of sensibility. Nevertheless, it is imbued with the culture of sensibility, and in its own way, is also engaged in questioning its value. In Mansfield Park, as in Self-Control and Sense and Sensibility, the characters scrutinize each other's faces and bodies for emotional truths. The transmission of feeling

without words and the trope of contagion of emotion play important roles in all three novels.

Self-Control

At a crucial moment in Self-Control, Laura, the heroine, wonders whether she should confide in her father some partial details of her relationship with the man he wants her to marry, Colonel Hargrave. She reconsiders, however, after recalling that she has sworn to herself never to reveal to her father that Hargrave had initially approached her with the insulting proposal that she be not his wife but his mistress. As much as she would like her father's counsel about how to judge Hargrave's subsequent proposals of marriage, Laura decides not to broach the topic, because "she was conscious that, if she entered on the subject at all, her father's tenderness, or his authority, might unlock every secret of her breast" (61).¹

Laura is afraid of both her father's tenderness and his authority to command her confidence. It seems appropriate and telling that she names these aspects of her father's relation to her in the same breath. As in so many of the novels I have surveyed in this dissertation, paternal tenderness toward a daughter becomes a kind of weapon, a form of authority almost more difficult to resist than a command. Self-Control goes farther than the novels I have looked at earlier in its depiction of the extreme emotional connection between this father and daughter (who are, unlike some of the other pairs I have considered, truly related by blood) as well as of their day-to-day domestic intimacy. Laura's relationship with her father, the painful schism that opens between them because she feels she must not confide in him about Hargrave, and her attempts to support him

emotionally and financially despite his sometimes abusive treatment of her, are the main focus of the first half of the book. The difficulties that Laura has in standing up to her father (who, not knowing the truth of Hargrave's character, becomes increasingly insistent that she marry him) are compounded by the sensibility that makes her susceptible to her father's suffering. Sensibility--and the contagion of feeling it engenders--thus features strongly in this daughter's entanglement with her father and is a major theme of the novel.

When Jane Austen did get to read Brunton's novel, she gave it dubious praise:

I am looking over *Self Control* again, & my opinion is confirmed of its' being an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, everyday thing she ever does.

(Jane Austen's Letters 234)

Austen was understandably (and wittily) critical of the melodramatic aspects of Brunton's novel, aspects which seem pronounced and glaring when one compares them with Austen's immeasurably more restrained and subtle touch. (Laura's "passage down the American River," accomplished by lashing herself into a stolen Indian canoe and tumbling over a waterfall, is part of her desperate escape from her would-be seducer, who has kidnapped her and had her transported to Canada on the eve of her wedding.) I would maintain, however, that the disjunction between the sentimental devices and realistic moments in the plot of Self-Control can be usefully read as evidence of Brunton's struggle to move beyond the conventions of the sentimental novel and also to present in a complex way the effects of the culture of sensibility. As Barbara Benedict

¹ All quotations from Self-Control are from the 1986 Pandora Press edition.

points out, even Austen makes use to some extent of the devices and conventions of the sentimental novels that Sense and Sensibility satirizes, in, for example, the affecting scenes of Marianne on her deathbed and her subsequent recovery. Benedict notes of Austen's novel, "Sentimental scenes appear within a discourse criticizing sentimental excess; a detached observation distinguishes a right view, yet sensation also allows a kind of truth" (196).

Brunton's novel opens in the little village of Glenalbert in the Scottish highlands, where Laura lives with her father, a half-pay officer in the Scottish army. Laura's mother, described as a vain and self-absorbed woman who was emotionally and physically abusive toward Laura, has just died after a long illness. Despite her mother's intermittent unkindness, which had encompassed "blows, disgraces, and deprivations," Laura grieves for her: "Tears filled her eyes as, passing over long intervals of unkindness, she recollected some casual proof of maternal love" (6). In this despondent state, during a "solitary ramble" (one of the distinguishing occupations of heroines of sensibility), Laura encounters Colonel Hargrave, the handsome officer who has been courting her and with whom she has allowed herself to fall in love. Hargrave, reluctant to propose marriage because Laura is not of noble birth, gets her to confess her feelings for him, and then shocks her with his immoral proposal that she live with him as his mistress.

Hargrave's proposal, which fills Laura with revulsion, opens up a rift between her and her adored father. That night, for the first time in her life, she goes to sleep without her father's blessing, because she is too upset to see him. This forgoing of the paternal blessing marks for the readers way in which Laura feels tainted by Hargrave's proposal,²

² Dale Spender notes how Brunton's account of this dynamic--the woman blames herself for improper or aggressive advances from a man and keeps them secret from those who would support or defend her--

although her ostensible reason for keeping Hargrave's insult a secret from her father is that she fears that her father will be tempted to avenge her by fighting Hargrave and thus face harm or death, or, in an almost more dreaded outcome for the pious Laura, will "become for her sake a murderer" (11). Laura's decision to keep Hargrave's behavior a secret drives the plot forward. The gulf between father and daughter deepens as their economic circumstances decline and as Captain Montreville, convinced that Laura cares for Hargrave and unable to fathom her resistance to his suit, pressures her repeatedly to accept him if only so she won't be alone and penniless in the future.

Most of the action of the novel takes place in London, where father and daughter remove shortly after the opening so that Captain Montreville can try to resolve problems related to an annuity he has purchased for Laura. Laura's motivation in accompanying her father is to make her own contribution to the family's financial stability by trying to sell her paintings and sketches in London. Brunton clearly wants to present as a model a heroine who is resourceful and not afraid to defy the convention that a woman of genteel birth must not enter the marketplace. This is a quality that will appeal to the worthy suitor who eventually emerges to take Hargrave's place, Montague DeCourcy. Upon learning that the beautiful woman he had encountered going into a print shop is the painter of the portrait in the window, he marvels to himself:

So, . . . this lovely creature's genius is equal to her beauty, and her worth perhaps surpasses both; for she has the courage to rise superior to the silly customs of the world, and can dare to be useful to herself and to others. (60)

resonates with current thinking about women who are victims of sexual assault or harassment: "Confronted with attempted seduction, Laura experiences a range of feelings and doubts that are not unknown today. Should she tell her father who would be shocked by such behaviour in his "friend"? Would she be believed? Perhaps it was all her fault anyway?" (330).

Despite Laura's efforts, however, poverty overtakes her and her father in London. Her father's attempts to resolve the problem of the annuity are unsuccessful, and he becomes depressed and ill. Hargrave, meanwhile, has followed Laura to London and resumes his importunings that she consider his proposal of marriage. Laura, who had stipulated that two years must go by before she would reconsider, two years in which Hargrave was supposed to have shown evidence of reformed behavior and attitudes, rebuffs him. Her father dies, and Laura, all but penniless, finds shelter with her wealthy aunt, Lady Pelham.

Shortly after moving in with her aunt, Laura overhears a casual mention by one of her aunt's visitors of a recent scandal involving Hargrave and a married woman. This information, which signals to Laura that Hargrave is truly depraved, precipitates a lingering and devastating illness, after which she must, like Austen's Marianne Dashwood at a similar juncture, work to rid herself of her passionate feelings for the unworthy and betraying lover. She is successful in doing so, but (also like Marianne) is convinced that her destiny, now that her great passion has been disappointed, is to live as a single woman. After a time, however, she comes to return the feelings of Montague DeCourcy, an old friend of her father's, and agrees to marry him.

At that point, Laura is carried off by the desperate Hargrave's minions and forced to cross the Atlantic to Canada, where she is held prisoner in a cabin in the wilderness by two English "attendants" and two Native Americans. Laura awaits Hargrave's coming, announced in a letter, and, despairing, hopes she will die before his arrival. Her miraculous escape occurs when, left alone for a moment, she finds footprints that lead to the shore and to a tiny canoe. Her tumble down the river in the canoe accomplished, she

awakens in the care of a Canadian family, who help her get home to Scotland, where she takes refuge with her childhood friend Mrs. Douglas. A suicide note from Hargrave, which swears to Laura's innocence, arrives at the same time as the persistent DeCourcy, and thus the heroine finds herself free to marry the man she loves.

The foregoing plot description will give readers an idea why Jane Austen was so dismissive of Brunton's novel. It is true that Laura is a heroine who is for the most part too virtuous and resourceful to be believable, and that the plot twists, especially in the second half, can tax the patience of a reader who looks for probability in a novel. At times, Brunton herself seems to want to tone down her endorsement of Laura's virtue. She declared in a letter "if ever I undertake another lady, I will manage her in a very different manner" (qtd. in Smith 42), and she has Laura's admirer DeCourcy, surely a character whose pronouncements can be trusted, refer to a disquisition by Laura as "one of the stalest pieces of morality" he had ever heard her utter (279). Brunton also attempts a kind of irony about Laura's status as a paragon. She has the narrator note after Laura has a particular setback that she "began, like a true heroine, to vent her disappointment in tears" (69), implying, of course, that Laura is meant to be understood as an everyday person rather than an inapproachable heroine.

Mary Brunton does not have Jane Austen's skills as a novelist, and the narrator's ironic stance is erratically maintained at best. Imperfect as Self-Control may be, however, it is intriguing for the way in which it deals with the problems of sensibility and contagion of emotion, and also for the particular emotional dynamic it presents between father and daughter. If little else in the novel is realistic, the emotional texture of Laura and her father's relationship feels convincing, at least to this reader. Further, the author

introduces realistic and telling domestic details of their life together, as in the following description of one of their first evenings together in their new temporary quarters in London:

When two people of very different ages meet tête à tête in a room, where they are not thoroughly domesticated, -- where there are no books, no musical instruments, nor even that grand bond of sociality, a fire, -- it requires no common invention and vivacity to pass an evening with tolerable cheerfulness. (54)

The passage quoted here then goes on to laud Laura for her ability to be a cheerful companion to her father, but I find it most striking for its acknowledgment of how a father and daughter can find being with each other socially awkward. Not just the difference in their ages is at play here but surely the differences in the ways father and daughter have been socialized to think, talk, behave. A depiction of a father and son of this period spending an evening together would most likely not feature this social awkwardness; there would perhaps be conversation about hunting or business or other male-identified pursuits. In presenting the more mundane aspects of Laura and her father's relationship--their struggle to get through an evening together--Brunton is providing an alternative to the sentimentalized paradigm of the father-daughter relationship that is prevalent in much eighteenth-century literature. All these two have in common, as this passage makes clear, is family feeling, which, strong though it may be, does not necessarily make conversation flow.

Laura's eagerness to please her father and the difficulties she has in withstanding his questions remind us of daughters in other women's novels of the period. Brunton, however, introduces a new perspective in that Laura is an overtly and devoutly Christian

heroine. Her convictions about right and wrong, derived from her faith, help her to assert herself against her father's wishes, even when those wishes are articulated practically from his deathbed. While critics tend to regard Brunton as a profoundly conservative novelist, and the novel's emphasis on female virtue--i.e, chastity--rewarded would tend to confirm that viewpoint, the novel can also be considered forward-looking in its portrayal of a very young woman who not only, like Fenwick's Sibella, dares to think but dares to insist on her convictions in the face of both her father's tenderness and his authority. Further, if Laura is meant to be a model, with her striving for self-control and for strength of spirit, the author shows us the suffering that such striving can entail.

As noted earlier, Laura's unwillingness to disclose Hargrave's offense puts her in the difficult position of having secrets from her father. Her avoidance of her father's presence after her encounter with Hargrave in the opening pages of the book draws a complaining comment from him the next day. Captain Montreville reacts disapprovingly to his daughter's seeming good spirits as, seeking to avoid his suspicion that anything might be wrong, she enters the parlor with an "overacted gaiety": " 'I scarcely expected,' said he, 'to see you so very animated, after being so ill as to go to rest last night, for the first time in your life, without your father's blessing' " (12). As is the case with other daughters in the novels I have considered, Laura's behavior, her looks, her manner, are under continual scrutiny by a father or father figure. Her private thoughts, too, are considered fair game: upon learning that Laura has refused Hargrave's offer of marriage, her father is "thunderstruck" and demands to know her reasons: " 'I think I have a right to hear your objections, for I am entirely at a loss to guess them. I don't indeed know a

fault Hargrave has, except perhaps for a few gallantries; which most girls of your age think a very pardonable error.' ” (19)

Captain Montreville, although not satisfied with his daughter's “objections,” at first refrains from pressuring her further, assuring her that “though her happiness was his dearest concern, he never meant to interfere with her judgment of the means by which it was to be promoted” (19). This is before their material situation deteriorates, however. When Hargrave appears in London and presses Laura again to marry him, Captain Montreville is enfeebled and sick, and father and daughter are in dire need. Montreville now is so worried about Laura's future that he practically browbeats her into accepting Hargrave. When she uses the term “vile” to describe Hargrave, Montreville, annoyed, tells her that her “notions are too rigid” and accuses her of being undutiful in using “such expressions” (175) in regard to a match approved by her father. In the remarkable exchange that follows, Laura gets her father to admit the existence of the double standard:

“Tell me then, were Colonel Hargrave your son, and were I what I cannot name, could any passion excuse, any circumstances induce you to sanction the connexion for which you now plead?”

“My dear love,” said Montreville, “the cases are widely different. The world's opinion affixes just disgrace to the vices of your sex, which in ours it views with more indulgent eyes.” (176)

This exchange is a rather startling vindication of Laura's “rigid” notions. While Montreville has no way of knowing what Hargrave has done to offend his daughter, and thinks she is merely objecting to Hargrave's reputation as a “man of gallantry,” the

narrative is clearly suggesting to readers that a father who demands his daughter's confidence has the responsibility to take his daughter at her word. As far as Laura is concerned, by pressuring her to marry Hargrave, a match she considers a "union with vileness," Montreville is in effect asking her to become "what [she] cannot name." The discussion is all the more wrenching for her because she is still in love with Hargrave and would like nothing better than to grant her father's request. But her misgivings are strong, and she insists to her father that she needs more time to be sure that Hargrave has forsaken his destructive path. The pitch of their exchange becomes increasingly emotional, as Montreville continues to plead and argue with his daughter, calling her at one point an "ungrateful child." Laura at last runs from the room to escape the unbearable pressure to which her father is subjecting her. Her long-standing decision to keep silent about Hargrave's overtures toward her, motivated by the desire to protect her father, thus ends with her father's abusing her principles and seeking to override her will with blatant emotional manipulation.

Captain Montreville's outright pleading with and haranguing of his daughter about Hargrave obviously cause her great distress. Perhaps even more difficult for Laura to withstand than her father's outbursts, however, is the effect of his melancholia and hypochondria, which escalate as their stay in London drags on. Brunton's novel is very much concerned with the contagious quality of negative emotions, and this is nowhere more evident than in the dynamic between Laura and her father.

Repeatedly the novel presents a tableau of Laura and her father in a room together with Laura attempting to resist both her own discouragement over their situation and the dampening effects of her father's mood.

[S]he started up from her melancholy posture--bathed her eyes--placed the tea equipage--ordered the first fire of the season to displace the faded fennel in the chimney--arranged the apartment in the nicest order--and had just given to everything the greatest possible appearance of comfort, when her father arrived. She had need, however, of all her firmness, and of all the elation of conscious self-control, to resist the contagious depression of countenance and manner with which Captain Montreville accosted her. (69)

As this passage makes clear, the “self-control” that is featured in the novel’s title does not refer only to the need for a young woman to subject her amorous desires to restraint or scrutiny. Self-control is also necessary in order not to be overcome by despondency or despair, and, in the common phrase of the day, to “exert” oneself against the effects of these feelings. The aggressive quality of Captain Montreville’s bearing--“his manner and countenance”-- towards his daughter is made clear by the author’s use of the term “accost” here. Among the other meanings “accost” might have carried in 1811, according to the OED, is “to assail.” The fact that the author chooses to refer at this moment to Laura’s father by his military title “Captain” Montreville adds to the sense of oppressive power associated with his gloomy bearing.

Laura has ample opportunities to practice her powers of exertion as her father becomes more and more enfeebled by “real debility and fancied disease” (96). Captain Montreville “allow[s] his spirits to grow daily more depressed,” to the point where he is fast becoming a “melancholy hypochondriac.” Laura, who is at this point awaiting the still-beloved Hargrave and is puzzled and hurt by his failure to appear, also becomes depressed.

Her father's dejection increased her own, and her ill-disguised depression had a similar effect on him. While, however, Captain Montreville gave way without effort to his feelings, the more vigorous mind of Laura struggled to suppress the sorrow which she saw was contagious. . . . She read to him, sung to him, exerted all her conversation talent to entertain him; and often, when all was in vain, when he would answer her by forced smiles, languid gestures, or heavy sighs, she would turn aside to wipe the tears from her eyes, then smile, and attempt her task again. (96)

The intense communicability of mood between Laura and her father is a function of the sympathy between them, which is, in turn, a marker of sensibility. Clearly the author does not mean to censure her heroine for her sensibility, since it leads to moral action on her part. Laura acts on her sympathetic feelings, not just toward her father but toward the destitute families in her district, whom she helps with gifts of money, food, and clothing, as well as her time. As the narrator explains, "In fancy she had substituted herself in the place of these victims of want; felt by sympathy their varieties of wretchedness; and she justly considered poverty among the heaviest of human calamities" (27). The attempt to substitute oneself "in fancy" in the place of another, to imagine vividly another person's situation and feelings, is the essence of sensibility's social aspect. Brunton does censure Laura's father, however, for his failure to exert any control over his own despondent feelings; in fact, the narrator describes him as having a "sickly sensibility" (96). Laura's behavior and her father's, then, represent contrasting responses to the problem of sensibility, with Laura's clearly being the more desirable one.

A distinguishing aspect of eighteenth-century literature's depiction of sensibility is that feelings--especially heightened feelings--express themselves through gestures of the body or inarticulate utterances rather than words. Thus, Captain Montreville's melancholia is expressed in "forced smiles, languid gestures, or heavy sighs." It is significant that Laura's attempts to bring her and her father out of their shared depression take the form of speech of one sort or another: reading, conversation, singing counter his nonverbal manifestations of suffering. Her insistence on language is part of the novel's critique of the cult of sensibility. Similarly, in Sense and Sensibility, as George Haggerty points out, a sign of Marianne's recovery from "self-consuming madness" ("Sacrifice of Privacy" 229) is that she speaks calmly and coherently to Elinor of her newly acquired self-knowledge after her illness. Haggerty notes, further, that Marianne "begins to emerge from instability when she can order her linguistic structures so as to include a sense of a world beyond her private vision" ("Sacrifice of Privacy" 229). Marianne and Laura survive, unlike Brunton's Captain Montreville, who cannot move beyond his "private vision" and selfishly indulges his sickly sensibility.

As the novel makes clear, various types of emotions, not just negative ones, are easily transmitted between persons attuned to each other. The first mention of any feeling's being "contagious" occurs early in the novel in reference to more cheerful emotions. Laura is with her father and her childhood mentor Mrs. Douglas, and she labors to keep the party in good spirits in the face of bad news about her father's finances:

She was so successful, that she was that evening the life of the little friendly circle. She talked, sang, and recited--she exerted all the wit and vivacity of which

she was mistress--she employed powers of humour which she herself had scarcely been conscious of possessing. Her gaiety soon became contagious. (27-28)

If Laura is successful in spreading cheerful feelings among her companions, she does so at a cost to herself. Once she is alone, “her exhausted spirits found relief in tears. She felt, that long to continue her exertion would be impossible; and in spite of reason, which told of the danger of solitude, anticipated, with pleasure, the moment when total seclusion should leave her free to undisguised wretchedness” (28). This is a telling moment in the narrative, one that reflects the author’s divided attitude toward her heroine’s sensibility. On the one hand, Laura’s ability and willingness to “exert” herself so that those she cares about don’t suffer unnecessarily is endorsed by the narrator as evidence of a “vigorous mind” and a sensibility in the service of humane action. What the passage quoted here shows, however, is the emotional cost to Laura of such efforts. Laura’s attempts to cheer her father and others whom she cares for, while guarding the reasons for her own secret depression, exhaust her and leave her with little emotional fortitude to keep her own spirits up. (This is another of the author’s insights that seems surprisingly modern: Laura’s emotional depletion after her “forced gaiety” is related to what psychiatrists today refer to as “conservation of mood.”)³

Brunton thus presents a complex picture of the problems of sensibility. Laura’s sensibility is what makes her a decent and humane person, and a heroine worthy of emulation, but it also makes her vulnerable to a number of dangers, among them the kind

³ See Kramer, 252, 262, 311. The phrase “conservation of mood,” as Kramer notes, was coined by Mark Aranow in an essay published in *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1992. It refers to the cycle of mood changes that people experience with alcohol or various street drugs (as opposed to antidepressants like Prozac)--that is, the inevitable “crash” that follows the euphoria. While Laura’s mood changes of course are not related to pharmacological substances, “conservation of mood” seems an oddly accurate description of her exuberance and subsequent collapse.

of emotional depletion noted above but also the threat of seduction embodied in the “fine eyes” and “imploring voice” of Colonel Hargrave.

For Laura, having an object to “love and cherish . . . was . . . a real necessity of nature.” Further, “no earthly pleasure could bring such joy to Laura’s heart, as the assurance, however oft repeated, that she was beloved” (172).⁴ Her habits of caution and self-discipline are thus no match for the charming Hargrave, “the first handsome man of fashion she had ever known, [and] the first who had ever poured into her ear the soothing voice of love” (43). Laura becomes enamored of Hargrave, investing in him qualities that he does not possess, qualities that derive from her reading and her fantasies. As the narrator points out,

it was not Hargrave whom Laura loved; for the being on whom she doated had no resemblance to him, but in externals. It was a creature of her own imagination, pure as her own heart, yet impassioned as the wildest dreams of fiction,—intensely susceptible of pleasure, and keenly alive to pain, yet ever ready to sacrifice the one and to despise the other. (6)

Laura’s predicament with regard to Hargrave reminds us, of course, of Austen’s Marianne and her ill-fated passion for Willoughby. Marianne is, like Laura, a heroine of sensibility. Where Marianne, however, has been encouraged by her mother, who is of similar temperament, to indulge her sensibility, Laura has been taught (not by her neglectful mother, one assumes, but by her mentor Mrs. Douglas and her father) to regard her own sensibility as “a weakness to be subdued, not as an ornament to be gloried in.”

⁴ Laura’s eagerness for love is no doubt connected to her relationship with a neglectful and unkind mother. Brunton is quite matter-of-fact in referring to the mother’s treatment of Laura. For example, Laura’s friend Mrs. Douglas suspects that something is bothering Laura besides grief over her mother’s death: “Such

Indeed, as the narrator points out, Laura is “little conversant even with the name of this quality” (212). The fact that Laura barely knows the name of the quality she possesses so amply suggests once again the author’s ambivalence toward the culture of sensibility. It is as if, by denying her heroine the knowledge of the common term for her ability to feel for others and her own heightened responsiveness, she wants to erase the term from the language, surely a curious move in a novel--a verbal form--that is preoccupied with that very term.

Sense and Sensibility

In the opening pages of Sense and Sensibility, the narrator informs us, in one of those exquisitely casual, almost throwaway lines in which important bits of information are often half-hidden in Jane Austen, that John Dashwood, the half-brother of the novel’s two heroines, “had not the strong feelings of the rest of the family.” The rest of the family, as it happens, is now all women: John’s stepmother, Mrs. Dashwood, and her three daughters, his half-sisters Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret. We are given to understand that Mr. Henry Dashwood, the father of John by a previous marriage and also of the three sisters, was unlike his son in that he did have strong feelings, but he has recently died. Henry Dashwood’s feelings, moreover, were of no use in assuring that his wife and daughters would not suffer financially after his death. Norland, the house and estate in which Henry Dashwood and his wife and daughters have always lived, must go to his son, John Dashwood, and his son’s family--a wife and small boy--upon Henry’s death, according to the will of the “old Gentleman”--Henry’s uncle--who had died just a

depression Mrs. Douglas could not attribute to the loss of a mother, whose treatment furnished more occasions of patience than gratitude” (23).

year earlier. We learn of John Dashwood's relative lack of strong feelings when his father is dying and pleads with him to make sure his stepmother and sisters are not left without means:

His son was sent for, as soon as his danger was known, and to him Mr. Dashwood recommended, with all the strength and urgency which illness could command, the interest of his mother-in-law [i.e., stepmother] and sisters.

Mr. John Dashwood had not the strong feelings of the rest of the family; but he was affected by a recommendation of such a nature at such a time, and he promised to do everything in his power to make them comfortable. (4).

John Dashwood's habitual temperament ("rather cold-hearted" and "rather selfish"), aided by the strong influence of his even more selfish and cold-hearted wife, reasserts itself before long, and the present of a thousand pounds to each of his sisters, which he at first envisions as the proper response to his father's wishes, devolves into the vague resolution to help his stepmother and sisters move to a new house when they eventually find one that suits them. As it turns out, the place they choose, Barton Cottage in Devonshire, is so distant from Norland that even this one service he had resolved on becomes impossible.

The narrator's description of John Dashwood as deficient in emotional capacity in comparison to the rest of his family sets the stage for the novel's depiction of the world of women and strong feelings in Devonshire. As much as it is anything, Sense and Sensibility is a novel about the transmission of emotion within families. Unlike the other novels I have considered so far, however, where the drama of emotion is between fathers and daughters, there is no patriarch here, only a mother and daughters.

One of the questions in the forefront of Sense and Sensibility has to do with how mothers educate their daughters, and, particularly, how they educate their daughters' emotions. Marianne Dashwood, who in the course of the novel is almost destroyed by her adherence to an ideal of sensibility, is very much a product of her mother's education and example. We are told early on that Marianne is

eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent. (8)

Marianne's "excess of sensibility"--her propensity to indulge and revel in her extreme emotions--is "valued and cherished by her mother." In the aftermath of Henry Dashwood's death, mother and daughter cooperate to keep each other's grief at a high pitch:

They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief which overpowered them at first, was voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in the future. (6)

Unlike Laura Montreville in Brunton's novel, who struggles to resist the contagion of her father's depression, Marianne, is, to say the least, unresistant, and in fact welcomes the reinforcement from her mother of her own negative emotions. The immediate consequence of Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood's self-indulgence is that they are unable to perform the minimal social obligations of greeting and attending to John Dashwood and his wife when they arrive at Norland. These obligations--which are not negligible considering that Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters are for the moment dependent on the

good will of these intruders--are left to Elinor, the eldest sister, who, although she has strong feelings and is also much affected by her father's death, is, in contrast to her mother and sister, able to "govern" her feelings.

More ominously, Marianne's unbridled indulgence of her grief at the loss of her father, and her mother's collusion in that indulgence, foreshadow exactly the situation Marianne will find herself in when she falls in love with and later is betrayed by Willoughby, the charming stranger who briefly becomes part of their circle in Devonshire. When Willoughby suddenly leaves Devonshire, after having given every indication of being in love with Marianne; when in London he later denies any attachment to her and coldly rejects her to marry another woman; when it turns out that he is a "libertine" who has seduced and abandoned a young girl, Marianne suffers deeply. Further, she insists on her suffering. When Elinor, alarmed by Marianne's wild grief upon receiving Willoughby's callous letter rejecting her, begs her to "exert" herself for the sake of those who love her, Marianne cries out, "I cannot, I cannot[!] . . . leave me, leave me if I distress you; leave me, hate me, forget me! But do not torture me so." (148)

Marianne's insistence on indulging and prolonging her anguish at Willoughby's betrayal leads to her near-fatal illness at Cleveland, the country estate where the Dashwood sisters stop on their way home from London. Marianne feels a kind of pleasurable pain at being only thirty miles away from Combe Magna, Willoughby's estate. Walking alone on the grounds at Cleveland, she experiences a moment of "precious, of invaluable misery," when she fancies that she can see Combe Magna in the distance, and "rejoice[s] in tears of agony to be at Cleveland." Further, "she resolve[s] to spend almost every hour of every day . . . in the indulgence of such solitary rambles"

(243). When Marianne's solitary rambles take her over ground that is damp from a recent rainstorm, she contracts a severe cold that develops into the fever that almost kills her. Later, when the sisters are finally home, and Marianne is recovering and repentant, she acknowledges to Elinor a new and sober consciousness of her own behavior, gained upon reflection while still upon her sickbed:

“I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. My illness, I well know, had been entirely brought on by myself, by such negligence of my own health as I had felt even at the time to be wrong.” (277-278)

Thus, by Marianne's own admission, her indulgence of her own feelings almost kills her.

If Marianne's “extreme youth,” as Elinor terms it (she is 17), can somewhat explain and excuse her recklessness, clearly Mrs. Dashwood's failure to exert a check on her daughter's behavior is a target of the author's censure. The depiction of the consequences of mother and daughter's belief in not “governing” their feelings is part of the author's critique of the cult of sensibility, one that she shares with Mary Brunton. But Austen is not without sympathy for this mother who participates so fully in her daughter's hopes. Further, in depicting Mrs. Dashwood's attitude toward her daughter, especially her reluctance to question her about intimate details of her life, Austen presents an alternative preferable to the intrusive and oppressive style of the fictional fathers who populate the other novels discussed here.

In the all-female Dashwood family, there is no patriarch to interrogate the daughter, to demand an account of her heart. When Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor are thrown into confusion about the state of Willoughby and Marianne's relationship after

Willoughby's abrupt departure, Elinor suggests that Mrs. Dashwood ask Marianne directly if they are engaged: "From you, her mother, and so kind, so indulgent a mother, the question could no give offence. . . . She used to be all unreserve, and to you more especially." Mrs. Dashwood's response is unequivocal:

"I would not ask such a question for the world. Supposing it possible that they are not engaged, what distress would not such an enquiry inflict! At any rate it would be most ungenerous. I should never deserve her confidence again, after forcing from her a confession of what is meant at present to be unacknowledged to any one. . . . I would not attempt to force the confidence of any one; of a child much less; because a sense of duty would prevent the denial which her wishes might direct."

(74)

Mrs. Dashwood's refusal to force her daughter's confidence forms a remarkable contrast to the position taken by the fathers or father figures in the novels I have looked at in this study. Burney's Mr. Villars and Mr. Tyrold, Edgeworth's Clarence Hervey, Inchbald's Mr. Dorriforth, Fenwick's Mr. Valmont, and Brunton's Captain Montreville--all do not scruple to use various kinds of psychological tactics, from cajoling to threatening, to elicit the secrets of their young wards' hearts. Mrs. Dashwood's failure to make inquiries about her daughter's relationship with Willoughby is in one sense irresponsible, but the novel makes clear that, in any case, no parental intervention could have prevented Marianne from going after what she wanted. Mrs. Dashwood in fact has a point: prying into Marianne's affairs might very well have turned her daughter against her. Again, this is a kind of worry--of alienating the daughter--that does not seem of consequence to the various father figures noted above. In the father-daughter scenarios I

have described in these other novels, the fathers claim ownership of the daughter's most private thoughts. The daughters are asked to reveal their thoughts in the name of filial duty; i.e., confiding in the father is constructed as a performance of love. In the all-woman Dashwood family, by contrast, Mrs. Dashwood performs her love for her daughter by acknowledging her daughter's privacy.

Issues of confidence--when to tell a secret and when to protect it--are crucial in Sense and Sensibility. The novel presents a range of possible modes of confiding or withholding information within the family and outside it, and each of these scenarios has complex consequences and meanings that reflect on the affective relations between individuals. If Mrs. Dashwood's attitude, her extreme delicacy about eliciting information from Marianne, registers one kind of love, concern, and respect for her daughter, the actions of Lucy Steele toward Elinor represent the opposite end of the spectrum: a contempt and animosity acted out in the forcing of her unwanted confidence on Elinor, whom she knows to be her rival for the affections of Edward Ferrars. Lucy tells Elinor the story of her secret engagement to Edward, knowingly inflicting pain. Further, because Elinor's code of honorable behavior will not let her betray a secret, even one foisted on her against her will, Lucy's confidence means that Elinor cannot share her own suffering with sister or mother. Lucy's imposition of her secret seems, then, to be a model of what confiding should not be; forcing a confidence on Elinor is as coercive a gesture as the demands of the father figures in the other novels for their daughters' secrets, and it is the opposite of Mrs. Dashwood's delicacy toward Marianne.

Exchanges of confidence are a mark or test of love between the two sisters whose relationship, with all its "passion and perturbation," forms "at the very least, the

backbone of this powerful novel” (Sedgwick 823). In London, Elinor and Marianne both rebuke each other for keeping secrets. Marianne, helpless to control her anxiety as she awaits word from Willoughby, compulsively checks the mail even after the servant has told her the letter that just arrived is not for her. The text makes clear that Elinor is equally under the sway of her own compulsion--getting Marianne to confide in her.

“You are expecting a letter then?” said Elinor, unable to be longer silent.

“Yes; a little--not much.”

After a short pause, “You have no confidence in me, Marianne.”

“Nay, Elinor, this reproach from you--you who have confidence in no one!”

“Me”! returned Elinor in some confusion; “indeed, Marianne, I have nothing to tell.”

“Nor I,” answered Marianne with energy, “our situations then are alike. We have neither of us any thing to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing.”

Elinor, distressed by this charge of reserve in herself, which she was not at liberty to do away, knew not how, under such circumstances, to press for greater openness in Marianne. (143)

Elinor’s ill-maintained silences, her “short pauses,” speak loudly to the reader of her struggle to contain herself, to not be intrusive and risk alienating Marianne. Elinor wants to respect her sister’s privacy, but Marianne’s obvious pain is unbearable for her. Her impulse is to help and protect Marianne, and for Elinor, remedy is always related to language. In this, she is oddly modern, almost seeming to have escaped from our own

age of psychotherapy. At a later point in the novel, following Marianne's initial storm of grief over Willoughby's betrayal, Elinor "encouraged her to talk as much as possible of what she felt." When Marianne learns the details of Willoughby's past, she becomes deeply downcast again, and once again Elinor watches her sister anxiously.

[Marianne] felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart; his seduction and desertion of Miss Williams, the misery of that poor girl, and the doubt of what his designs might once have been on herself, preyed altogether so much on her spirits, that she could not bring herself to speak of what she felt even to Elinor; and brooding over her sorrows in silence, gave more pain to her sister than could have been communicated by the most open and frequent confession of them. (179)

Marianne's silent pain, then, is more unsettling to Elinor than a spoken account of it would have been. The reasons for this perhaps seem obvious in our post-Freudian era: Elinor wants Marianne to have the relief of speaking, of sharing her feelings, and, further, if Marianne talks, Elinor can respond, can perhaps try to help or comfort her with her own words or some type of action. In the context of the novel, Elinor's desire for Marianne's words is of a piece with the novel's emphasis on confiding as a measure of trust or love between family members and especially between the two sisters.

Further, to place Sense and Sensibility in the context of the eighteenth-century debate over sensibility, Austen wants to insist through Elinor on the importance of using language to convey information. Language--verbal evidence--is set up as the alternative to the reliance on unspoken transmission of emotion and the evidence of bodily signs. This opposition is dramatized perfectly in the discussion between Elinor and Mrs.

Dashwood over the status of Marianne's and Willoughby's connection after Willoughby leaves Devonshire. Lacking an articulation--a confession--from Marianne of her situation, Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor try to piece together the truth from other kinds of evidence. Mrs. Dashwood declares herself "perfectly satisfied" of the couple's affection and their engagement, while Elinor doubts the latter, pointing out that "not a syllable has been said" to her mother by either Marianne or Willoughby on the topic of an engagement. Her mother's response--"I have not wanted syllables where actions have spoken so plainly"--illustrates her allegiance to the cult of sensibility; she relies on the evidence not of words but of physical signs of devotion between her daughter and Willoughby. Further, as the narrator tells us, Mrs. Dashwood is under the spell of the couple's joy. "She entered into all their feelings with a warmth which left her no inclination for checking this excessive display of them" (48). Marianne's intense feelings of pleasure in the connection to Willoughby are contagious; mother and daughter share and reinforce each other's emotions here just as they did with their grief over the death of Henry Dashwood.

Mrs. Dashwood believes in Marianne and Willoughby's engagement not only because of the way the two behave toward each other but because of what she deems to have been Willoughby's nonspoken communication to all of them. She declares to Elinor,

Has not his behaviour to Marianne and to all of us, for at least the last fortnight, declared that he loved and considered her as his future wife, and that he felt for us the attachment of the nearest relation? Have we not perfectly understood each

other? Has not my consent been daily asked by his looks, his manner, his
attentive and affectionate respect? (70)

For Elinor, however, looks and manner are not enough. The “total silence” (70) of both her sister and Willoughby on the topic of their putative engagement is an obstacle for her. With Willoughby away and a spoken declaration from him apparently not forthcoming, Elinor suggests to her mother another form of verbal evidence, that is, letter-writing. “If we find they correspond, every fear of mine will be removed.” So invested is Mrs. Dashwood in her belief in Marianne’s engagement and continued happiness with Willoughby that she retorts unkindly to her elder daughter,

A mighty concession indeed! If you were to see them at the altar, you would
suppose they were going to be married. Ungracious girl! (70)

In proposing the criterion of letter-writing, Elinor is not only reiterating her demand for the evidence of words rather than gestures or looks, but invoking the standards of propriety of the day. Under those standards, a correspondence between an unmarried young woman and an unmarried man would be considered damaging to the woman’s reputation unless the two were engaged. Elinor uses this criterion to deduce that Lucy Steele is telling the truth, unlikely as it seems, about her engagement to Edward Ferrars after she sees a note from him in Lucy’s possession: “a correspondence between them by letter, could subsist only under a positive engagement, could be authorised by nothing else” (114). Later, in London, when Elinor observes that Marianne is writing a letter, but not to their mother, “it immediately struck her that she must then be writing to Willoughby, and the conclusion which as instantly followed was, that however mysteriously they might wish to conduct the affair, they must be engaged” (135). Elinor

is mistaken in her conclusion here, since Marianne, in any circumstances less likely than Elinor to adhere to social form, is at this point well beyond caring about them in her desperation for word from Willoughby.

Elinor's conclusion that Marianne and Willoughby "must be engaged" reflects her own desperation, her desire to will away what she knows of Marianne's disregard for form. If she can believe that her sister is writing a letter sanctioned by an engagement, even a secret one, then it is possible her sister will not have to suffer. In the end, of course, Elinor's doubts about Willoughby are vindicated; while his "looks" and "manner" may have spoken of love for a fortnight or so, the lack of a verbal declaration from him portends his eventual betrayal of Marianne.

In this novel, Jane Austen makes a case for the necessity of language--rather than the unspoken communication of gestures, looks, bodily signs--as a conveyer of meaning and also a means of containing and defining feeling. What makes the novel so powerful, though, is the tension between Elinor's insistence on containment and the force of the unspoken emotions that circulate among the women. Austen manages to give full credit to the strength of these emotions--and to the emotional connection Marianne felt to Willoughby--but also to suggest that unspoken manifestations of feeling are not always to be relied on.

In "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," Eve Sedgwick analyzes the pre-dawn scene in which Elinor awakens to the sounds of Marianne's sobs and "agitation," as Marianne, "half-dressed," kneels against the window-seat in their cold unlit bedroom, alternately writing and crying. Elinor, as always, tries to elicit words from Marianne ("Marianne, may I ask"?) and offers to give words, but Marianne, who, as Elinor

correctly surmises, is “writing for the last time to Willoughby,” will not talk and begs Elinor “not to speak to her for the world.” Sedgwick points to the “same-sex tenderness, secrecy, longing, and frustration” present in the “depicted bedroom space.” She describes this scene as both a homoerotic and heteroerotic moment in the novel: “if love is vectored toward an object and Elinor’s here flies toward Marianne, Marianne’s in turn [flies] toward Willoughby.” But there is also another kind of sexuality present in this scene, Sedgwick says, and that is the autoerotic, represented in Marianne’s “terrible isolation; . . . her unstanchable emission, convulsive and intransitive; . . . and the writing activity with which it wrenchingly alternates” (823).

Sedgwick associates with Marianne the sexuality of the “masturbating girl,” a category that, Sedgwick says, has become lost to us today, subsumed in the “homo/hetero cleavage” that has come to rule notions of sexual identity. For Sedgwick, Marianne’s identity with the autoerotic is evident in her restlessness, her irritability, her delight in the “locomotor pleasures of her own body” (running, tumbling, galloping on horseback), and, further, in “the absention of Marianne’s attention from wherever she is” (828). In proposing for Marianne the identity of the masturbating girl, Sedgwick seems to want to propose for her “a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection” (821).

I find Sedgwick’s analysis suggestive but ultimately limited. Marianne’s restlessness, irritation, and absent manner can be ascribed as easily to her anxiety over Willoughby--that is, to a heteroerotic fixation--as to an identity with autoeroticism. Further, there is a contradiction in Sedgwick’s presentation of the model of the

masturbatory impulse: Marianne's "terrible" isolation in the bedroom seems at odds with the suggestion of the joyous "energies for independence, self-possession," and "rapture" that Sedgwick says may be connected to the idea of masturbation.

What Sedgwick's analysis does provide is a way of approaching the erotic texture of the emotions between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, emotions that are communicated largely without words but rather through body posture, gestures, tears, and touch. When Marianne finally receives word from Willoughby and rushes from the breakfast room with the letter, Elinor follows her to their bedroom to find Marianne

stretched on the bed, almost choaked by grief, one letter in her hand, and two or three others lying by her. Elinor drew near, but without saying a word; and seating herself on the bed, took her hand, kissed her affectionately several times, and then gave way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's. The latter, though unable to speak, seemed to feel all the tenderness of this behaviour, and after some time thus spent in joint affliction, she put all the letters into Elinor's hands; and then covering her face with her handkerchief, almost screamed with agony. (154)

Elinor is possessed by her sister's grief almost as if they were one person; although she doesn't scream, her tears "are scarcely less violent" than Marianne's. Elinor will go on to use words to reason with Marianne and cajole her to exert herself against her grief, but for this moment Elinor's emotion, like Marianne's, is expressible only through the body, through nonverbal gesture.

In another important scene, Austen presents a tableau in which emotions are communicated without words on several levels. Elinor must finally write from London to

tell Mrs. Dashwood how Willoughby has failed their expectations and how Marianne is suffering.

Elinor, with a very heavy heart, aware of the pain she was going to communicate, and perceiving by Marianne's letter [from their mother] how ill she had succeeded in laying any foundation for it, then sat down to write her mother an account of what had passed, and intreat her directions for the future; while Marianne, who came into the drawing-room on Mrs. Jennings's going away, remained fixed at the table where Elinor wrote, watching the advancement of her pen, grieving over her for the hardship of such a task, and grieving still more fondly over its effect on her mother. (172)

Marianne is "fixed" and fixated, motionless in her grief, unable to comfort herself and unable to experience anything but grief amplified threefold. Watching Elinor writing, she relives her own story in imagining Elinor's account of it. Her intensely felt connection to sister and mother--her apprehensions of the one's pain at having to relate sad news and the other's pain at receiving it--augments her own sorrow. The reader watches Marianne watching Elinor and also experiences this amplification of emotion. This device is reminiscent of one used in sentimental novels of the mid-eighteenth century, such as Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling. In the earlier novels, the emphasis was on the visual frame: the reader is affected by the spectacle of a character's emotional reaction, usually physically manifested, to a dramatic scene of suffering. Here, appropriately enough in this novel that wants to emphasize the verbal, the only spectacle is Elinor's pen moving across the page; it is the dreadful stillness of the two women, Elinor focused on writing and Marianne focused on Elinor's pen, that conveys the sadness to the reader. The detail

of Marianne's fixation on the movement of Elinor's pen is utterly true to the kind of fragmented perceptions that grief creates; to Marianne the pen, not Elinor, is communicating the news to their mother. This scene of writing also forms a complement to the bedroom scene that Sedgwick analyzes. In that scene, Elinor watched as Marianne wrote to Willoughby; here, Marianne watches while Elinor writes a letter about Willoughby. In both cases, the writing marks a crucial turn in the story, from which it will be impossible to retreat. What is perhaps most striking is the difference in Marianne's demeanor in the two scenes; in the first, she is convulsively emotional, and in the second, she is stricken and motionless, not at all displaying the restless energy that Sedgwick attributes to the "masturbating girl."

Elinor writing to their mother "an account of what has passed," aware that she is not just telling a story but communicating pain, is a figure for Jane Austen the writer. How to present the story of what has happened--and particularly how to convey the emotional import of events without manipulating or overwhelming the reader--is the issue in this novel. Critics tends to see Austen's accomplishment as one of mediating between the extremes of Elinor's adherence to form and Marianne's "speechless emotionalism" (Haggerty, "Sacrifice of Privacy" 233). Haggerty notes that in depicting the ways in which the Dashwood sisters approach each other's modes of apprehending the world, Austen "seems to be working out the claims of each for herself as a novelist" ("Sacrifice of Privacy" 233), while Barbara Benedict, similarly, sees the novel as negotiating "the conflicts between the heroicism of feeling and that of restraining feeling" (196).

Haggerty and Benedict's observations about Austen's narrative choices with regard to the problem of emotion are important. The tension between Marianne's impulse to give way completely to feeling--to a "speechless emotionalism"--and Elinor's insistence on using speech to connect to others and to contain feeling is indeed a major strand in the novel. What seems most memorable, however, in the novel's treatment of emotion is the depiction of an ultimately protective space in which, absent the patriarchal figure, strong emotions travel between women. If, as I suggested earlier, there is an implied critique of Mrs. Dashwood for her failure to perform the role of a patriarch, that is, to question Marianne about her amorous life, and also for her allegiance to the cult of sensibility, there is another side, which is that the women manage to take care of each other. Marianne is not abandoned; she is ultimately rescued from despair largely because she is loved, fiercely loved, by her mother and sister and she knows it. Brunton's Laura, by contrast, whose mother is depicted as having been a withholding and abusive parent, is never sure she is loved: "no earthly pleasure could bring such joy to Laura's heart, as the assurance, however oft repeated, that she was beloved" (172). Further, unlike many of the other novelistic daughters I have considered here, whose emotional lives are dominated by father figures whose attitudes toward their daughters or wards range from capriciously affectionate to forbiddingly remote to tyrannical, Marianne is not in fact isolated. Where Burney's Camilla lies dangerously ill in a hotel, estranged from her family, spurned by her mother, Marianne is nursed by her mother and sister when she is ill. Further, unlike Camilla, who is rebuked by her father for betraying the slightest evidence of her "preference" for Edgar, Marianne is not made to suffer shame over her much more direct actions. When Elinor discovers that Marianne has been writing to Willoughby despite

their not being engaged, she “grieve[s] silently” over the “imprudence” of the gesture but spares Marianne her censure. The absence of the reproving father figure also means that the constraint of decorum is absent; Marianne can cover her face and scream in agony in the presence of a sister as she could not, one imagines, in the presence of a father.

Mansfield Park

In the Austen novel I will take up next in this chapter, Mansfield Park (1814), Austen brings back the figure of the stern patriarch. Sir Thomas Bertram is in the line of the forbidding fathers or father figures in earlier novels, particularly those by Fenwick and Inchbald discussed in the previous chapter. Like Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood and especially like Mr. Valmont in Secrecy, he is a remote and “old-fashioned” father, preoccupied with propriety, and inspiring fear in his children, especially in his daughters and his niece. If Mrs. Dashwood’s reluctance to govern or guide her daughter’s feelings is in part responsible for the crisis over Willoughby, the Sir Thomas’s tyrannical attitude leads to worse kinds of damage among his own children. The world of strong feelings among women, Austen seems to be saying, provides a model worth emulating, whatever its dangers.

In Mansfield Park, as in both Brunton’s Self-Control and Austen’s Sense and Sensibility, a major issue is the proper education--and particularly the moral education--of daughters. Read together, the novels pose questions about who makes the better educator of daughters: a mother or a father? a stern parent or an indulgent one? The contrast between the warmly affective manner of Mrs. Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility and the remote demeanor of Sir Thomas in Mansfield Park is striking.

Although the two Austen novels were published only three years apart, Austen began writing Sense and Sensibility much earlier, perhaps as early as 1795.⁵ Mansfield Park is darker, more complex, more caught up in the politics not just of the family but of a nation at war. But family politics remains very important here: in fact, more so than in the 1811 novels discussed in this chapter, one of the pressing concerns of the Mansfield Park is defining what makes a family: Is a niece the same as a daughter? What are the obligations owed by a niece to an aunt and uncle who give her a place to live but are not always particularly kind to her? Can cousins who grow up together fall in love and marry or are they more like brother and sister?

The three novels treated in this chapter share not only a preoccupation with the moral education of daughters but with issues of feeling and sensibility, in particular, with how emotions are conveyed within families and expressed through the body. The term “sensibility” does not occur as often in Mansfield Park as in the other novels, reflecting, again, that novel’s genesis in what could almost be considered a different era than Sense and Sensibility. Like the 1811 novels by Austen and Brunton, though, Mansfield Park is very much concerned with how feelings are displayed and transmitted--and what kinds of feelings a daughter may show.

In the depiction of the relationship between Sir Thomas and his dependent niece, Fanny Price, we return to the kind of emotionally punitive dynamic between a fatherlike figure and his ward that was noticeably absent from the all-woman household of Sense

⁵ We don’t know for sure when Austen began writing Sense and Sensibility, which was in its original form an epistolary novel called Elinor and Marianne. We do know that in November 1797, shortly after finishing First Impressions (the original version of Pride and Prejudice), Austen began to convert Elinor and Marianne into a draft of Sense and Sensibility. As Chapman points out, there is evidence within the text that Austen was still working on it in 1801 (Marianne in London refers to the “two-penny post,” which was only instituted in that year). There is no further record of Austen’s work on the manuscript until we hear of her correcting proofs in 1811. (See Brownstein 34-35; Chapman xiii-xiv; Le Faye 4-5.)

and Sensibility. It is clear that Austen is holding up Mrs. Dashwood's perhaps overindulgent but consistently loving attitude toward her children as preferable to Sir Thomas's severe and abstracted manner. In the end, bolstering the force of this comparison, Sir Thomas must admit the mistakes he has made and their consequences; the father, in this story, is the one who learns.

Sir Thomas's role as a parent is called into question not just in his governance of his niece Fanny Price but of his own daughters, Maria and Julia. Ostensibly privileged in terms of their education, Maria and Julia can recite such facts as "the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns" (17). They also receive instruction in the "accomplishments" generally considered necessary for upper-class women to succeed in polite society, such as music and drawing. As Kathryn Sutherland points out, however, their education is superficial, and leaves them devoid of inner resources (xiv-xv). Further, they lack the moral grounding that comes from the ability to feel for others; their hearts, as it were, have not been educated. The narrator makes it clear early on that inconsistent and misguided supervision is the major culprit in the Bertram girls' moral emptiness. Their mother, Lady Bertram, in her indolence and self-absorption, has ceded all participation in their upbringing, leaving them to the conflicting methods of their repressive father and their overindulgent, "partial" Aunt Norris. The meddlesome Aunt Norris, full of self-importance at being in charge of her two nieces, flatters them and encourages them in their feelings of superiority over their Cinderella-like cousin Fanny Price, the poor relation who comes to live with them when they are all young girls. With such guidance from their aunt,

it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, [the Bertram daughters] should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In everything but disposition, they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him. (6)

What the Bertram girls learn from their father--to repress their spirits--is communicated by his manner. In this novel, then, not just emotions but emotional bearing is contagious, and lessons about behavior are transmitted without words. The father's forbidding demeanor prompts his daughters to feel afraid of him and to hide their natures from him. Thus, when Sir Thomas is called away to manage his estates in the West Indies, and is to be away for some time, his daughters, around 19 and 20 at this time, feel no sadness at parting with him: "Their father was no object of love to them, he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome."

The desire to escape their father's restraining presence will play a large part in Maria and Julia Bertram's self-destructive courses. Driven by greed, disappointment in love, and "self-revenge," Maria will marry a wealthy man she neither loves nor respects, consoling herself with thoughts of a large establishment and the freedom to do what she wishes. When the object of her desire, the rakish Henry Crawford, reappears in her life, she throws away her marriage to go off with him, and ends up disgraced and alone. Julia, who, like Maria, cannot bear to remain at home, makes a slightly less self-destructive

choice, eloping with a man she does not care particularly for and of whom her father does not approve. Julia, who after all has not committed a cardinal sin, is eventually forgiven; Maria will not ever be admitted to her father's home again. In the aftermath of these familial disasters, Sir Thomas blames himself:

the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, was never to be entirely done away. . . . Too late he became aware how unfavourable to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity. He saw how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs. Norris, by its reverse in himself, clearly saw that he had but increased the evil, by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, as to make their real disposition unknown to him, and sending them for all their indulgences to a person who had been able to attach them only by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise. (381)

Fanny Price has had a different kind of education than her female cousins. Her portion is not flattery and indulgence but the exact opposite, as her relatives for the most part follow Sir Thomas's directive that she not be allowed to forget, despite her living amongst the family, that she is not a Miss Bertram. Aunt Norris in particular takes this directive to heart, ordering Fanny about and scolding her at whim. But Fanny is lucky in one respect: her older cousin Edmund takes note of her early on and treats her with true kindness. Where the Miss Bertrams learn from their father's bearing toward them to

“repress their spirits” in his presence, Fanny, already possessed of a tender and affectionate nature, learns from Edmund to respond with love to those who love her.

As Fanny grows into womanhood, her childhood adoration of Edmund becomes an “attachment,” to use the language of the period. Her love for Edmund and her desire to be beloved by him as a woman is the secret that “she would rather die than own” (261), and that she manages to hide from not just him but the entire family and the various ancillary figures that enter the story. Further, the secret is only gradually revealed to the readers. The narrative voice of this novel, which can be caustic in relating the feelings of other characters (“[Maria] had Rushworth-feelings and Crawford-feelings”), is extremely delicate in representing Fanny’s consciousness, reflecting accurately Fanny’s modesty and sense of unworthiness. At first, we barely know if Fanny herself is aware of her feelings. It is only through the most gentle asides from the narrator, commenting on the beginnings of the rivalry between Fanny and Mary Crawford, that we surmise Fanny’s attachment and also her own awareness of it. For example, after relaying a discussion between Fanny and Edmund of their new acquaintance Mary Crawford’s character, the narrator reports:

Having formed [Fanny’s] mind and gained her affections, [Edmund] had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject there began to now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow. (55)

Fanny’s ability to hold onto her secret is severely tested when Sir Thomas confronts her and demands to know why she will not consent to marry Mary’s brother

Henry Crawford, who has surprised himself and everyone else by falling in love with Fanny after starting with the intention of sporting with her feelings. Sir Thomas makes one of his rare visits to Fanny's private retreat, the east room. The sound of his "heavy step" approaching brings only terror to Fanny's mind:

it was her uncle's; she knew it as well as his voice; she had trembled at it often, and began to tremble again, at the idea of his coming up to speak to her, whatever might be the subject. (257)

Sir Thomas has come to speak to Fanny about Henry's suit, sure that she must be delighted to be the object of such an agreeable and wealthy young man's attentions. When she tells her uncle she means to refuse Henry (and in fact, has already done so, despite not being taken seriously in her refusal) because she "cannot like him . . . well enough to marry him" (260), Sir Thomas is incredulous, then angry. He accuses her first of not knowing her own feelings, and then becomes suspicious that she may have already formed an attachment to someone else. The unspoken question, which Fanny understands all too well, is whether she has had the temerity to fall in love with one of her cousins, since she has "seen scarcely any one" else.

"This is beyond me," said he. "This requires explanation. Young as you are, and having seen scarcely any one, it is hardly possible that your affections----"

He paused and eyed her fixedly. He saw her lips formed into a no though the sound was inarticulate, but her face was like scarlet. That, however, in so very modest a girl might be very compatible with innocence; and chusing at least to appear satisfied, he quickly added, "No, no, I know that is quite out of the question, quite impossible. Well, there is nothing more to be said." (261)

As in similar scenes of father-daughter interrogation in other novels I have discussed in this study, here the father figure places almost unbearable pressure on the young woman in his charge to yield up the secrets of her heart. Her words are not trusted, and her face, her bearing, her body are scrutinized minutely for clues to her inclinations. Where some of the fictional fathers discussed earlier use a cajoling, tender manner, Sir Thomas treats Fanny with “cold sternness” and upbraids her with, among other things, being ungrateful to him, a charge that hurts Fanny to the core. The import for the young woman is always the same: she has no right to the privacy of her own thoughts. And, in Fanny’s case, even when she does state quite plainly her feelings (“I--I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him”), she is not believed: she is harassed, pestered, called to account. Naively, perhaps, Fanny

had hoped that to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled dislike, on her side, would have been sufficient. To her infinite grief she found it was not. (262)

The conversation with Sir Thomas is excruciating to Fanny for several reasons. First, she is, as noted above, terrified of her uncle, who has treated her for the most part with a kind of masculine brusqueness and disapproval or dismissiveness. The detail of his “heavy footsteps” approaching her sanctuary conveys the oppressive masculinity of his presence. Second, she is so shy that any attention or personal scrutiny causes her painful feelings. In this interview, her uncle is not only directing his full attention toward her but speaking to her of intimate matters--of her life as a sexual being. Her uncle’s first mention of the subject of Henry Crawford causes her “colour to [grow] deeper and deeper;” and her uncle, seeing that “she was embarrassed to a degree that made either

speaking or looking up quite impossible, turned away his own eyes” before he continues speaking. This is a remarkable moment, in which Fanny’s sense of being revealed and vulnerable communicates itself to her uncle so that even he is unable to keep up his scrutiny of her. Neither of them is able to look at the other.

In this novel, looking is a prominent means of communicating and gathering information about another person’s emotional state, and thus Fanny and Sir Thomas’s avoidance of each other’s gaze in the cast room is therefore all the more striking. When Sir Thomas returns unexpectedly from the West Indies to find his home turned upside down in the service of the theatrical event his children are mounting, an endeavor of which he was bound to disapprove, his anger and disappointment are communicated not through words but through speaking looks:

Sir Thomas’s dark brow contracted as he looked with inquiring earnestness at his daughters and Edmund, dwelling particularly on the latter, and speaking a language, a remonstrance, a reproof, which he felt at his heart. Not less acutely was it felt by Fanny, who had edged back her chair behind her aunt’s end of the sofa, and screened from notice herself, saw all that was passing before her. Such a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have expected to witness; and to feel that it was in any degree deserved, was an aggravation indeed. Sir Thomas’s look implied, “On your judgment, Edmund, I depended, what have you been about?” (155)

In this scene, Fanny reads her uncle’s looks and not only feels the import of his anger toward Edmund, but actually translates his facial expression into a complicatedly worded sentence that begins as a declarative and ends with a question. The narrative technique

Austen employs in this scene invites the reader to experience the passage of emotion from one character to the other, and indeed replicates it. First we are outside of the characters' consciousnesses, watching Sir Thomas closely as his brow darkens. Next we are privy to Edmund's feelings, inside his heart, as it were: we are told that Sir Thomas's reproach is one that "he [i.e., Edmund] felt at his heart." The slight referent ambiguity--at first it is not completely clear who is meant by "he"--gives a sense of permeable boundaries between father and son. What boundaries there are are vulnerable to the unspoken force of Sir Thomas's anger. From Edmund's consciousness we travel into Fanny's, which apprehends with grief not only Sir Thomas's anger but Edmund's probable distress and self-reproach. Fanny's grief is compounded by her sense that Edmund may have deserved this reproach, and that it is his infatuation with Mary Crawford that has affected his judgment. Like her uncle, she is disappointed in Edmund. In its layering of the various characters' perceptions of each other's emotions, and especially Fanny's perceptions, this scene is similar to the one in which Marianne sits miserably experiencing how Elinor and her mother are suffering (or, more exactly, imagining how her mother will suffer) as Elinor writes to her mother. While Marianne and Fanny are perhaps as different as two heroines could be, both of these scenes convey Austen's concern in these two novels with the transmission of unspoken emotions within families.

If Fanny's mere observation of Sir Thomas's look of anger, a look that is most specifically directed not at her but at her cousins, is enough to make her cower out of sight behind the edge of a sofa, then it is no wonder that, alone with Sir Thomas in the east room, she looks away from his gaze of interrogation and reproach. Fanny's

difficulty in this scene is similar to that of her fictional counterparts in the novels discussed elsewhere in this dissertation: Like Burney's Evelina and Camilla, like Edgeworth's Virginia or Inchbald's Miss Milner, she is ashamed to admit that she has conceived amorous feelings for a man. The attitude of Sir Thomas during his interrogation of her makes it clear that, were his niece to have "formed an attachment," shame would be the proper emotion for her to feel; indeed, he at first interprets her deep blush under his scrutiny as a sign of shame, and therefore as evidence of such an attachment, but then, outwardly at least ("chusing at least to appear satisfied"), he ascribes her color to "innocence."

Fanny is not of course innocent of the crime of having feelings for a man. The fact that that man is her cousin Edmund makes her inclination even more inadmissible to her uncle. In principle, marriage between first cousins was not taboo (Jane Austen's brother in fact married a first cousin). But for Fanny, the poor relation, to aspire toward a match with the son of her benefactor would be considered outrageous and overreaching, and she knows it. Thus Fanny's difficulties are compounded. For Fanny, as for Inchbald's Miss Milner, who is also in love with a forbidden object--her guardian himself--both the fact of being in love and the name of the object of that love are literally unutterable. Further, Fanny cannot justify to her uncle her dislike and mistrust of Henry Crawford without compromising her cousin Maria's reputation, since her estimation of Crawford's character is based in large part on his overt--and requited--attentions to Maria, despite Maria's engagement to another man. Like Brunton's Laura in Self-Control, who will not tell her father of Hargrave's importunities for fear of physical violence between them, Fanny keeps silent under haranguing from a father figure in order

to protect another's well-being. Further, in her struggle between feelings of obligation and duty to Sir Thomas and her competing desires for privacy and dignity, Fanny in this confrontation exactly embodies the "distress" Mrs. Dashwood feared to impose on Marianne in Sense and Sensibility by "forcing . . . a confession" from her daughter.

There is yet another reason for Fanny's distress and confusion in the east room alone with her uncle. Not only is Sir Thomas speaking to her of her sexual life, but his scrutiny of her face and her manner in this scene are freighted with a somewhat menacing erotic charge, reminiscent as they are of other recent scenes in the novel where he has directed his attention to her "person" in ways that made her uncomfortable. For example, upon his return from the West Indies after two years, Sir Thomas takes special note of how much Fanny has changed:

He led her nearer the light and looked at her again--inquired particularly after her health, and then correcting himself, observed, that he need not inquire, for her appearance spoke sufficiently on that point. A fine blush having succeeded the previous paleness of her face, he was justified in his belief of her equal improvement in health and beauty. (149)

The narrator does not represent Sir Thomas's thoughts as lascivious, but his scrutiny of his niece's body seems excessive, especially when one considers that his parting words to her before leaving for his trip were that he hoped her brother William, if he came to visit, would not be disappointed to find her little different at sixteen than she was at ten. These words, spoken harshly enough to make the sixteen-year-old Fanny cry, suggest that Sir Thomas finds Fanny somehow to blame for not having grown "tall and womanly" like his own daughters. His reaction to her appearance upon his return, when read against his

parting comments, suggests in turn that he now does indeed find her womanly. The narrator, reporting Fanny's perceptions of this encounter, speaks of her as experiencing "tenderness" and "joy" and "kindness" emanating from Sir Thomas. At the same time, however, Fanny is "quite oppressed" and "knew not how to feel or where to look." Her "fine blush" indicates a particular awareness of and a response to her uncle's admiration of her--perhaps part pleasure and part discomfort.

If Sir Thomas's admiration of Fanny and her reaction to it are presented somewhat delicately in the scene described above, this delicacy is absent from a subsequent dialogue between Edmund and Fanny, in which Edmund conveys to Fanny quite plainly his father's approbation of her "person":

"Go to my father if you want to be complimented. He will satisfy you. Ask your uncle what he thinks, and you will hear compliments enough; and though they may be chiefly on your person, you must put up with it, and trust to his seeing as much beauty of mind in time."

Such language was so new to Fanny that it quite embarrassed her.

"Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny--and that is the long and short of the matter. Anybody but myself would have made something more of it, and any body but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before; but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now--and now he does. Your complexion is so improved!--and you have gained so much countenance! and your figure--Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it--it is but an uncle. If you cannot bear an uncle's admiration what is to become of you? You

must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at.--You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman.”

“Oh, don’t talk so, don’t talk so,” cried Fanny, distressed by more feelings than he was aware of; but seeing that she was distressed, he had done with the subject (165)

I have quoted at length from this passage because it conveys in a remarkable way the complex of feelings circling among Sir Thomas, Edmund, and Fanny. Fanny is embarrassed here not just because she is modest and is made uncomfortable by references to her body, but because Edmund is bringing her unwanted news; that is, if anyone in the family is to find Fanny attractive and desirable, she would want it to be her cousin, not her uncle. What Fanny is hearing from Edmund is that the wrong man finds her desirable. In a sense this scene prefigures the one in the east room with Sir Thomas, where, once again, the wrong man’s feelings for Fanny are under discussion; in that instance, the wrong man is Henry Crawford. What Fanny wants to hear is that Edmund loves her and finds her beautiful.

Edmund, who in the dialogue quoted above is the mouthpiece for his father’s views on Fanny’s beauty, is no doubt unconsciously speaking for himself as well. Indeed, he acknowledges that he finds her pretty (“anyone but myself would have made something more of it”) but then immediately invokes his father as the source of the observations that follow on Fanny’s complexion, her countenance, her figure. Implicitly Edmund agrees with these observations, but they are laid at the feet of his father; according to Edmund, he is merely describing the “admiration of an uncle.”

Readers of the novel understand--even if Edmund does not--that Edmund is speaking for himself as well as his father (this is another way in which father and son are identified as one in this novel), but Fanny cannot assume that to be true, and indeed would be courting disaster if she were to attempt to respond to his as yet unacknowledged desire for her. Edmund's obtuseness to Fanny's feelings for him recalls the behavior of other suitors in these novels, notably Edgar in Burney's Camilla, and is in part a novelistic device, but in this dialogue the obtuseness borders on cruelty. Fanny wants Edmund's words of admiration to be uttered as part of his courtship of her, not as a vehicle for his father's feelings. Further, the message surrounding his words of admiration is a dismaying one. The advice that Austen has Edmund give Fanny draws a cynical picture of what a woman can expect from a man and what she must do to attract one: that is, capitalize on her physical beauty, use it while she has it to get someone interested in her, and then hope that that person will also discover and come to respond to her inner life. In this context, Edmund's instruction to Fanny that she must "harden herself" seems almost sinister, as does the injunction to "not mind growing up into a pretty woman."

The fact that the man who Edmund promises Fanny will eventually come to appreciate her inner beauty as well as her physical appeal is his father and her uncle adds yet another unsettling overtone to the conversation. Sir Thomas is not Fanny's suitor, and yet Edmund is presenting him as if he were one; surely Fanny's concern is not that her uncle--and an uncle, moreover, who has played the role of her parent--discern her inner beauty as well as admiring her physical attractions. This progress of admiration would seem to be what a young woman would hope for from a man she hoped to marry.

There seems, finally, to be something improper in Edmund's relaying his father's sentiments to Fanny.

Edmund's sharing with Fanny her uncle's admiration of her, as well as the identification of father and son in this novel, also brings up the question of how we are meant to think of Edmund and Fanny's eventual union, a marriage between cousins. As noted earlier, marriage between first cousins did not carry the incest taboo in the period in which Austen was writing, and the novel certainly sanctions Edmund and Fanny's marriage. And yet, the fact that Sir Thomas and Aunt Norris debate how to avoid such an outcome early on, when they are first considering bringing Fanny into the family, raises a question about it. More pertinently, the inclusion of the dialogue between Edmund and Fanny about how attractive her uncle thinks her raises another kind of shadow, a blurring of the lines. If cousins can marry cousins, or, more precisely, can desire each other and act on that desire, what makes an uncle out of bounds, especially an uncle not even related by blood? Edmund's reference to Sir Thomas as "but an uncle," whose admiration should cause Fanny no distress, carries with it a certain irony, perhaps not intended by Edmund but certainly by Austen.

Sir Thomas's comments to Fanny on her health and beauty and Edmund's reiteration of them take place prior to the confrontation between Sir Thomas and Fanny over her refusal to marry Henry Crawford, and must surely influence her feelings during that confrontation. If Sir Thomas's attitude toward Fanny has been kinder and more attentive since his return from the West Indies, that kindness is tinged with an erotic interest that Fanny cannot but find alarming, perhaps all the more so because her position with relation to him is so ambiguous. She is not a daughter, as Sir Thomas makes sure to

remind her: "You do not owe me the duty of a child." And yet, this distinction does not stop him from scolding her severely, in a diatribe that goes on for over a page in the printed text and leaves her once again in tears, for her supposed selfishness and lack of duty toward him. In the sense of demanding obedience and an accounting of her thoughts and motives, he assumes the role of a father--a certain kind of autocratic father, at any rate. Further, in a gesture that is true to his dictatorial attitude toward Fanny's emotions and that also reinforces the narrator's earlier description of him as teaching his daughters to "repress their spirits," Sir Thomas follows up his tirade with an instruction to Fanny to "tranquillize" herself. "Check these tears," he tells her; "they do but exhaust you."

The interrogation of Fanny by Sir Thomas reiterates the paradigmatic scene of father-daughter interrogation that recurs in the works of the six women writers--Burney, Edgeworth, Inchbald, Fenwick, Brunton, and Austen--I have treated in this study. The fact that Sir Thomas intrudes upon Fanny in the east room, the one place in the house she thinks of her as her private retreat, underscores the psychological invasion that is taking place. In his attitude and behavior toward Fanny--the capricious alternation between kindness and anger, the emotional manipulation, the scrutiny of her body--Sir Thomas recapitulates many of the actions and characteristics of the other fathers and father figures in the novels under discussion here. For all six of these women writers, the depiction of the scene of father-daughter interrogation is a way to express their sense of unease, protest, anger, about the power relations between fathers and daughters--and, by extension, men and women--in their culture.

Conclusion

Although the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women's fictions under study in this dissertation, with the possible exception of Fenwick's Secresy, all fit into the broad category of the courtship novel, they vary in terms of style, form, and their authors' attitudes toward the heroines' quest for marriage. Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth present narratives that to a large extent validate the domestic resolution to a heroine's problems--that is, marriage to the object of her affections. The English Jacobin novelists treated in my second chapter, Elizabeth Inchbald and Eliza Fenwick, present much more problematic versions of the courtship plot and of the patriarchal structures that support it. In Inchbald's A Simple Story, Miss Milner's marriage to her desired object--her guardian--destroys her. Her daughter Matilda manages to escape the spell of her fixation on the same man--barely--and marries her cousin. We are perhaps meant to think of this as a happy ending, but the suffering of both Miss Milner and Matilda that dominates the narrative feels larger than the ending. Further, the narrative does not convince us that Matilda feels desire for her cousin Harry Rushbrook; her consent is not even presented in the narrative. In Fenwick's Secresy, there is no semblance of a happy ending; the heroine who has tried to articulate and act on her desires rather than waiting for her lover to speak for her dies in the wake of childbirth, like many a fictional fallen woman before her. In the 1811 and 1814 novels of Mary Brunton and Jane Austen that I treat in Chapter 3, we see the reinstatement of the successful marriage plot, and yet, as I have shown, both novelists question the conduct of the fathers whose duty it is to help guide their daughters toward the proper suitor. In Mansfield Park, finally, Austen

presents a patriarch--Sir Thomas Bertram--who is shown to be ineffective and wrongheaded in his supervision of his niece and his daughters and who must learn from his mistakes.

What all the novels have in common, in fact, from Burney's Evelina, published in 1778, to Austen's Mansfield Park of 1814, is a questioning of the functioning of patriarchy on the intimate level of the family, in particular within father-daughter relationships. A consistent narrative feature in almost all the novels I have discussed is the paradigmatic scene in which a father or guardian interrogates a young woman upon the state of her heart. As I have shown, these scenes cast light upon an array of eighteenth-century topoi relating to the family, to ideas about sensibility and sexuality, and to the expectations--and restrictions--women faced. The novels represent the daughters' dilemmas over whether to confess their feelings to their fathers as fraught with anxiety, an anxiety related to having to choose between competing directives of proper feminine behavior. Confessing to having formed an attachment to a man who has not declared his feelings was taboo, according to standards of modesty, and, further, seems in these novels to put the daughters in danger of their fathers' contempt and anger. On the other hand, denying a father's request--or demand--for information is undutiful and therefore unfeminine. In general, father-daughter relationships are presented in these novels as sites of unease, distress, and psychological coercion. In the one novel I have treated here that does not feature a daughter subject to paternal interrogation--Austen's Sense and Sensibility--the absence of this particular kind of distress is notable.

The scenes of father-daughter interrogation pose the question, among others, of what a daughter can safely say to her father, without risking censure, contempt, rejection.

The questions thus posed within the fictional frame are analogous to the questions the authors themselves faced as writing daughters--both literally, in their relationships with their own fathers, and figuratively, in their position within a patriarchal society whose expectations and strictures limited women's self-expression. The richly imaginative, compellingly plotted novels the women wrote, depicting in myriad ways their female characters' resourcefulness, provide the answers.

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