

*Forging a New Educational Model:  
A Study on the Ideological Parallelism  
Between Jovellanos's Pedagogical Philosophy  
and Maria Edgeworth's Didacticism*

*Forjando un nuevo modelo educativo:  
estudio del paralelismo ideológico entre la  
filosofía pedagógica de Jovellanos y el  
didactismo de Maria Edgeworth*

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores a set of captivating similarities between Gaspar de Jovellanos's (1744-1811) and Maria Edgeworth's (1768-1849) approaches to didacticism. Both pedagogical thinkers, although in distant geographical and personal circumstances, opened new routes in favour of a profound transformation in education in their respective countries at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They proposed a similar educational model, characterised by practical sense and morality.

Both authors saw children as perfectible rational beings through education and teaching, and strove to put this principle into practice in their educational essays and literary writings. Moreover, both were convinced that education was the key to trigger off a deep social and economic transformation in society so to enhance the progress of their respective countries. Both of them understood that social welfare is based upon the transmission of moral values, to guarantee a harmonic and integral development

of the individual. Morality is conceived as the ultimate goal in their educational programme, founded upon a sensible combination between reason and emotion.

**Key Words:** Edgeworth, Jovellanos, Enlightenment, Educational Programme, Family Gender issues.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la fascinante conexión entre los planteamientos didácticos de Gaspar de Jovellanos (1744-1811) y Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849). A pesar de las diferencias en su contexto personal y geográfico, ambos pedagogos abrieron nuevos caminos en busca de una profunda transformación de la educación en sus respectivos países a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del siglo XIX. Ambos proponen un modelo educativo similar, caracterizado por el pensamiento práctico y la moralidad.

Los dos autores defendían que los niños son seres racionales que pueden perfeccionar su comportamiento a través de la educación, y trataron de llevar este principio a la práctica en sus ensayos pedagógicos y obras literarias. Asimismo, ambos veían en la educación el estímulo clave para impulsar una profunda transformación social y económica en aras del progreso de sus países. En efecto, para ellos el bienestar social se basaba en la transmisión de los valores morales para garantizar un desarrollo integral y armónico del individuo. La moralidad es el fin último del programa educativo, que tiene como base un equilibrio sensato entre razón y emoción, pilares fundamentales de la educación.

**Palabras Clave:** Edgeworth, Jovellanos, Ilustración, Modelo Educativo, Familia, Cuestiones de Género.

## 1. THE AGE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: IMPORTANT INFLUENCES IN GASPAR DE JOVELLANOS AND MARIA EDGEWORTH

Both Jovellanos's and Maria Edgeworth's pedagogical philosophy is deeply linked to the Enlightenment, which started in England in the seventeenth century, and reached its heyday in France and Germany in the eighteenth century. Although there are some crucial differences across the various countries and the numerous thinkers involved, the Enlightenment was generally conceived of as a highly influential philosophy that championed the supremacy of reason. It brought about a new scientific approach to human knowledge and to the world in general, always with a pragmatic

goal in mind, leaving no room for superstition. Furthermore, from the perspective of the Enlightenment, social progress should go hand in hand with common welfare and ethical values, based on equality, justice, and freedom.

During the Enlightenment period, the notion of reason was considered as superior to other forms of knowledge, and it became the cornerstone for the development of scientific methods to discover «truth». Consequently, it gave way to the general belief in the superiority of reason over emotion, and mind over body. Jovellanos and Edgeworth are both regarded as rational authors and their writings are magnificent examples of the Enlightenment philosophy.

In terms of the eighteenth-century educational philosophy, there is a new emphasis on the original innocence of human beings, whose character and behaviour could be shaped by means of education, on the basis of a rational interpretation of society and institutions. Both pre-industrial Spain and Ireland faced numerous challenges at the turn of the eighteenth century. It was considered essential that infants were equipped with a solid foundation based on moral values and religious duties. In fact, it was precisely during these formative years when children were most malleable and ready to acquire a set of social rules and ethical standards that would accompany them for the rest of their lives.

On the one hand, Jovellanos was very much influenced by some relevant philosophers like Bacon, Locke, Newton, Condorcet, Condillac, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Beccaria. Moreover, Jovellanos adapted the tenets of these ideological sources to his own context, and consequently, his personal approach combined the main principles of the Enlightenment with the humanistic tradition and the specific characteristics of the Spanish situation.

He favoured the values and principles of the Enlightenment in search of justice and prosperity in society, but he was against a revolutionary approach. On the contrary, he strove to promote a profound and gradual transformation through the educational system, so that all citizens were equipped with a solid foundation of moral values to accomplish their social and personal responsibilities. As he mentioned on various occasions throughout his multiple essays, e.g.: «I believe that a nation that cares for its education can accomplish great reforms without bloodshed, and I believe that no rebellion is necessary to achieve that education»<sup>1</sup>. The motto of his personal proposal for social transformation reads as follows: «proper laws, proper lights, and proper resources»<sup>2</sup>. From Jovellanos' point of view, the Enlightenment is the foundation of

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<sup>1</sup> «Creo que una nación que se ilustra puede hacer grandes reformas sin sangre, y creo que para ilustrarse tampoco sea necesaria la rebelión», JOVELLANOS, in: José Miguel CASO GONZÁLEZ, *Obras Completas de Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos*, 1985, T. II, p. 635.

<sup>2</sup> «Buenas leyes, buenas luces y buenos fondos», JOVELLANOS in: Miguel ARTOLA, *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Obras publicadas e inéditas de D. Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos*, Madrid, 1956, T. 86, p. 195.

personal and public prosperity, and the educational system is the appropriate channel to foster a significant social transformation to attain an egalitarian, peaceful, and fair society. Only by means of these ideological principles a country may aspire to make sustainable progress towards prosperity and justice.

Jovellanos dealt with manifold topics including education, history, geography, economics, politics, medicine, botany, language and literature, Latin, French, English, Asturian language, theology, etc. His theatre plays also display a clear social intention to illustrate the audience with the moral values and principles of the Enlightenment.

On the other hand, Maria Edgeworth and her father, Richard L. Edgeworth, were devoted readers of significant educational texts written by Bacon, Locke, Rousseau, Hartley and Priestley. Unquestionably, these works shaped their theories on education. In terms of the revolutionary context she was engulfed in, due to events such as the Rebellion of 1798, the Act of Union (1800) and the Great Famine (1840s) in Ireland, Maria Edgeworth was conscious of the need to adapt to rapidly changing times. However, she rejected revolutionary appeals as she wished that <<steadiness and reasonable reform will produce and maintain tranquillity in political matters>><sup>3</sup>, in line with Jovellanos' political position. Thus both thinkers propose a gradual and peaceful approach to fuel social transformation through education, against what they saw as fanatical revolutionary appeals.

Maria Edgeworth was the second child and eldest daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth –an enlightened landowner, a well-known author and inventor, who focused on educational theorising– and his first wife, Anna Maria Elers. In time Maria Edgeworth would become her father's competent assistant and accountant, committed to managing the family estate at Edgeworthstown, in Ireland, and to educating her father's extended family, comprising twenty-two children, born from Richard's four wives. Maria Edgeworth's literary production was not conceived, in principle, for pleasure or to escape from the confinement of female boundaries in nineteenth-century society seeking more independence, but to earn her father's admiration and recognition. Richard Edgeworth certainly recognised his daughter's literary talent, hence he encouraged her to write and supported her interest in education, supervising and editing Maria's writings. However, eventually she became one of the most renowned female writers of the time and took part in philosophical and pedagogical circles thanks to her father's sponsoring.

Before the Edgeworths' educational works were published, only two educational treatises had appeared in England: Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), which proved to be too insubstantial to be prac-

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<sup>3</sup> Julie NASH, *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, Cornwall, Ashgate, 2006, p. 162.

tical. The Edgeworths were also deeply influenced by Francis Bacon, who early in the seventeenth century proposed a child-centred, experimental approach to education.

Indeed, both Jovellanos's and the Edgeworths' educational views are clearly inspired in Bacon's method for education and research, which was an eminently experimental approach, based on a pragmatic view of children's psychology, imbued with commonsense and morality.

In the preface of *Practical Education*, co-written with her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth, the authors establish the practical approach of their educational treatise: <<we rely entirely upon practice and experience>><sup>4</sup>, which reveals the Edgeworths' pedagogical convictions of empirical observation, experimental process and methods derived from experience and praxis. Therefore, moral, social or political theories should not be formulated *a priori*; on the contrary, they should be the product of lived reality. The Edgeworths also used children's dialogues within the text as practical examples taken from the experimental method. Edgeworth's tales are often characterized by utilitarianism and practical advice with much emphasis on the child learning from experience and reasoning. As Emily Lawless comments, <<the didactic impulse is seen to distinctly overpower the creative one; wherever we find utility lauded to the skies as the only guide of an otherwise foundering humanity>><sup>5</sup>.

In terms of Rousseau's influence over Edgeworth's educational works, it has to be considered that in the beginning Richard Edgeworth had been a faithful follower of Rousseau's educational theories. He went as far as to train his eldest son, Richard Jr., as a second *Émile* by those theories. However, this experiment resulted in a complete failure –Richard Jr. was the only of his children to be poorly educated– and consequently, he turned his attention, with his wife Honora's help, to a more pragmatic and experimental method, based on praxis, which resulted in more successful educational ideas and attracted attention all over Europe. Therefore, after experiencing the disastrous consequences of his son's behaviour, the father moved away from Rousseau's principles. Nevertheless, some key features from Rousseau's thought may be traced in Maria Edgeworth putting his benevolent conception of human nature into practice, and in her defence of education as the means to facilitate children's morality and successful integration in society. Yet she criticised Rousseau's limited view on women's role in society, as will be analysed in the last section of this article.

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<sup>4</sup> Maria EDGEWORTH & Richard Lovell EDGEWORTH, *Practical Education*, London, Garland Publishing, 2009 (1798), pp. 1-5. Accessed 24-05-2013 in URL: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28708/28708-h/28708-h.htm> (Volume I) and <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28709/28709-h/28709-h.htm> (Volume II).

<sup>5</sup> Emily LAWLESS, *Maria Edgeworth*, London, MacMillan, 1904, p. 18.

Consequently, we may say that Locke's <<foundational principle in recognizing the heuristic value of childhood dialogue>> from *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) had a greater impact on the Edgeworths than Rousseau. Richard Edgeworth accepted the Lockean doctrine of the tabula rasa and discarded the possibility of innate ideas or natural instincts as <<simply the consequences of practice and industry>><sup>6</sup>. His goal was to guide the child towards a sensible use of judgement, and as he assumed that the child had no innate ideas, he believed that all ideas must be taught: <<Truth is not instinctive in the mind, and the ideas of integrity, and of the advantages of reputation, must be very cautiously introduced>><sup>7</sup>.

This belief in the unlimited power of education and instruction over innate characteristics is in agreement with the Age of Enlightenment, where reason is the dominating system in all human sciences and occupations. This is clearly expressed in the following reflection by Zimmern:

Mr Edgeworth believed according to the proverb, <<that youth and white paper can take all impressions>>, that everything could be achieved by education; that, given the individual, it was possible to make of him whatever the instructor pleased. Of course our present more scientific mode of thought, our superior scientific knowledge, shows us the untenability of so dogmatic a persuasion; but it was characteristic of the eighteenth century, forms the key-note to many of their educational experiments, and furnishes the reason of their failures (...) We know now that it is out of the power of education to change nature<sup>8</sup>.

As analysed, both Jovellanos and Edgeworth shared a common interest in the educational theories at the end of the eighteenth century, and they studied childhood's emotional, psychological and intellectual development. Children's literature equally flourished spectacularly at this time in order to respond to this new social demand and provide an appropriate offer of children's books to educate younger generations. Thus both authors agree in emphasising the crucial role played by early education at the time, and in acknowledging the importance of literature for children to bring out their potential.

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<sup>6</sup> EDGEWORTH, M. & EDGEWORTH, R. L., *Practical Education*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> EDGEWORTH, M. & EDGEWORTH, R. L., *Practical Education*, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> Helen ZIMMERN, *Maria Edgeworth*, Cambridge, Roberts Brothers, 2010 (1883), p. 22.

## 2. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

Another significant connection between Maria Edgeworth and Jovellanos is their similar consideration of social justice and their egalitarian educational approach to social classes, as they both believed everybody should have access to free education. Jovellanos fought against the vices and corruption of the Spanish government and society, and aimed at inspiring an enlightened approach to cultural, social and political life, by means of an improved educational programme for all citizens. He had a high sense of social justice and strove to foster equality among social classes and provide the same educational opportunities for everybody. He believed in gender equality and social justice, and he wanted to defend the rights of the working class. He championed some universal values like common welfare, fair working conditions, moral values, truth, austerity, etc. Since he closely linked personal and public spheres, all these elements should contribute to attain the individual's happiness and social prosperity. In order to foster a fair and prosperous society, he proposed some key measures: he defended the individual's right to private property both in terms of labour and land; he defended labour, industrial and commercial freedom; laws should be based on justice and equality among all citizens; and the educational system should be open to all citizens: <<In order to make men happy it is necessary to enlighten them. Then the love for Arts experienced a renaissance, and legislation, reconciled with wisdom, hurried to build many public high schools>><sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Jovellanos defended the rights of the minorities like the *vaqueiros*,<sup>10</sup> the gypsies, the converted Jews, the poor, and those in prison. Thus, he made an extraordinary contribution to social justice at that time.

On the other hand, in Ireland, Maria Edgeworth was aware of the difficult economic situation of the Irish population at the beginning of the nineteenth century and she tried to promote the following solutions which would lead to peace and prosperity: <<good treatment of tenants, the spread of education and better agricultural methods, genuine religious toleration for Catholics and Protestants alike, the improvement of the standard of justice at all levels>><sup>11</sup>. At a time when the English were struggling to maintain control over Ireland, belief in the <<natural>> inferiority

<sup>9</sup> <<Para hacer a los hombres felices era preciso ilustrarlos. Entonces renació el aprecio de las letras, y la legislación, reconciliada con la sabiduría, se apresuró a multiplicar los institutos de enseñanza pública>>, *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles (BAE)*, 46, p. 319.

<sup>10</sup> The term "vaqueiros" refers to a cultural group in the Spanish autonomous community of Asturias. This group has a singular and ancient folklore. Their main activities were cattle breeding and seasonal transhumance, as they moved to the mountains from May to October looking for green pastures for their cattle.

<sup>11</sup> Michael HURST, *Maria Edgeworth and the Public Scene: Intellect, Fine Feeling and Landlordism in the Age of Reform*, Florida, University of Miami Press, 1969, p. 16.

of the Irish population was the official justification to preserve English rule over Ireland. However, Maria Edgeworth satirised these beliefs and, from a New Historicist point of view, she subverted the concept of inherent inferiority or superiority of class or nation, and she raised her voice to dismantle the power discourse that supported those rigid hegemonic structures in society. As Nash argues, Maria Edgeworth's distrust of the social *status quo* is <<a critique of the hierarchical social system that governed English society>><sup>12</sup>, in line with New Historicist criticism. However, she shows some ambivalence in terms of the effects of blurring the line between social classes:

Edgeworth seems to want it both ways here: she argues that the education of servants be improved to make them fit companions for children, but laments the inevitable loss of deference and respect that will follow such levelling measures<sup>13</sup>.

She does not lead a campaign for social reform, as she portrays reality as it is, but she is not comfortable with the classical view of social barriers established by social paternalism, by which <<providence, not the will of a socially-constructed government, ordered the world, setting men above women, parents above children, and masters above servants>><sup>14</sup>. It is important to contextualise her ideological approach following her father's liberalism and progressive paternalism, both within the family structure but also in society. Her empathetic and charitable consideration of the poor was based on her personal experience managing the family estate at Edgeworthstown.

Whilst she rejected some of the radical revolutionary demands from the French Revolution, she did challenge the current *status quo* by fostering some important social changes. However, she always tried to promote what she believed were the key solutions that would lead to peace and prosperity in Ireland: a harmonious relationship between landlords and tenants based on protection, loyalty and trust; the spread of education to all social classes; more tolerance between Catholics and Protestants; better agricultural methods which would improve considerably the labour conditions of the lower classes; and finally, an improvement of the standard of justice in society, especially in terms of Ireland's relationship with England, which she envisioned as <<sister>> countries. Therefore she defended Ireland's right to define its own identity and culture, and consequently, she challenged England's hegemonic power and oppressive rule over the island.

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<sup>12</sup> NASH, *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> NASH, *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> NASH, *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, p. 163.

One of the most important differences between Maria Edgeworth's didacticism and Jovellanos's philosophy is the lack of religious references in the former, whilst the latter defended a sensible religious commitment, without superstition. Jovellanos openly declares himself a faithful Christian, and his theological proposal combines religion with morality. From his point of view, religion must be considered <<the summit and complement of true wisdom>><sup>15</sup>. This way, his approach is different from the anti-religious spirit of the French Encyclopaedia, he pursues an enlightened approach to reason but grounded on Christian beliefs, therefore he is closer to the English Enlightenment.

Edgeworth, however, does not make any explicit reference to religion as a source of morality. Surprisingly enough, given the religious context of this period in Ireland, it is interesting to note that, in bringing morality to the scene of her plays, she did not include any explicit reference to religion or God. This is the reason why she received some harsh criticism on the absence of any religious motivation from a few members of the contemporary religious circles. As James Newcomer comments, <<in a country where religious fervour gave fuel to hatred and suspicion she practiced tolerance>><sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, Maria adopts a newly born Christian paternalism that emerged among upper-class ladies, who found in charity activities a suitable way to express their care for lower classes: <<in class relations, the need for 'good feeling' and 'kindness' by the upper classes toward the lower classes was emphasized>><sup>17</sup>.

On the other hand, the emphasis on being engaged in charitable activities was one of the most valued attributes of women's civic responsibility, as Elizabeth Eger warns in the Introduction to her book *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*: <<there has also been greater acknowledgement of women's role in cementing civic virtue through their charitable work, an important aspect of public life>><sup>18</sup>. This association with charitable activities is a key feature in the eighteenth-century society, as women were traditionally associated with certain virtues of humanity, such as benevolence and compassion, as part of historically conventionalised gender identities.

<sup>15</sup> <<...cima y complemento de la verdadera sabiduría>>, *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles (BAE)*, 46, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> James NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, Cranbury, Bucknell University Press, 1973, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Robert PRICE, *British Society, 1680-1880: Dynamism, Containment and Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 308.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth EGER, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 8.

### 3. MARIA EDGEWORTH'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME WITHIN THE FAMILY: THE ROUTE TO MORAL IMPROVEMENT

Maria Edgeworth and her father worked closely together on their observations of what methods worked best on their pupils. These learnings and experiences are reflected in her educational treatises, *The Parent's Assistant* (1796-1801) and *Practical Education* (1798). Maria Edgeworth eloquently starts *The Parent's Assistant* by quoting Aristotle's view on education: <<All who have mediated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth>><sup>19</sup>. Children's education is perceived as the key element to ensure a successful socio-political and economic evolution of the country, which is entrusted to the next generations. They will inherit our educational legacy and the knowledge and sensibility they acquire during their formative years will determine their role and achievements in history.

These educational treatises –aimed at inculcating improvement, virtue, common-sense, utility, and inventiveness in children's minds– have been considered as the most important contributions to pedagogical research after Locke's. As Zimmern points out, though education had been a favourite theme with all the philosophers, from Aristotle to Locke, their systems were <<too remote for practical application (...) [so] their theories of education were disregarded just by those very persons who had the training of the young in their hands>><sup>20</sup>.

Collaboratively written with her father but really a family project, Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* consists of numerous essays<sup>21</sup> based on eighteenth-century educational philosophy which are aimed at providing useful and practical advice on life, as the title suggests. The preface of the book addresses the people who should be more concerned about their children's education: their parents, as they are the guides of children's education and self-discovery in life.

All principles of Edgeworthian education are condensed into *Practical Education*, which articulates the didactic theory from which all her fictional writings are derived,

<sup>19</sup> EDGEWORTH, M. & EDGEWORTH, R. L., *Practical Education*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> ZIMMERN, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Practical Education* is divided into two volumes and includes the following chapters: <<Toys,>> <<Tasks>> (largely by RLE), <<On Attention,>> <<Servants,>> <<Acquaintance,>> <<On Temper,>> <<On Obedience,>> <<On Truth,>> <<On Rewards and Punishments,>> <<On Sympathy and Sensibility,>> <<On Vanity, Pride and Ambition,>> <<Books,>> <<On Grammar, and Classical Literature>> (by RLE), <<On Geography and Chronology>> (by RLE), <<On Arithmetick>> (by RLE), <<Geometry>> (by RLE), <<On Mechanics>> (by RLE), <<Chemistry,>> <<On Public and Private Education,>> <<On Female Accomplishments, Masters, and Governesses,>> <<Memory and Invention,>> <<Taste and Imagination,>> <<Wit and Judgment,>> <<Prudence and Economy>>.

putting into practice the moral principles of their authoress. Immediately after writing *Practical Education*, Maria Edgeworth turned her attention to revising some short stories and writing additional tales as illustrative examples of the theoretical principles contained in *Practical Education*. Some of these stories were published in 1801 under the title of *Moral Tales*. As Richard Edgeworth admitted in the preface, these stories were intended to illustrate the moral lessons delivered in *Practical Education*. These tales were conceived as didactic fiction for moral improvement of <<private selfhood, which is further evidence that the Edgeworths, particularly Maria, did not consider the private and public two separate but instead interactive categories>><sup>22</sup>. The individual should be integrated in a social structure where he/she would grow both spiritually and socially by means of his/her interaction with others.

From this perspective, she warns readers of the difficult task of teaching children and acknowledges the responsibilities that fall under the educator's role. Children will be led through the first stages of life by them, therefore educators need to monitor their learning and emotional development carefully. Their formative years will establish the roots for their personality and their happiness:

Those only who have been interested in the education of a family, who have patiently followed children through the first processes of reasoning, who have daily watched over their thoughts and feelings; those only, who know with what ease and rapidity the early associations of ideas are formed on which the future taste, character, and happiness depend, can feel the dangers and difficulties of such an undertaking<sup>23</sup>.

Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, all educationalists, whether evangelical, rationalists or romantic, were united in stressing the importance of the family's and parents' role, especially that of the mothers, in imprinting moral lessons upon the child in infancy, and in bringing out the best of the child's nature. In order to perform this important mission successfully, women needed an enhanced educational programme for themselves, as claimed by many writers and educationalists.

Consequently, family life must be considered as the first social experience the child goes through, and therefore its influence over the child's personality and conduct is extraordinarily important. As Judith Dunn demonstrates by citing numerous case studies to analyse the development of young children within the family,

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<sup>22</sup> Mona NARAIN, <<Not the Angel in the House: Intersections of the Public and Private in Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales* and *Practical Education*>>, Julie NASH, (ed.). *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, Cornwall, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 57-72.

<sup>23</sup> EDGEWORTH, M. & EDGEWORTH, R. L., *Practical Education*, p. 2.

It is presumably within the family that the initial stages of children's understanding of cultural rules begins, and within the emotional context of particular family relationships that individual differences in children's perceptions of and response to such rules begins<sup>24</sup>.

Similarly, Jovellanos placed high importance on the education infants received within their family, and he stated that before a child reaches a rational stage in his/her psychological development, his/her moral training should be founded on the family context, as he concludes

Even those virtues that rather stem from reflection than from emotion can be better inspired in domestic education; and should a youth not observe the first examples of respect of religion and law, of selflessness and public zeal, within the family and in the behaviour of its members in society; should these examples not enlighten the spirit, and engrave these virtues in the heart of this youth, little could be added by the cold school lessons<sup>25</sup>.

Likewise, Edgeworth considered family life as the most important influence in children's education, and therefore her educational programme was conceived within the family dynamics. Educationalists as they were, as mentioned above, the Edgeworths sided with Locke's belief in the power of instruction over innate characteristics of the individual. It is noteworthy that the authors of *Practical Education* did not seek to appeal to theorists or philosophers, like most other writers dealing with these issues, but to mankind in general. However, their appeal was especially aimed at parents, in whose hands, after all, lies the responsibility of their children's upbringing, hence the title of their work. As Hawthorne points out, «the parents' will alone should determine the child's actions. Rationalism thus becomes a calculated determination in which the parent plays the role of God»<sup>26</sup>.

Furthermore, in *Practical Education*, in the chapter dedicated to «Rewards and Punishments,» Maria Edgeworth takes a distance from a traditionally severe per-

<sup>24</sup> Judith DUNN, «Growing up in a Family World: Issues in the Study of Social Development in Young Children», Martin Richards & Paul Light (eds.), *Children of Social Worlds: Development in a Social Context*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1986, pp. 98-115.

<sup>25</sup> «... aún aquellas virtudes civiles que nacen más bien de reflexión que de sentimiento pueden ser mejor inspiradas en la educación doméstica, y que si un joven no observare los primeros ejemplos de respeto a la religión y a las leyes, de amor a la constitución y al gobierno, de desinterés y celo público en lo interior de su familia y en la conducta pública de sus individuos; si estos ejemplos no ilustraren su espíritu, y grabaren en su corazón estas virtudes, mal las podrá esperar de las frías lecciones de la escuela», *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles*, (BAE) Madrid 1963, T. 46, p. 236.

<sup>26</sup> Mark D. HAWTHORNE, *Doubt and Dogma in Maria Edgeworth*, Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1967, p. 67.

spective of education: <<Children who have been reasonably and affectionately educated, scarcely any punishments are requisite>><sup>27</sup>. This way, she favours a balanced approach focused on reason and affection addressed to inspiring children's obedience by means of pleasure and happiness, where <<the fewer the laws we make for children, the better>><sup>28</sup>.

The Edgeworths knew and understood the psychology and behaviour of children, and they tried to compile all their educational tenets, supported by experience and real-life examples. They treated the art of education as an experimental science, so they put every effort in following a pragmatic approach: firstly, they would establish what competences and skills children should acquire throughout their training programme, and then, they would record children's performances of trial and error in order to study their progress.

In essence, the Edgeworthian educational formula was articulated around two main principles: learning and happiness, always with the goal of morality in mind. On the one hand, Maria Edgeworth was in favour of paying attention to children's temper from the moment of birth to prevent occasions of ill-humour: <<By patiently endeavouring to discover the causes of terror in children, we may probably prevent their tempers from acquiring many bad habits (...) to conquer them as soon as possible>><sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, happiness was perceived both as a goal and as a means of education: <<Childhood ought to have as great a share of happiness in it as it can enjoy compatibly with the other seasons of life>><sup>30</sup>.

Thus, Maria Edgeworth was one of the first educational writers to assert that children should find their educational programme both attractive and motivating; otherwise they would lose interest in learning and their attention would be diverted to other things. Therefore, it is vital that educators kindle children's affection and motivation in learning everyday as this will guarantee their commitment to their own learning process and will foster their curiosity to expand their knowledge and culture. Children should be induced <<to reason with precision and to invent with facility>><sup>31</sup>. The Edgeworth's educational method was based upon rationality and inventiveness. As mentioned above, this is in line with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, where the notion of reason was considered as superior to other forms of knowledge and became the cornerstone for the development of scientific methods and new inven-

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<sup>27</sup> NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> EDGEWORTH, M. & EDGEWORTH, R. L., *Practical Education*, p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 32.

tions. The Edgeworths were significant defenders of this philosophical trend in their educational programme and in their daily activities.

Moreover, inspiring obedience in children from the very early years of their lives is considered important in order to lay the foundations of their personality and morality. Thus,

Obedience must be taught as a habit. By associating pleasure with those things which we first desire children to do, we should make them necessarily like to obey; on the contrary, if we begin by ordering them to do what is difficult and disagreeable to them, they must dislike obedience (...) Oppression and terror necessarily produce meanness and deceit, in all climates and in all ages; and wherever fear is the governing motive in education, we must expect to find in children a propensity to dissimulation<sup>32</sup>.

The interactive nature of learning derived from the Edgeworths' belief in the importance of the individual, but only within the context of a moral community through the mirroring of familial and communal approval. Maria Edgeworth condemns the superficial and pompous characters from fashionable society who were only interested in flattering their individual ego, thereby moving away from morality and good manners.

Consequently, her plots always contain a moralising message to be put into practice by means of exploring ethical conflicts either in adults or in children, thus enhancing the virtues she endeavours to instil in her audience: industry, honesty, wisdom, justice, respect for oneself and for others, and commonsense. This didactic scheme was applicable to both children and adults, especially of the lower classes, in particular the uneducated peasantry whom she also tried to instruct by means of her works.

In conclusion, morality was both Jovellanos's and Maria Edgeworth's uttermost goal. Thus both wrote fiction with a moral purpose, and their educational philosophy was clearly grounded on reason and prudence. Consequently, they were convinced that the safest route to happiness is acting with reason and morality, which leads to judgement and prudence. As Zimmern points out, Edgeworth <<systematically addressed herself to the understanding rather than to the heart of her readers, and [...] she rarely forgot her educational aim>><sup>33</sup>. Maria Edgeworth's moral fiction aims at fostering individuals' integrity and moral conduct within the social structure. All the stories are focused on inspiring high moral standards in children's minds and to make them follow these guidelines in their daily behaviour.

<sup>32</sup> NEWCOMER, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> ZIMMERN, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 14.

#### 4. GENDER EQUALITY: DEFENDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's education was a hot topic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it originated many controversial debates around what should be included in a women's educational programme. Whilst some progressive thinkers sought to champion and foster women's rights for education within society and the family, others strove to maintain the status-quo of women restricted to the traditional roles of submissive mothers and wives within the domestic sphere.

In this respect Jovellanos was a progressive thinker as he promoted a common educational programme for boys and girls: <<So much could education do over customs. And so much it might still do if, directed to the highest ends, it would try to equal both sexes, removing so many ridiculous and harmful differences between them by which they are separated today>><sup>34</sup>. Jovellanos proclaims himself a defender of women's rights and he actively attacks all laws that discriminate women against men, as these rules go against nature and reason. He fosters a more egalitarian society where women's rights are recognized as equal to men, both in the public and in the private sphere. He wishes to put an end to male tyranny, <<a remnant of our barbarous customs>> as it is opposed to natural laws, and seeks to promote a more egalitarian and respectful relationship in marriage.

This is another common feature between both writers. In *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1798), Maria Edgeworth also claims equality between men and women in intellectual terms: <<superiority amongst the human species depends upon reason: that men are naturally stronger than women is evident; but strength of mind has no necessary connection with strength of body>><sup>35</sup>. In the first letter, the <<Gentleman>> describes the anti-feminist belief that women are not entitled to a literary education; women rather should, as Rousseau so strongly advocated, remain in their proper sphere, the home<sup>36</sup>. Rousseau displayed a profound mistrust of women in the public sphere, and therefore he would deny them the most elementary political rights. Because the <<Gentle-

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<sup>34</sup> <<Tanto podía la educación sobre las costumbres. Y tanto pudiera todavía si, encaminada a los más altos fines tratase de igualar los dos sexos, disipando tantas ridículas y dañosas diferencias como hoy los separan>>, <<resto de nuestras bárbaras costumbres>>, *Memoria sobre espectáculos públicos*, Oviedo 1991, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Maria EDGEWORTH, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, 2009 (1795): p. 2. Accessed 01-10-2012, in URL: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edgeworth/ladies/ladies.html>.

<sup>36</sup> As Rousseau argues in a letter <<there are no good morals for women outside of a withdrawn and domestic life, the peaceful care of the family and the home (...), the dignity of their sex consists in modesty, shame and chasteness are inseparable from decency for them>> (Rousseau in Joan LANDES, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 72).

man>> accepts social prejudice as philosophically correct, the belief that women are inferior beings by nature, is, to him, undeniably true. The <<Gentleman's>> principal objection to female education was his observation of the <<enlightened>> woman's reluctance to follow established moral and social codes; the <<Friend>> shows how a proper education will enable her to fulfil her moral and social responsibilities with greater happiness. Virtue and prudence will be taught by reason.

This debate was anticipated by Rousseau's views concerning female accomplishments, as he sets out the most relevant educational principles for Émile's happiness and the key ingredients of his relationship with a woman, Sophie. Just as education is crucial for Émile, the same is true of Rousseau's ideal woman: <<she ought to have everything which suits the constitution of her species and her sex in order to fill her place in the physical and moral order>><sup>37</sup>. As stated by Joanne Cordon, Rousseau thought that both sexes required

educations that address the fundamental nature of each, and because men and women are made by nature for different ends, their educations must differ. Rousseau is not the first writer to set out educational principles for the so-called weaker sex<sup>38</sup>.

According to Rousseau, men and women are conceived for different ends, therefore their education must be different as well. He recommends women should focus on those tasks linked to the domestic sphere like sewing, embroidery, lace making and drawing, and they must be busy and obedient. Consequently, <<women's educators should equip their charges with gentleness and guile, the two great weapons for women who want to "conquer" their men>><sup>39</sup>, however, the greatest weapon that a woman must possess is wit, which Rousseau calls <<the true resource of the fair sex>><sup>40</sup>. Thus, <<women need to manage their husbands by the covert manipulation of seeming inferior while all the while maintaining unacknowledged control of the household>><sup>41</sup>.

Edgeworth challenges gender stereotypes and Rousseau's rhetorical straitjacket for women, as they were reduced to the domestic sphere and to please their male companions. On the contrary, Edgeworth claims that both men and women should follow

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Emile: Or, Education*, New York, Basic, 1979 (1762), p. 357.

<sup>38</sup> Joanne CORDON, <<Revising Stereotypes of Nationality and Gender: Why Maria Edgeworth Did Not Write *Castle Belinda*>>, Julie NASH, (ed.), *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, Cornwall, Ashgate, 2006, p. 147.

<sup>39</sup> CORDON, <<Revising Stereotypes...>>, p. 148.

<sup>40</sup> ROUSSEAU, *Emile...*, p. 371.

<sup>41</sup> CORDON, <<Revising Stereotypes...>>, p. 148.

the same educational programme and develop their intellectual and personal skills without those gender constraints.

Thus Maria Edgeworth was in line with Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft in their personal campaign defending women's rights for education and self-fulfilment. As her biographer, Marilyn Butler, captures in her research about Edgeworth's life and works,

Edgeworth followed Barbauld and Wollstonecraft as an educationalist and an advocate of women's education on the same terms as men. Her most innovative writing on education was done in the 1790s, centring on *Practical Education* [...] it proposes one syllabus for boys and girls, in which science would be included, classics omitted, and it urges that women of all classes should be trained to earn their living. In her own day, Edgeworth was certainly regarded, as Austen equally certainly was not, as a model of the rational woman, and moreover a dedicated portrayer of rational women – as in brief, the most accomplished and visible of literary Enlightenment progressives<sup>42</sup>.

Many writers have attached great importance to the topic of female education in the eighteenth century, starting with Mary Astell, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Eliza Haywood, Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft. Thus, Edgeworth did not stand alone in this pursuit of contemporary gender reconfiguration. Furthermore, Mary Wollstonecraft lobbied for female emancipation, renovating the conventional duties of wives and mothers to embrace companionate marriage and early childhood education>><sup>43</sup>.

However, Edgeworth was more interested in illustrating the steps that women should take to attain moral perfection and self-improvement than she was in putting forward consciously or openly any consideration of the new ideas about women's rights. Edgeworth expounded the case for women's education not as a champion of women's rights, but <<to enlighten their judgement, to cultivate their understanding, to enable them to occupy their time independently, and above all to increase domestic happiness and the attractions of home and family>><sup>44</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Marilyn BUTLER, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987 (1975), p. XXXIV.

<sup>43</sup> Irene B. BEESEMYER, <<“I thought I never set my eyes on a finer figure of a man”: Maria Edgeworth Scrutinizes Masculinity in *Castle Rackrent*, *Ennui*, and *The Absentee*>>, Julie NASH, (ed.), *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, Cornwall, Ashgate, 2006, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Jane RENDALL, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States: 1780-1860*. Hampshire, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994 (1985), p. 110.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As explained throughout this essay, Jovellanos's educational programme is inspired in universal values like truth, justice, freedom, equality among social classes and genders, solidarity and respect for minorities, dialogue and peace. He believes in the need for social change, though he is against revolutionary methods. He rather claims for a profound educational reform to transform society from within, inspired in reason, experience, and pragmatism. Moreover, his pedagogical philosophy is based on freedom and progress.

Similarly, Maria Edgeworth puts forward a practical and sensible approach towards education, in order to inspire readers to concentrate on their moral perfection and self-improvement. She shuns frivolity and affectation from fashionable society, giving preference to commonsense, rationality, and moral values. She is one of the defenders of the supremacy of sense over sensibility, while she tries to reconcile reason and emotions in a balanced manner, in order to offer an integrated and holistic model for children to emulate. Her educational programme is based on realism. Therefore she excludes any elements of fantasy and imagination from her plays, as her ultimate goal is to convey a moralising message in her works and facilitate children's successful integration into society.

In summary, as illustrated in this essay, the Spaniard Gaspar de Jovellanos and the Irish Maria Edgeworth happen to share seminal ideas on children's education, gender equality, and belief in progress.

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