Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth: Official and Unofficial Ideology

GARY KELLY

THE FIRST few decades of the nineteenth century may be said to constitute the second phase of the invasion or appropriation of novel writing by large numbers of women — the first phase being the last three decades of the eighteenth century, the period of what J. M. S. Tompkins has dubbed "the English popular novel." In that first phase the decade of the 1790's — the decade of the Revolution and the reaction to it in England — was a kind of turning point for both men and women fiction writers, since it saw the polarization of a whole range of attitudes and beliefs which informed practice of the arts, including fiction. So that, while in many respects the place and the practice of women writers of fiction in the two decades after the 1790's were similar to what they had been in the two decades before, a revolution in reading had taken place, as part of the political and social revolutions of the 1790's. As the various works of the major woman writer of the 1790's, Mary Wollstonecraft, make clear, these revolutions could have special implications for women readers and women writers. These implications were pursued actively in the two or three decades after 1800 by women as well as men writers. Nevertheless, as one might expect, most women writers responded generally to the crisis of the 1790's in the same ways that men writers did, that is, they exhibited a sharpened interest in the relationship of the individual and society, in the way this relationship was mediated through the family, in the origins of character in early "education," and in the possibilities and mechanisms of change and transformation — especially moral change — in the individual, and thus in society at large (since society was still seen

as an agglomeration of individuals). Women writers exhibited this interest, too, very much as men writers did, by dealing in the individual case, in relations between individual men and women, as children and parents, as lovers, as husbands and wives.

Especially important as a fictional technique for expressing these dominant themes, then, is the character of men and women as actual or prospective members of a family unit, as participants in the "domestic affections," and thus, by extension, the character of men and women as sustainers or breakers of the social fabric. The nature of the social fabric, or the network of social conventions and institutions is itself, of course, problematical, and is often treated ambiguously, as a given condition of individual human existence which is both positive and negative in its effects on the individual. So a frequently occurring narrative figure in the fiction of this period is the riven family, the family broken either by excessive individualism on the part of one or more of its members, or by excessive conformity to social convention — often presented as slavish adherence to "Fashion" or to the values of "Society" (i.e., a particular upper-class social "set"). One can see these themes and figures at large in the "major" writers of this period certainly — in Austen, in Scott, in Mary Shelley, and others; however, the same themes and figures are seen in the "lesser" but "popular" (in several senses) women writers of the time, women with such diverse backgrounds, social and cultural connections, and fictional techniques as Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth. In their fictional practice these three writers illustrate the persistence and diversity of treatment of the themes and figures described above; and, in their popularity, they also illustrate the appeal of such themes and figures to the several classes of readers of their day. But two of these writers also illustrate the ways in which the conventional language of fiction of a particular period could be used to embody both "official" and "unofficial" ideologies, both a dominant and hegemonic patriarchal attitude to the relation between self and society, and a submerged and therefore covert feminist one.

Throughout her life, until she became a Quaker in 1824, Amelia Opie was celebrated for her beauty, her vivacity, her charm, her pretty singing voice, her excellent taste in dress, and

her moral fictions. Her mother died when she was just fifteen, she was raised by her father, married but did not have any children, and after her husband died she returned to her father's house to be his housekeeper and companion for the rest of his life. She was always known for both her femininity and her independence, for her sense of propriety and her liberal humanitarianism; and her fictions exhibit the same somewhat contradictory qualities, preaching conformity to the conventional sexual and family roles, but fascinated by deviations from those roles, incorporating criticism of the oppressive and unjust nature of social institutions and social convention, but reaffirming the dominance of social institutions and obligations over individual rights. Although she had published a novel and some verse before 1801, her public career as a writer of fiction began in that year with the publication of *The Father and Daughter, A Tale in Prose*, dedicated to her father. It was published by the notable and notably serious London house of Longman and Rees, and for the next two decades Longman, with others, continued to publish her "tales," and Amelia Opie held, with gradually diminishing effect, a place as a popular writer, publishing twenty-six volumes of fiction, although only *The Father and Daughter* and its successor, *Adeline Mowbray* (3 vols., 1804), remained popular past the early 1820's.

Central in her fictional arguments, then, is the relationship between a young woman protagonist (a version of the Sentimental novel's virtue — or fallen virtue — in distress) and a variety of men characters. The men are usually of three types — fathers, husbands, and suitors — but there are also men as friends or mentors, and as actual or would-be seducers. This structure is seen most clearly in the two fictions or "tales" written after her marriage, which above all the rest of her work established Amelia Opie as a popular moral writer for the next two decades, namely *The Father and Daughter* and *Adeline Mowbray.*

The first tale begins *in media res* as Agnes Fitzhenry (the name suggests a relationship with the Agnes of Elizabeth Inchbald's liberal and sentimental novel *Nature and Art*) travels by night over a frozen heath, with a moaning child at her bosom, towards her father's habitation, and wishing she had never left it. Her

story is then recounted in retrospect. In her youth "Agnes united to extreme beauty of face and person every accomplishment that belongs to her own sex, and a great degree of that strength of mind and capacity for acquiring knowledge supposed to belong exclusively to the other" (p. 3). However, her mother died when Agnes was very young, and her father, a merchant in a country town, decided not to remarry for his daughter's sake. This is the first debt of daughter to father (if we exclude Agnes's owing to him her very existence, a kind of debt frequently noted in Sentimental fictions dealing with parent-child relationships, and often seen as a moral obligation); however Agnes soon acquires a second and heavier one. Clifford, a handsome well-born officer, gains her heart and triumphs over her virtue. Agnes bears him a son, but learns from him that he swore never to marry her; he also tells her that since her elopement her father has decided to remarry; Agnes reflects on her "exchange" of father for lover. When Clifford admits that he plans to marry a City heiress Agnes decides to return "home," and sets out. The story has now reached the point of the opening of the book. When a maniac approaches Agnes as she is travelling with her son through a forest, and threatens to strangle her little Edward, Agnes receives a double shock — the maniac is her father, who lost his wits over the loss of his daughter and her virtue.

The tale could have ended at this point, or near it, for as a story it has reached a kind of closure. But Opie's work has really only begun. The rest of the tale sees Agnes put through a variety of agonies (and the variety, not plot, is the only real compositional principle); her father is confined in a Bedlam he himself was, before he became insane, responsible for building; she is helped by her former friend Caroline Seymour, but rejected by Caroline's father; she works herself almost to death to support herself and her child; she is helped by her old nurse's daughter Fanny, but finds that Fanny's interest in her has caused more conventionally-minded women to withdraw their children from Fanny's school; and she attempts to nurse her father back to health and sanity. Finally, Agnes's heroic sufferings win public sympathy and approval, and her father recovers his sanity just in time to recognize his daughter before he dies; Agnes can now die

too, and just as a double funeral is taking place her former lover, now Lord Mountcarrol, drives up in a coach, sees his son Edward, and takes him away to cheer the last years of his remorseful life. The narrator ends the tale with the hope that whoever falls as Agnes did may "regain the esteem of the world by patient suffering and virtuous exertion" (p. 234), and that the innocent may never listen to a seducer lest the image of a dear relation should haunt her through life. "For, where is the mortal who can venture to pronounce that his actions are of importance to no one, and that the consequences of his virtues or vices will be confined to himself alone?" (p. 235).

It is interesting that the fallen and the innocent she of the tale should become the "he" of this moral, for of course the function of the men in this fiction is clearly to be part of the moral economy which informs the tale's structure: a lover gained for a father lost; remorse, work, and social ostracism in return for the father regained; and perhaps even a son as a gage for futurity. Moreover, the one object of desire, Clifford, is absent from most of the tale, and the other, Agnes's father, is merely an object of devotion, so that the emphasis of the tale is thrown entirely on the "woman's" world of emotional experience, dramatized as a series of scenes of emotional distress, which earns the moral, and yet also overpays for it. Furthermore, in *The Father and Daughter* Opie does show signs of her friendship with Mary Wollstonecraft; for in Agnes Fitzhenry's time of need it is other women, not the absent lover or incapacitated father, who come to her rescue, in the form of Caroline Seymour (an idealized version of Opie herself) and Fanny (a composite of Wollstonecraft's youthful friend Fanny Blood and faithful servant Marguerite?). Women help women, virtually in the absence of men, just as in Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman*, published with Godwin's *Memoir* of his dead wife in her *Posthumous Works* (1798). If so, and if *The Father and Daughter* gains a certain resonance from (what would probably be available to readers in Opie's circle) a relationship with Wollstonecraft's posthumous novel and Godwin's *Memoirs* of her, then we may ask if there is a conflict in Opie's tale between its Wollstonecraftian demonstration of women helping women in the absence of men,

and its conservative attitude toward individual violation of social convention, an attitude which is represented in the novel by more than one man.

The Father and Daughter shows women helping women, in the absence of father, lover, husband; *Adeline Mowbray, or the Mother and Daughter* (1804) shows women corrupting women, another favourite theme of Mary Wollstonecraft. In this case it is the foolish mother (though would-be female "philosopher") whose neglect leaves her daughter practically defenceless against both her own passions and the prejudices and vices of a decadent "Society." Furthermore, in the central relationship between the sexes in this tale, that is, betwen Adeline and young Glenmurray (modelled on Godwin) Opie debates certain central aspects of Wollstonecraft's feminism, and Wollstonecraft's loves, as they bear on the conflict of individual freedoms and social responsibility, or, to put it another way (a way found at large in the polemical literature of the 1790's and after) the problem of rights as opposed to duties. As the narrator tells us near the end of volume one, after Adeline has begun living with Glenmurray without benefit of marriage, she "was not yet aware how much the perfection of the female character depends on respect even to what may be called the prejudices of others" (I, 220). "Prejudices" were, of course, precisely what Godwin and Wollstonecraft had attacked in their writings, prejudices, or those irrational beliefs held by members of a society to be truth, prejudices such as reverence for the institution of marriage, to which Godwin and Wollstonecraft had bowed when they decided themselves to break the tenets of their social philosophy and marry — as Godwin explained it in his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft, for the sake of her emotional comfort and social security.[1]

In *Adeline Mowbray*, then, the men characters function in ways already observed in its predecessor. The father is missing (a false father appears later in the tale), the mother is foolish, and so more emphasis is thrown on the object of desire, Glenmurray. What is desirable about him, however, is not his physical attributes or material possessions, but his intellectual powers, for when Adeline and her mother first meet Glenmurray at Bath, they meet "that author over whose works they had long delighted to medi-

tate, and who had completely led their imagination captive, before the fascination of his countenance and manners had come in aid of his eloquence" (I, 51). Here is clearly a "philosophic" Byronic hero, or "romantic" social critic, before his time. Unfortunately Glenmurray's pursuit of truth is so absolute that he ignores prejudice altogether, to his own cost, and the cost of Adeline and Mrs. Mowbray, who find that their acquaintance with Glenmurray is enough to frighten off more conventionally-minded acquaintances. Glenmurray even believes that hostility and persecution are tests of the truth of his arguments, and so perseveres in his errors, for his blameless life and active virtues are of no avail with the public in the face of what is seen as the mischievous tendency of his works. Glenmurray is, then, a noble hero, but he is mistaken in his views, and thus a false mentor for Adeline. Yet Glenmurray's counter in the story is another self-interested would-be seducer, Sir Patrick O'Carrol, who marries Mrs. Mowbray and believes that his new position as Adeline's step-father will make it easier to seduce her. Adeline flees home and her false father, to seek "protection" from Glenmurray, and in doing so, of course, she has to endure separation from her beloved parent, her mother.[2] Most of the rest of the novel then consists of a series of distresses brought upon Adeline by her and Glenmurray's opposition to marriage on principle. Though they are perfectly virtuous in every other respect, this conduct brings upon them social ostracism, the suspicion of a series of virtuous and benevolent friends, and, for Adeline, the insults of men who believe that she must be of easy virtue to live openly with a man without the "protection" of marriage. After Glenmurray's death the tale bears a decided resemblance to *The Father and Daughter* in its emphasis on Adeline's guilt and remorse. Adeline decides to marry Charles Berrendale, who has long admired her, in order to protect herself from insults from men who had known her only as Glenmurray's "kept woman"; however Berrendale turns out to be miserly, a glutton, and repulsive, and moreover keeps her from that society with her own sex which was her principal motive for marrying in the first place. Adeline now realizes that affliction is to be her lot, but welcomes it, as the just punishment for disobeying her mother. After some further vicissitudes, in which

Adeline's capacity for suffering and her benevolence impress the virtuous and convert the vicious, she is finally reconciled with her mother, but only on her deathbed. Home at last, Adeline dies happy, her head on the bosom of her faithful black servant Savanna, and mourned by her mother, her daughter, her virtuous friend the Quaker Mrs. Pemberton, and her erstwhile moral counsellor Dr. Norberry (a portrait of Opie's father Dr. Alderson).

After what has been said about *The Father and Daughter* it is hardly necessary to point out the similarities between the moral of this tale and the fictional argument in *Adeline Mowbray*. Once again, however, one must be struck by the contradictions between what the tale purports to argue — as Glenmurray's friend Willie Douglas puts it, "'The opinion of the world is every thing to a woman'" (II, 232) — and the tale's obvious interest in the sufferings of an emotionally extravagant and publicly misunderstood woman. Adeline's error is an honest one, and it is in allowing her public character to become detached from her "true" moral character. It was, Amelia Opie must have thought, Mary Wollstonecraft's error, too, and Opie had good reasons for knowing the circumstances of that error very well.[3] *Adeline Mowbray* is in a way, then, an Anti-Jacobin novel, and this fact explains part of its popularity; but its popularity was also due to the fact that, in its arrangement of men and women characters, it reinforced a version of the ideology and culture of patriarchy which men and women readers still very close to the decade of Revolution wanted and needed to have reinforced. At the same time, it offered those readers a chance to dwell on the spectacle of freedom of a kind, and of an "authentic" moral and sexual relationship; and yet this relationship could only be experienced at a terrible cost in the face of social conventions and social institutions which, however wrong or unjust, could not be seriously undermined for the sake of mere "theory." In the conflict between self and society, between rights and duties, it is the latter which must and do triumph. This argument Opie, like many men and women fiction writers of her time, dramatizes largely through the nature of men and women characters and the relationships between them in her "tales."

Like its predecessor, however, *Adeline Mowbray* is also open to questioning by readers who might wish to misread what the tale overtly seems to argue, and find a subversive "unofficial" text in the "official" one. There is too much coincidence in the "plot": why does Glenmurray have to die when he does, or at all; why are Adeline's virtuous friends so unsuccessful in supporting and assisting her; why do Adeline's female enemies and male would-be seducers always start up at just the wrong time for her; why do Adeline's virtuous projects for self-redemption and independence, such as her day-school, have to fail? Clearly, the reader who wishes to find in the "official" text a covert subversive text may certainly do so. The question then is, was this subversion deliberate, or at least an unconscious rebellion, on Opie's part? However one answers that question, there is enough evidence from contemporary women's — and men's — letters and diaries, as well as their novels, to incline one to believe that such a secret readership could and did exist, a readership who could see a model relationship between woman and man in the relationship of Adeline and Glenmurray — in spite of the dominance of patriarchy, both in the real social world and in the world of Opie's tale — just as they could see a model relationship, in spite of the chance of death, in the relationship of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, the originals who could, very easily, be read into Opie's tale.

Amelia Opie certainly went on, over the next eighteen years, to develop a greater polish and a greater variety of narrative modes than she exhibited in these three early fictions, but the essential elements of her fiction remained. In some ways, the potentially subversive contradictions in her plots, especially in *Adeline Mowbray*, were eliminated or scaled down, but *The Father and Daughter* and *Adeline Mowbray* did remain her most popular and best known works, and were reprinted long after Opie herself became a Quaker, and ceased to write. But while she was still writing and was still at the height of her modest powers as a writer of tales, a woman novelist of very different background made a great *éclat* with her pen after she had already acquired a considerable notoriety in real life by precisely the same kinds of extravagance, and defiance of social convention and social insti-

tutions, which Opie described in her tales but refrained from practising herself.

Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* was published in 1816, the same year in which Opie published *St. Valentine's Eve*, a revision of the themes and characters of her first fiction, *The Dangers of Coquetry*. *Glenarvon* was, as the "World" knew, a *roman à clef*, a published fictional version of the public scandal of Lady Caroline's affair with Byron. But what *Glenarvon* was supposed to do, of course, was to make public the private feelings, sufferings, and emotional extravagance whose public face the "World" already knew. And so, *Glenarvon* was popular. It is difficult to believe that Lady Caroline, interested as she obviously was in Sentimental fiction, did not know of *Adeline Mowbray*, and just as difficult to believe that Amelia Opie, lively as was her interest in all things to do with the "World," did not hear of the Byron affair. For, in fact, there are a great many similarities between the structure of *Glenarvon* and the structure of Amelia Opie's fiction. Is it possible that Lamb, whom Byron himself described as having "an imagination heated by novel-reading," learned how to enact an extravagant emotional affair by reading novels and tales such as those written by Amelia Opie? Certainly Lamb's novel could be seen as repaying a debt to fiction writers such as Opie. There is in *Glenarvon* the badly educated or neglected heroine (Calantha Delaval), left to develop bad habits of emotional self-indulgence and extravagance; there is the model husband (Henry Mowbray, Earl of Avondale), model but for his excess of indulgence toward his wife; there is the villainous machiavel (William Buchanan); and there is of course the heartless male coquet (Glenarvon). In addition, there is a gallery of lesser types — the scheming corrupt older woman (Lady Margaret), the neglected child (Calantha's son Harry), a few more evil men (Count Gondimar; Count Viviani, who turns out to be Glenarvon), virtuous female friends (Mrs. Seymour and her daughter) whose friendship for the heroine is — alas! — unavailing. And then Lamb tosses in a few colourful eccentrics, such as the bard-like wanderer Camioli and his prophetess-national leader daughter Elinor, also known as St. Clare (she too falls in love with Glenarvon). Mixed in with

this variegated character typology are some historical and political elements — the novel is set in Ireland during the Irish Rebellion — lacings of sublime and picturesque nature, along with vestiges of the Gothic romance of murder, seduction, disguise, and disinheritance. But none of this is too alien to the repertory of fictional elements employed by Opie and others.

Glenarvon is certainly a loose assortment of elements from a variety of fictional sub-genres available at the time. It is as if Lamb had not one but several languages of fiction jarring together in her mind; and this in turn suggests to us that she had some difficulty grasping the real-life experience with the language of fiction, some difficulty in transforming autobiography into coherent form. And if, as suggested above, Lamb like so many women of her time learned to read life, and men in her life, through her reading in "the English popular novel," then the reasons for the incoherence in *Glenarvon* are that Lamb lived her affair with Byron in the first place through the character types and plots she had learned from that fiction (amongst which one might include Byron's verse narratives), and that the life-experience could not be ordered coherently, or grasped completely by the language of fiction because the experience was in itself contradictory, as contradictory as Wollstonecraft had said that kind of relationship between the sexes always would be. In other words, Lady Caroline's fiction, particularly in its treatment of the characters of and relations between men and women, makes the same apparent assertion of hegemonic patriarchal values in Amelia Opie's tales, but reveals too a real ambivalence about the right of those values to hegemony.

For in *Glenarvon* we run into the same problems of coherence seen in *Adeline Mowbray*. If Avondale, for all his ideal qualities and liberal views, turns out to have the same patriarchal and paternalistic values as other men, then Glenarvon, for all his anti-social character and qualities, turns out to represent patriarchy as well. There is, in the first place, the *coup de foudre* of his impact on Calantha. Calantha, while admiring the majesty of some ancient ruins and reflecting on the *ubi sunt* theme, comes upon a solitary youth:

> She gazed for one moment upon his countenance — she marked it. It was one of those faces which, having once beheld, we never afterwards forget. It seemed as if the soul of passion had been stamped and printed upon every feature. The eye beamed into life as it threw up its dark and ardent gaze, with a look nearly of inspiration, while the proud curl of the upper lip expressed haughtiness and bitter contempt; yet, even mixed with these fierce characteristic feelings, an air of melancholy and dejection shaded and softened every harsher expression. Such a countenance spoke to the heart, and filled it with one vague yet powerful interest — so strong, so undefinable, that it could not easily be overcome.
>
> Calantha felt the power, not then alone, but evermore.
>
> (II, 31-2)

Love is here asserted as the extra-social, absolute, timeless plane of experience which clearly must rival "virtue" (the officially approved absolute insisted upon by the narrator); and it is love very different from the love embodied in the social institution of marriage which Calantha has already experienced with Avondale, and found, as social experience is, to be merely a relative thing, not extra-social, not absolute, and certainly not timeless. One is reminded very forcibly here of the treatment of these themes in *Wuthering Heights*, another novel imbued with Byronism, and one which bears remarkable similarities to *Glenarvon*. Glenarvon's function, then, as the male representative of the extra-social absolute, is made even clearer when the narrator recounts his background:

> It was amidst the ruins of ancient architecture, and the wild beauties of Italian scenery, that his splendid genius and uncommon faculties were first developed. Melancholy, unsocial, without a guide, he had centered upon himself every strong interest, and every aspiring hope. Dwelling ever in the brilliant regions of fancy, his soul turned with antipathy from the ordinary cares of life. . . . One object of interest succeeded another; a life of suspense was preferred to apathy; and the dark counsels of unprincipled associates, soon led one, already disloyal in heart, to the very brink of destruction. Flushed with the glow of intemperate heat, or pale with the weariness of secret woe, he vainly sought in a career of pleasure, for that happiness which his restless mind prevented him from enjoying. (II, 81-2)

Disillusioned with society, Glenarvon then withdraws into self, and into anti-social selfishness: "He had been wronged, and he

knew not how to pardon: he had been deceived, and he existed henceforward, but to mislead others" (II, 83). And so Glenarvon goes to Ireland, and "fascinated with the romantic splendour of ideal liberty, and intent upon flying from the tortures of remembrance," he becomes a leader in the Irish rebellion.

Thus personal experience and feeling are linked to politics in a way similar to that in *Adeline Mowbray*, although the relationship is reversed in Lamb's novel, with private experience determining political action, rather than political or philosophical beliefs affecting private life. Glenarvon is a figure of fascination for the Irish populace, as well as for Calantha, and representing the people in this romantic mix of passion and politics is, not surprisingly, another young woman, Elinor St. Clare (another version of Lady Caroline Lamb), who loves Glenarvon, and becomes his political *aide-de camp*, following him about in male attire. Everything in *Glenarvon*, as in *Adeline Mowbray*, is reduced to relationships of passion, and the male world of politics and public action in particular is reduced or converted (depending upon the relative value one places on male and female worlds of experience) to the field of action in which women are the specialists, the philosophers, and at least equal with men as agents, namely, love and passion. This reduction in itself surely constitutes a subversion of patriarchy.

However, once Glenarvon has been introduced into the novel, and has claimed Calantha as his own (he insists on going through a kind of marriage ceremony with her), there is really nowhere for the story to go. The action for the rest of volume two lurches about from place to place, picking up and dropping a variety of minor characters and subplots, but it remains snagged on the "courtship" between Glenarvon and Calantha, as scene after scene dwells on the same kind of impassioned declarations of love, until Calantha "falls," that is, her love for Glenarvon produces a public scandal, reprimands from all her relations, and social ostracism. The novel, by the way, is rather vague as to exactly how Calantha falls, and certainly emphasizes the loss of public reputation rather than any loss of sexual chastity. Then, early in volume three Calantha and Glenarvon are forced to part, Glenarvon soon finds other more "Social" loves, and Calantha is left desolate,

triumphed over by her female rivals in Society. A small protest is registered here, as to society's double standard on sexual indiscretion, as the narrator observes:

> That which causes the tragic end of a woman's life [the context suggests that "life" means reputation and thus social existence, rather than mortal life], is often but a moment of amusement and folly in the history of a man. Women, like toys, are sought after, and trifled with, and then thrown by with every varying caprice. Another, and another still succeed; but to each thus cast away, the pang has been beyond thought, the stain indelible, and the wound mortal. (III, 99-100)

But Calantha's husband remains loyal, until he is shot and killed by Glenarvon in a duel (or stabbed to death in a later version); the last hundred pages of the novel are crowded with a confusion of politics, war, rebellion, and a series of revelations, Calantha and Avondale die, and Glenarvon himself dies at sea, pursuing a ghost-ship, the Flying Dutchman. The novel concludes as it has opened, as a congeries of elements from various kinds of fiction of the day, including the political novel, the historical novel, the novel of manners, the literary-social satire, and the Gothic romance.

Thus the structure of the novel as a whole consists of an opening section, full of characters, complex relationships, incidents, past histories, and some social and historical material, including Calantha's marriage to Avondale; this is followed by a long central section of impassioned courtship, in defiance of Society's opinion, family duties, and the institution of marriage; and this section is followed by Calantha's "ruin" in the eyes of Society, her abandonment by Glenarvon for more socially gratifying affairs in England, the return of her husband, and more crowded subplots, relationships, revelations of past histories, and stirring public events. This spatial structure can be seen, then, as a private extra-social world of passion in the centre, surrounded by a crowded, complex, confusing, and deceptive social world; and in this structure the principal men characters, Avondale and Glenarvon, come into their own, as it were, or emerge out of the level of being — social or extra-social — which is appropriate to each, and which each represents. As in *Adeline Mowbray*, then, there is

a conflict between what *Glenarvon* seems to mean officially, and what it says unofficially about the relationship between conventional patriarchal social values, and the private world of passionate experience.

The novel appears to argue that the individual, private, passionate "woman's" world of experience must be sacrificed to social, public, and conventional patriarchal standards if there is a conflict between the two, as there is a conflict between married love and "absolute" love, between Avondale and Glenarvon, in Calantha; but in fact all the interest of the novel is in passion as an absolute, it gives the central place in its structure to this passion, it reduces public thematic material to the private passions in all parts of the novel, and it "exposes" the public social world (as in the celebrated satire on the Princess of Madagascar) as a world of intrigue, hypocrisy, deceit, self-interest, and irreconcilable relative values. All that is left is a rival absolute to absolute passion, namely "virtue"; but in this novel the representatives of "virtue" — Mrs. Seymour, Lord Avondale to some extent, Calantha's father — are seen to be not only ineffective, but moreover to represent "propriety," the code of behaviour validated by social convention, not by absolute and extra-social moral authority. Passion remains the only effectively dramatized extra-social — and anti-social — world of meaning in the novel.

There is an obvious similarity here to the fiction of Amelia Opie, although Lamb is more interested in the heroine's acts of emotional extravagance than Opie, and much less interested in the repayment of extravagance by remorse. The novel's real interest, that is, is in a "female" world of emotional experience which is overtly presented as subversive of the dominant patriarchal system of social convention, and which is deplored accordingly, but which is also the real subject of celebration in the novel. It should be pointed out, too, that the status of *Glenarvon* as a *roman à clef* only reinforces this potential for being read as a subversive novel: Glenarvon can feed off the public reputation of Byron, just as Calantha can feed off the public notoriety of its author — Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb, along with many others, can be "read into" the novel — that is why it was popular. But Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb were public figures precisely

because of their notoriously anti-social behaviour and attitudes and their public celebration of passion and contempt for convention — though Byron tried to restrict his anti-social attitudes primarily to his published writing. Even then he had originally no intention of advertising himself through the work which made him famous, *Childe Harold*, whereas Lamb was much more willing to exhibit herself (she was accused of being an exhibitionist in her dress) both in her behaviour during their affair and (to vindicate her behaviour) in her fictional account of the affair.

In fact, the connection between Opie's fiction and Lamb's is even more obvious in Lamb's next novel, *Graham Hamilton*, where the central woman character, Lady Orville, behaves much more like the financially improvident female protagonists of many of Opie's tales than like the emotionally extravagant heroine of *Glenarvon*. But *Graham Hamilton*, with its autobiographical form and its constitutionally indecisive and impulsive hero, is also very much like some of the "Tales of Fashionable Life" of another very popular woman writer of the period. In its shortened form, its attempts at more earnest moral didacticism, its thorough attack on decadent "Society," its celebration of "simplicity" and "domestic affections," *Graham Hamilton* must give rise to speculation that, in her attempts to reduce the feminist and subversive element in her fiction, Lady Caroline Lamb looked very closely indeed at the fiction of the most moral popular writer of the day, Maria Edgeworth. For if Amelia Opie's tales represent the popular-sentimental tradition, and Lady Caroline Lamb's represent what might be called the popular-sensational, or popular-romantic tradition, then the tales and novels of Maria Edgeworth could perhaps be described as the popular-didactic. Although Opie's tales and Lamb's novels have obvious didactic intent, Maria Edgeworth's fiction is dominated by social and moral purpose to a much greater and even more obvious extent. An important superficial resemblance, for example, is that both Edgeworth's tales and Lamb's *Glenarvon* have an Irish setting. But certainly the most popular of Edgeworth's fictions — apart from *Castle Rackrent*, which first made her a writer of importance to the reading public — were her *Tales of Fashionable Life*, which consolidated her public position, established firm grounds for her

popularity, which exhibited the chief characteristics of all of her fiction with a purpose, and which would have been most likely to interest Lady Caroline Lamb as she thought about writing *Graham Hamilton*. The *Tales of Fashionable Life* consisted of two series, published in 1809 and 1812, and thus Edgeworth's main basis of popularity was in the years between Opie's greatest popularity in the first years of the nineteenth century and the publication of *Glenarvon*, by far Lady Caroline Lamb's most popular novel, in 1816.

Of the *Tales of Fashionable Life* the most important, and again among those most likely to have interested the author of *Glenarvon* and *Graham Hamilton*, are "Ennui," published in the first series, and "Vivian" and "The Absentee," published in the second. These three tales, unlike, say, Edgeworth's novels of middle- and upper-class life such as *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806), and *Helen* (1834), but like Lamb's *Graham Hamilton*, have men as the central and by far the dominant characters. "Ennui" is an episodic first-person account of the life of Lord Glenthorn, who has been trained for no active occupation in life but that of gentleman. As a result he suffers from *ennui*, the moral and psychological disease of those of independent means; but since he has no active occupation Glenthorn is in fact the opposite of independent. Lacking any strong personal motive or ambition he is constantly put upon and exploited by others, and it is only when he encounters some difficulty which he himself must resolve that he loses for a moment his sense of *ennui*. Imbedded in this narrative, then, is the traditional Christian idea of life as a scene of struggle, and thus as an education for eternity. Issuing as the tale does from the ideas and concerns found in Maria's and her father's collaborative work, *Essays on Professional Education* (also 1809), "Ennui," in all its fictional elements, is thoroughly subdued to ideas of transcendent moral responsibility to oneself (ideas of a thoroughly conventional kind), and, the corollary, to ideas of social responsibility, or duty. For Glenthorn's *ennui* is not just an affliction to himself; it leads to his neglect of all responsibility to others, from his first wife (who runs away with his corrupt steward, Crawley) to the tenants on his Irish estate.

The choice of a man, and a landed aristocrat, as first-person narrator and central character enables Edgeworth to show more clearly and immediately the consequences of a lack of "active virtue," since it is conventionally a man's role to be active. And so it is only when Glenthorn discovers that he is not "lord" Glenthorn, but a mere commoner, and that he must earn his own livelihood, that he sets about studying the law, and begins to enjoy life. Of course Glenthorn does have significant relations with women in his careers, first as an idle gentleman, and then as a professional-in-training. It is an indication of the emptiness of his genteel life that he marries merely for money, neglects his wife, and lets her run off with her paramour to certain ruin; it is just as clear an indication of his new moral purpose that, as he eradicates the idle habits of a lifetime and learns to be active, he is motivated largely by love for a good woman, the virtuous and feminine, but witty and independent Miss Delamere. Needless to say, by the end of the tale "Glenthorn" has proven himself worthy of this reward for active virtue.

There is, of course, more to the tale than this; there is, especially, the "local colour" of the Irish portions of the tale, including Irish types speaking in dialect. These aspects of the tale are not mere ornaments or comic and loco-descriptive coating for the pill of didacticism. Edgeworth, for all her appropriation of eighteenth-century ideas and fictional techniques, shows herself to be a true participant in the French Revolution debate in Britain in the strong sense of community she implants in her fictions, that is, in her emphasis on social and civic "duties"; and her exemplification of the lack of a sense of community in men characters who are irresponsible and self-centred is characteristic of the debate on rights *versus* duties initiated in the 1790's, and carried over into Romantic fiction. For it is men particularly who, as leaders in the "public" sphere of human activities, must accept responsibility for the preservation and progress of the community. Edgeworth, as reviewers such as Francis Jeffrey recognized, was both a conservative and a progressive, and thus liable to become very popular with the middle-class readers who were "progressive" in their opposition to what they saw as a decadent and idle aristocratic culture (Glenthorn's career as a Lord and gentleman,

which includes gaming and debauchery), and yet conservative in their resistance to demands for social and institutional change from the lower orders in society (Glenthorn's opposition to the mob during the Irish rebellion, for "Ennui," like *Glenarvon*, is set in that period). Thus, although Edgeworth's hero in "Ennui" has many of the qualities of the men who are objects of desire in the fiction of Opie and Lamb, he, and the tale in which he lives, are devoid of fascinating passion and unconventional qualities or anti-social attitudes and activities. The very "disease" from which Glenthorn suffers, *ennui*, is a proof against such fascinations; and the self-directed irony of Glenthorn's autobiography, the anecdotal form of the narrative, and the moral earnestness of the tone after Glenthorn's forced conversion to "duty" — a professional life and social usefulness — also work to exclude from the tale any interest in the "unofficial" world of passion and the individualistic values which passion represents. Indeed, what happens in "Ennui" is that the central male character is given the significant weaknesses to bear, and the object of desire, Miss Delamere, is made the representative, with her father (who bestows her on Glenthorn as a reward), of the official social values of activity, responsibility, steadiness of character, and duty. There are weak female characters in "Ennui," but they do not occupy the centre of the tale as they do in the fiction of Opie and Lamb. In "Ennui" there are none of the contradictions found in *Adeline Mowbray* or *Glenarvon*.

If one were to find such subversive contradictions in a tale by Edgeworth one might expect to find them in "Vivian." Dealing entirely with Society and lacking the specific social community of a "national" tale, "Vivian" has a central character who is given to impulsive actions, and it has a sad ending. Moreover, there are many resemblances between "Vivian" and Lady Caroline Lamb's *Graham Hamilton*, and one wonders if, in naming one of her characters Viviani in *Glenarvon* (in fact Viviani turns out to be Glenarvon), Lady Caroline was acknowledging a debt to or a critical revision of Edgeworth's tale. Certainly the official moral of *Glenarvon* and the official moral and much of the furniture of *Graham Hamilton* are very close indeed to those found in "Vivian," so that one would suspect Lady Caroline of referring, if only

in memory, to Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life* when she decided to become a fiction writer herself. However Edgeworth's tales, and even "Vivian," are very different from the novels of Lamb and the tales of Opie. It is true, for example, that Vivian is a creature of impulse, lacking in steadiness of character like Graham Hamilton; it is true, too, that Vivian loves and is loved by a virtuous young woman, Selina Sydney, who resembles Gertrude Hamilton in *Graham Hamilton*; it is also true that Vivian is seduced by a married woman, just as Hamilton is "seduced" (though not sexually) by Lady Orville; and it is true that Vivian, in his foolish impulsiveness, runs up debts even larger than those incurred by Hamilton; but after all this Edgeworth's tale does deal much more with the social consequences of Vivian's weakness of character, which is not even impulsiveness so much as the far less glamorous and thoroughly unsentimental defect of want of decision. Thus he, like Glenthorn in "Ennui," is manipulated by others, right up to his own death in a duel, and is impulsive only through lack of steady principles and will to act on them. But whereas the conflict between passion and social duty is seen more clearly in "Vivian" than in the fiction of Opie and Lamb, Edgeworth's tale decisively resolves the conflict in favour of duty, dwells very little on scenes of passion, and concentrates instead on attacking the kinds of selfishness which undermine duty and the "public interest." For if "Vivian," like "Ennui," issues from the moral and social values of the Edgeworths' *Professional Education*, then Vivian's profession, the one he cannot maintain because of his indecisiveness, is the profession of elected legislator. The surest sign, perhaps, of the difference between Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life* and those of Lady Caroline Lamb is that in the latter's *Glenarvon* the badly educated, "romantic" heroine Calantha is in the centre of the novel, whereas the badly educated and "romantic" Lady Julia Lidhurst in "Vivian" plays a minor role, and is finally just pushed out of the way. Yet in his way Vivian represents the same officially negative world of value as does Calantha — as the Machiavellian character Marmaduke Lidhurst says of Vivian, "you'll find he will be but a woman's man, after all!" (p. 245). Vivian throughout his tale is like Glen-

thorn for half of "Ennui" — he is a "bad" man because he is like a woman.

"The Absentee," Edgeworth's other popular tale from *Tales of Fashionable Life*, is a kind of "remake" of "Ennui," but here the errors of the father's extravagant and idle generation are redeemed by the moral and social education to duty and responsibility in the son, Lord Colambre, who is then appropriately rewarded with the hand of the virtuous and feminine Grace Nugent. "The Absentee," like "Ennui" and "Vivian" is also a "professional" tale, dealing with another man's profession, that of landowner, and in this "professionalization" of a traditional "gentleman's" occupation, one sees clearly too the bourgeois social values for which Edgeworth was one of the most popular propagandists in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In all three of these representative and popular tales, then, women are part of the system of earthly rewards and punishments: society, in its institutions of professions and property, is naturally man's, not woman's, estate. Whether the tale be exemplary or admonitory, the function of men and women characters, and the plotting of the relationships between them, signify the same thing. Of course Edgeworth was aware of the great role women had to play in the progressive conservative model of ideal social relations, and in novels such as *Leonora*, *Belinda*, and *Patronage* she dealt at large with that topic; but however much importance she attributed to women as moral guides and family mediators, as well as specialists in the humane sentiments and in close domestic observation, she still saw women, as did almost all men fiction writers, in terms of either a reward (if virtuous, "sensible," and well-educated) or a punishment (if badly educated, selfish, and extravagant) for men. There is, then, almost no covert feminism in the fiction of Maria Edgeworth, and this certainly sets her apart from Amelia Opie and Lady Caroline Lamb, in spite of the thematic repertory and formal and stylistic language of fiction which they shared.

In conclusion, we may ask if Amelia Opie, having "read" Mary Wollstonecraft's works and life, and Godwin's *Memoir*, wished to refute those texts in *The Father and Daughter* and *Adeline Mowbray*, and thus take her place in the popular "offi-

cial" ideology of the day by dealing with the conflict of rights and duties as it bore on women especially; and we can go on to ask if those tales' fascination with the "unofficial" feminist ideology which they embodied reflected their author's own fascination for values and experiences which she, unlike Caroline Lamb, never allowed herself to live. We can ask what conflicts Lady Caroline Lamb herself experienced as she read her own experience of the conflict of self and society through fictions such as Opie's, and perhaps through Wollstonecraft's life and writings as well; or we can read with her Maria Edgeworth's wonderfully consistent expressions of the official ideology, and see Lamb attempting to appropriate Edgeworth's fictional language as she tried strenuously but failed to cleave to the official ideology. In the tales and novels of Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth we can certainly see three popular women fiction writers participating in their age's chief debate, the debate between rights and duties; and we can see how women writers might use character and plot to express their views in that debate. But we can also see that characters could be used, in varying relationships to other fictional elements such as plot, dialogue, historical and social setting, and narrative mode, to contain (in the case of Opie and Lamb) or else to exclude (in the case of Edgeworth) "unofficial" and feminist values in the face of their "official" values and beliefs — the values and beliefs of a society dominated, in spite of recent social change and upheaval, by yet another version of the ideology of patriarchy.

NOTES

[1] Opie had good reason to feel ambivalent about the relationship of Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Godwin had proposed to and been rejected by her when she was still unmarried, in the summer of 1796, only weeks before he became involved in his romance with Wollstonecraft.

[2] I have described the place of Opie's relationship with her mother in "Discharging Debts: The Moral Economy of Amelia Opie's Fiction," *The Wordsworth Circle*, 11 (1980), 198-203.

[3] In the letters to Wollstonecraft from Opie in the Abinger MSS. (Bodleian Library, Oxford) the latter exhibits a fascination for Wollstonecraft, and a peculiar mixture of independence and submissiveness to her.