

Fecha de recepción: 20 abril 2014
Fecha de aceptación: 20 mayo 2014
Fecha de publicación: 10 febrero 2015
URL: <http://oceanide.netne.net/articulos/art7-3.php>
Oceánide número 7, ISSN 1989-6328

Raising a Family: Sarah Harriet Burney and Maria Edgeworth on Education

Carmen María FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ
(EOI Santiago de Compostela/Universidade da Coruña, Spain)

RESUMEN:

Sarah Harriet Burney (1771-1844) fue una prolífica escritora británica que vivió en el siglo diecinueve, además de ser hermanastra de la aclamada novelista Frances Burney. Tras la reciente reedición de su último volumen, los estudios de género y los estudios culturales han vuelto la atención hacia la obra de Sarah Harriet, que revela mucha información sobre la sociedad británica previctoriana. Este artículo explora un aspecto que no se ha estudiado hasta ahora y se propone una lectura de sus cinco obras (*Clarentine* [1796], *Geraldine Fauconberg* [1808], *Traits of Nature* [1812], *Tales of Fancy* [1816-20] y *The Romance of Private Life* [1839]) desde el punto de vista de los reformadores Maria y Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Un examen minucioso de la ficción de Sarah Harriet demuestra que hay muchas similitudes entre sus ideas y los principios de los Edgeworth expuestos en el ensayo *Practical Education* (1798) y en *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) de Maria Edgeworth, lo que demuestra la clara influencia de los autores angloirlandeses. Aunque nunca ofreció un tratado educativo, Sarah Harriet introdujo muchos temas significativos en sus obras, como la cuestionable utilidad de la educación basada en el género y la necesidad de una reforma radical del patriarcado. En este sentido, Sarah Harriet debe ser relacionada con feministas como Mary Wollstonecraft o Mary Hays.

Palabras clave: Sarah Harriet Burney, Maria Edgeworth, literatura británica, literatura del siglo diecinueve, educación

ABSTRACT:

Sarah Harriet Burney (1771-1844) was a prolific nineteenth-century British woman writer and the half-sister of the celebrated novelist Frances Burney. After the recent reedition of Sarah Harriet's last volume, gender studies and cultural studies are turning attention to her *oeuvre* which reveals considerable information about society in pre-Victorian Britain. This paper explores one aspect of Sarah Harriet's writing which has not been studied so far and proposes a reading of her five works (*Clarentine* [1796], *Geraldine Fauconberg* [1808], *Traits of Nature* [1812], *Tales of Fancy* [1816-20] and *The Romance of Private Life* [1839]) from the point of view of the educational reformers Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth. A close examination of Sarah Harriet's fiction shows that there are lots of similarities between her ideas and the Edgeworths' principles as stated in their essay *Practical Education* (1798) and in Maria Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) which is revelatory of the clear influence of the Anglo-Irish authors. Though she never offered an educational treatise, Sarah Harriet introduced a good deal of significant issues in her works, such as the questionable utility of gender-based education and the need for a radical reform of patriarchy. In this sense, she must be related to feminist writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Hays.

Keywords: Sarah Harriet Burney, Maria Edgeworth, British literature, nineteenth-century literature, education

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the least-known British women writers of the early nineteenth century is Frances Burney's half-sister, Sarah Harriet Burney (1771-1844), whose productions have been brought to light thanks to modern scholars, such as Lorna J. Clark, the editor of Sarah Harriet's correspondence and last volume. Frances described Sarah Harriet in her *Early Journals and Letters* as "one of the most innocent, artless, *queer* little things you ever saw, & all together, she is a very sweet, & a very engaging Child" (qtd. Clark, 2007: 39). In 1781, after her mother's death, Sarah Harriet was sent to Switzerland, where she soon became fluent in French and improved her music skills. A lover of Italy and one-time resident of Rome and Florence, Sarah Harriet admired Maria Edgeworth whom she considered "the most useful author, whether male or female, now existing" (Clark, 1997: 179) and Jane Austen—she punctually received copies of Austen's productions from the publisher Henry Colburn (Clark, 1995: 22; Clark, 1997: lxi). Sarah Harriet always wrote with an economic aim in mind and also worked as a governess and a companion of a young invalid (Clark, 2003: 42-3). Apart from nursing her father in his last years, Frances's half-sister helped Dr. Burney to transcribe his manuscripts. Vying in popularity with Frances during the nineteenth century, the youngest daughter's merits cannot be underrated. Several of her novels ran to second editions, and their translations fared very well on the continent (Clark 2000: 122). In the literary realm, "little Sal"—as she was familiarly called—composed five works: *Clarentine* (1796), *Geraldine Fauconberg* (1808), *Traits of Nature* (1812), *Tales of Fancy* (1816-20)—including *The Shipwreck* and *Country Neighbours; or The Secret*—and *The Romance of Private Life* (1839)—consisting of *The Renunciation* and *The Hermitage*.

This is a paper about women in intellectual history. The aim is to analyze Sarah Harriet's educational views and suggest that she was a follower or a practitioner of the ideas promoted by the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) and her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817), who had a very close relationship with their foster country, Ireland. The daughter of an enterprising member of the Protestant *élite*, Maria will always be remembered for having inaugurated the regionalist novel, and, more specifically, the Big House novel with *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a text which inspired her great friend Sir Walter Scott, and later, Ivan

Turgenev. As for Richard Lovell Edgeworth, he belonged to The Lunar Society and had important contacts on the Continent. He gave his daughter a solid education in literature, economy, sociology and history, so Maria read Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke and Edmund Spenser, among others. Important public figures, such as Erasmus Darwin or Josiah Wegwood, frequented the Edgeworth household. Father and daughter believed in the progress of education "from the cradle to the grave", as they explained in the preface to *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809).

The role of mothers in Maria's *Belinda* (1801) and *Helen* (1834) as influenced by Sarah Harriet's works has been exposed elsewhere (Fernández, 2012), but the aim now is to focus on Sarah Harriet as an educational writer. Rather than examining the Anglo-Irish authoress's tales, which would require a totally different approach, we would like to turn our attention to *Practical Education* (1798) and *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795). Maria did more than half of the writing of the former while the technical chapters were written by Richard Lovell himself (Butler, 1972: 169). *Letters* means a valuable sketch of issues which will later permeate Maria's feminocentric fiction. Our analysis must compulsorily bear in mind two points. First, it is easy to relate Sarah Harriet and Maria Edgeworth at a personal level: both spent part of their lives devoted to their fathers and scholars have amply discussed the kind of dependence existing in each case (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984; Spender, 1986: 272, 285; Kowaleski-Wallace, 1989; Fernández 2013a: 4-5). According to the feminist Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Maria Edgeworth must be singled out since she promoted a new style patriarchy in which no obvious signs of tyranny or repression exists (1991:21) and it is time to examine Sarah Harriet's views in this aspect. Second, at the time Burney and Edgeworth wrote, overt feminist statements could ruin a woman's reputation. The pervading strategy we find in Sarah Harriet's fiction consists of using irony and comedy to play with cultural conventions, which was common practice among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers to combat patriarchal nonsense, to reveal its inadequacy and make sense out of the discrepancies between the myths surrounding real life.

2. PARENTAL AUTHORITY

The representation of childhood in literature is related to the emergence of

the middle classes. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall explain, there was a radical change in parent-child relationships during the eighteenth century: children had begun to be identified as a group with their own interests and needs, they were allowed more freedom in a less harsh and authoritarian context and gained their own literature, toys and pastimes. Additionally, "By the end of that century, the elevation of innocence, the unspoilt and the natural within romanticism furthered the special place of children. Foreign commentators were stuck by the way children of the English middle classes, in contrast to those of the aristocracy, were treated as loved companions by their parents" (1987: 343). Nevertheless, excessive indulgence had a negative side and there were fissures within the family realm.

In *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths advance their theoretical principles. Alice Paterson called the three volumes "the most important work on general pedagogy to appear in this country between the publication of Locke's *Thoughts* in 1693 and that of Herbert Spencer's *Essay on Education* in 1861" (qtd. Butler, 1972: 171). The work was composed of twenty-four chapters and was hugely successful. As W. C. Häusermann points out; their continental translators, Marc-Auguste and Charles Pictet, published a translation in twelve successive numbers in *Bibliothèque britannique*; and Häusermann quotes their words: "L'ouvrage que nous venons d'achever nous a paru mériter l'extrait les plus étendu que nous ayons entrepris depuis que nous travaillons a ce Recueil" (1952: 31). More recently, Mireille Magnier highlights the Edgeworths' merit "d'avoir ouvert la voie à une véritable technique de l'enseignement, d'avoir remplacé l'apprentissage lent, partiel e fautif de la psychologie de l'élève par une sure manipulation des rouages de la compréhension, par l'éveil pui l'orientation de la personnalité jusque dans les élans affectifs" (1977: 72-3).

One of the allusions to Maria Edgeworth in Sarah Harriet's works appears in the best-seller *Traits of Nature*. Edgeworth is associated with Mrs. Barbauld and Mrs. Trimmer who "have written good little books for children, which have thrown poor Mother Goose, and the Arabian Nights, quite out of favour" (Burney, 1812, II: 136). Besides, in the same work, the heroine sits to read "the first and incomparable volume of Miss Edgeworth's Fashionable Tales" (Burney, 1812, III: 138). The novel deals with Adele Cleveland, who is neglected by Mr. Cleveland believing that the girl

is like her mother, the sentimental Lady Rosalvan. Adele has been brought up by her grandmother and then goes to live with the Hampdems. In that household, she meets Algernon Mordington, an orphan who unexpectedly becomes an heir and has an unhappy marriage. In *Traits*, childhood friendship between Adele and Algernon is reinforced by the fact that both children were neglected by their parents. At the end of the novel, Mr. Cleveland unrealistically accepts his daughter after the mediation of a cousin who explains to the old patriarch that Algernon's passion is sincere.

For Clark, "her [Sarah Harriet's] fondness for children, especially boys, appears to have been genuine; she would make her living from educating the youth" (2007: 40). Together with the prevalence of sibling rivalry, failings of education pervade in Sarah Harriet's last three works. Moreover, Lorna Clark maintains that the youngest daughter addresses more explicitly than Frances Burney the issue of education, showing cause and effect, so in *Clarentine* she describes how a young heir derives his "boldness and intrepidity" from his "conscious independence" (2007: 46) and her scenes in the nursery offer case studies in child development. *Traits of Nature*, for instance

traces in detail the effects of "an unhappy system of favouritism" and shows how an attitude of "infantine arrogance" is created "by the enjoyment of boundless indulgence". When a young boy's "little impetuositities of temper" are left unchecked, he soon rebels against "petticoat government" and becomes unmanageable", though remaining "the idol of his misjudging father". The most "spoilt, unruly, consequential little tyrant" in the schoolroom soon grows into a "rash, petulant headstrong" youth, the scourge of those around, and finally blossoms into a full-grown patriarch, "irascible, haughty, tyrannical." (Clark, 2007: 47)

In *Traits*, Little Algernon's violent character is constantly punished and his nurse is far from the idea presented by the Edgeworths: "An active, cheerful, good humoured, intelligent nurse, will make a child good humoured by a regular, affectionate attendance; by endeavouring to prevent all unnecessary sufferings, and by quickly comprehending its language of signs" (1825: 102). Sarah Harriet is very critical of the cold relationship between

parents and children since the boy and his sister Harriet are told that the severities they endure are commanded by Algernon and neither the children can stand their father nor realize that obedience to laws arise from a connection between social duties and social happiness as the Edgeworths promote (1825: 147-8). The total lack of communication and confidence between the parties debilitates the family as an institution. To complete the picture, once that the boy has got over his illness thanks to Adele's attentions, Elinor voices the well-spread view that children are inherently bad:

Without due control, children are terrible little wild beasts! Here are there, you meet with a heart prone to grateful affection, and many of them seem almost born with an extraordinary sense of justice; but these are nearly the only virtues I ever found that they possessed without long cultivation; 'though of evil qualities, poor little souls' their store is incalculable. A friend of ours, who is a father himself, and as affectionate a one as ever lived, carries this doctrine so far, that I once heard him, in derision of the cant about infantine innocence, aver his belief, that there never was a child in existence who, if its strength has equaled its passions, would not have committed half a dozen murders before it was three years old! (Burney, 1812, III: 198)

Hypocrisy conditions family ties, and again there is a great distance between words and real behavior in the first story in *Tales of Fancy*. Modelled on Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *The Shipwreck* features two English ladies, Lady Earlingford and her daughter Viola, who found themselves on an island in the Indian Ocean as the only survivors of a shipwreck. One of their companions on the island is Fitz Aymer, regarded as an unprincipled man. Following her mother's advice, Viola passes for her cousin Edmund and soon falls in love with Fitz Aymer who gradually reveals his worth. When Lady Earlingford dies the victim of an infectious fever, Viola and Fitz Aymer have to rely on each other for support and eventually manage to leave the island. Back in England, Sir William, Viola's father, gives his sanction, so the girl can marry Fitz Aymer.

Together with Little Algernon, the hero exemplifies the consequences of being educated by different people. Surprising enough, Fitz Aymer is not portrayed under

a totally negative light: he is proud of himself and ambitious, and the Edgeworths never frown on these attributes. For them, pride is not the same as self-confidence since it is not necessarily negative: "[expressions of confidence in one's self] are sometimes powerful over the human mind, and where they are genuine, mark somewhat superior character" (1825: 200), and ambition is positively regarded if a boy's heart "beats with the hope of immortalizing himself by noble actions; he forms extensive plans for the improvement and the happiness of his fellow-creatures; he feels the want of power to carry these into effect; power becomes the object of his wishes" (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 202). However, Fitz Aymer admits he was not trained in the practice of self-control: "[...] I have exposed myself to a thousand calumnies — I have been daringly regardless of my own reputation, and fatally insensible of the lasting mischief which so arrogant a defiance of public opinion would entail upon me!" (Burney, 1820, I: 160-1). It seems that his aunt left him her fortune and pampered him until he joined a regiment at eighteen with the hope of acquiring distinction. Despite his faults, he has nothing to reproach himself "which the most rigorous moralist could interpret into deliberate criminality" (Burney, 1820, I: 162). The Edgeworths state that in these cases neither indignation nor shame could affect a boy (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 159) Therefore, "the ideas of integrity and the advantages of reputation must be cautiously introduced. We run the risk of making them hypocrites or give them a fatal distrust of themselves if we give children a too perfect theory of morality" (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 154).

There is unarguably much to reform in the patriarchal family, as Sarah Harriet shows. The domestic ideology was consolidated in the eighteenth century as a gender ideology that provided the basis for the belief on women's and men's spheres as separate. David I. Kertzer and Mario Barbagli maintain that romanticism reinforced the Rousseauist notion of maternal predominance in the rearing of young children. Contrary to Locke, education was to become a female occupation where fathers had but a minor say (2002: 263). Mothers are remarkable agents of change and instability in family, especially in *Traits*. The protagonist has private lessons because she will obtain her father's admiration more easily by cultivating her talent, not only with her beauty (Burney, 1812, I: 151). When Adele visits her

mother, she gets used to reading novels and romances, which her mother censures: "and there was scarcely one trite or an improbable narrative amongst them that she did not heartily regret, and, in some measure, even esteem, as possessing the negative of intending no harm, although it aimed at no good" (Burney, 1812, I: 279). Lady Rosalvan reads "Sonnets, elegies, tales, epigrams; Addressed to a Lady's Broken Fan; Hints for a Tragedy; Essays on Sympathy; Lines on a Tear; Couplets on a Smile; inscriptions and descriptions" (Burney, 1812, I: 278). Adela only hears productions with hackneyed ideas, incorrect rhyme and defective grammar, apart from amatory compositions strange to be found in a woman's possession, and Lady Rosalvan considers as the essence of wisdom, which sets her apart from her daughter (Fernández, 2013a). The girl thinks that a parent should know their children's acquaintances and that "[...] whatever might be the rights and privileges of a parent, it was impossible they should be so unlimited as to authorize the contamination of that mental purity which it was every young woman's duty to preserve unblemished" (Burney, 1812, I: 280).

There is a problem with the people like these who live in an artificial world, as the Edgeworths state: "the species of reading [novel reading] to what we object [...] diminishes, instead of increasing, the sensibility of the heart" (1825: 213). On the one hand, if they are addicted to reading, girls may want to imitate their heroines and "cannot endure the languor to which they are subject in the intervals of delirium" (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 192). On the other hand, the opposite attitude and the need to worship reason or activate understanding are sponsored by the Edgeworths since they lead to knowledge. If women cultivate their reasoning powers and acquire tastes for science and literature, they will not require the stimulus of dissipation or romance (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 192). Otherwise, "the best dispositions can give us no solid security for happiness" (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 211). It is difficult to avoid giving children false ideas of virtue, but the Edgeworths suggest resorting to reasoning, which Lady Rosalvan has definitely rejected.

The lady's opposite appears in the *Tales of Fancy*, a volume with a totally different setting. *Country Neighbours* focuses on Blanch Stavordale, the presumable daughter of George Stavordale and

Aurelia Castelli, an Italian opera singer of low extraction. Blanch falls in love with an aristocrat, Mr. Horace Tremayne, and heir to Sir Reginald Touberville. She instantly faces the opposition of Lady Earlsford, Horace's mother, who would prefer a wealthy heiress, such as his cousin Jane Touberville, for her son. The young couple can marry once it is discovered that Blanch is really Jocelyn Stavordale's legitimate offspring.

In *Country Neighbours*, the narrator Anne Stavordale is amazed by Blanche's love for truth. It seems that her mother taught her rectitude because the girl had an active imagination and a "strong propensity to indulge in romancing, to invent fantastical dreams, and to embellish every trivial incident with the glaring colours of fiction" (Burney, 1820, II: 427-8). Aurelia Castelli reformed her by directing her efforts to awake the child to the "voice of conscience" (Burney, 1820, II: 428) and never let her deviate from the strictest veracity (Burney, 1820, I: 428), a position the Edgeworths defend: "It is not sufficient to excite an admiration of truth by example, by eloquent praise, or by the just rewards of esteem and affection; we must take care to form the habits at the same time that we inspire the love of this virtue" (1825: 125-30).

The story also includes a debate on how to introduce the classics to children and the narrator thinks that they should not be taught authors such as Milton or Young since they are difficult to grasp and this destroys the gratification of reading later on (Burney, 1820, II; 256). In this regard, the Edgeworths stress the role of language in education (1825: 207) and discourage parents from presenting allegorical poetry and metaphysics to children: "children may reflect upon their own feelings, and they should be encouraged to make accurate observations upon their own minds" (1825: 231). Also, it is convenient to wait before dealing with abstract subjects, and instructors are advised to select the most suitable pieces as good examples for children (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 239). When Tremayne asks if a boy who is learning the classics at school will turn an admirer of them, Lady Stavordale, Anne's mother, says that that is possible with previous study, but a boy should be long trained and go step by step: "this sort of progressive initiation must have given time for the development of his intellect, and the formation of his taste" (Burney, 1820, II: 257).

3. FEMALE EDUCATION

In eighteenth-century Britain, accomplishments were the basic premise to catch a husband. This category included drawing, piano or harp playing skills, penmanship, dancing, deportment and some knowledge of French. Latin and Greek —the ticket for entering law, medicine and the Anglican Church —were effectively closed to females, as well as the newer commercial skills and scientific subjects. It was considered that too-much-learned women became undomestic and eccentric (Todd, 1989: 217). Though female education considerably improved during the century “forth the reasoning powers” and “enriching the mind with useful and interesting knowledge suitable to their sex” according to Thomas Gisborne (qtd. by Rogers, 1982: 27), reason was perceived as a male quality, and sensibility as a female one. Girls’ commitment at school was usually expected to be less than their brothers’ (Davidoff and Hall, 1987: 291; Armstrong, 1987: 59-95), and, by 1750, girls’ boarding schools became synonymous with moral standards and national decline (Jones, 1990: 99).

The Edgeworths regard accomplishments as valuable tickets for admission to fashionable company. Additionally, they are supposed to increase a young lady’s chance of a prize in the matrimonial lottery and are one resource against ennui (1825: 325). Father and daughter put forward other methods to inspire the youth with self-confidence: “If children live in good company, and see constantly people with agreeable manners, they will acquire manners which the dancing teacher does not always teach” (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 331), for example. Besides, a good mother knows the value of accomplishments, and it is advisable to teach women to restrain themselves since the great decisions in women’s lives are taken before they are twenty (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 432).

Sarah Harriet’s first production, *Clarentine*, deals with the daughter of an aristocrat who was disinherited by his father after marrying a French woman of good family in one of his travels. Although the girl is brought up by her relatives the Delmingtons; she feels a bit detached from the family until she unexpectedly meets her aunt, the emigrée Madame D’Arzele, and her husband. As the narrative advances, some men are sexually interested in the heroine who finally marries William Somerset.

In *Clarentine*, Lady Delmington is a widow who lives in Devon with her four children educating them “upon the most economical, yet rational plan” (Burney, 1796, I: 2). The family gather every day in the school room to repeat their lessons and practice for the next day. Few families pay a visit to Lady Delmington whose children don’t usually appear on formal occasions and have teachers to improve their dancing, music and drawing skills. Nevertheless, when Harriet’s birthday is approaching, the family receives Mrs. Harrington, who unjustly criticizes the education of the Delmington children and considers that their mother should put more pressure on them, voicing a conservative position:

she was perpetually talking of the consequences to be inevitably expected from the unlimited indulgence of parents to their children — of the weakness of supposing that where all command was resigned, authority could be maintained, and of the folly of grieving at that which a little firmness, and better regulations might have totally prevented. (Burney, 1796, I: 62)

Letters for Literary Ladies (first edition in 1795) stemmed from a correspondence between Richard Lovell and Thomas Day discussing higher education for women. Maria adheres to Enlightenment values and *Letters* reflects her reliance on education as a tool for women’s development and happiness. By using contrasted character types, Julia and Caroline, The Anglo-Irish authoress illustrates a gradual process of woman’s degradation. The production was not cherished by Richard Lovell at all, as Maria correspondence reveals: “[*Letters*] are now disfigured by all manner of crooked marks of Papa’s critical indignation, beside various abusive marginal notes which I should not have you see for half a crown sterling” (Hare, 1894, I: 32; letter to Sophy Ruxton 23 February 1794). Formally, *Letters* is divided in two parts: at the beginning we find the impressions of two gentlemen on the birth of a daughter and then there are the letters between Caroline and Julia, epitomising the contrast between rationality and sentimental philosophy. While the first correspondent reveals his misogyny and compares cultivated women with monsters, the second gentleman thinks women’s early education is decisive in life. For the latter, attention and discipline are important too and a woman must study since she is as responsible for the education of her children as the respect of her daughter depends on the mother’s

reputation (Edgeworth, 1805: 58- 60). He also maintains that many mistakes arise from giving to women inappropriate books which lead them to have false ideas about life (Edgeworth, 1805: 72-3). In *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths assume that parents should examine their children's readings though "it is an arduous task, but none can be too arduous for the enlightened energy of parental affection" (1825: 206). A mother is answerable for what a girl reads since the girl can have confused notions:

Sentiment and ridicule have conspired to represent reason, knowledge and science, as unsuitable or dangerous to women; yet at the same time wit, and superficial acquirements in literature, have been the object of admiration in society; so that this dangerous interference has been drawn, almost without our perceiving its fallacy, that superficial knowledge is more desirable in women than accurate knowledge. (Edgeworth, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 1825: 343)

As we have previously stated, the debate on female reading is paramount in *Traits of Nature*, where Mrs. Hampden forbids her daughters to read: "It's well enough for boys, who can't work, and would only be in mischief, perhaps, if it was not for a little reading, which helps to keep them quiet, and does not take them off from any thing more profitable" (Burney, 1812, I: 32). A very different point of view is upheld by Sir Frederic Rosalvan, who is persuaded that Adele would rather cultivate her mind to avoid that she would "find herself defective in any of the accomplishments, personal or intellectual, which education might have bestowed!" (Burney, 1812, I: 151).

Sarah Harriet's second narrative, *Geraldine Fauconberg*, features two families, the Lesmores and the Archers, who plan their children's marriage when they are born. Some women like Mrs. Neville in *Geraldine* justify their conduct by admitting that they never had a maternal guide nor an enlightened friend but Ferdinand (Burney, 1808, II: 380). In this novel, Sir Henry objects to Emma's education:

What masters have you ever given her, my dear, except a superannuated, old pothook-maker, who taught her to write a hand fit for a scrivener of the last century? Mistresses, indeed, she had had in profusion! Now tell

me, Emma, how many good sort of decayed gentlewomen have you been attended by, for the purpose of being instructed in what you ladies call fancy work? (Burney, 1808, II: 23)

Criticism of this type in the mouth of a secondary character is a powerful strategy usually employed by Sarah Harriet to make the protagonist realize their true feelings (Fernández, 2013b: 242) in consonance with other contemporary women writers who also turned their attention to education. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), Elizabeth Bonhote's *The Parental Monitor* (1788), Sarah Trimmer's *Reflection on the Education of Children in Charity Schools* (1792), Mary Hays's *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* (1798), Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System Of Female Education* (1799) and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) are representatives of this tendency. Together with Wollstonecraft, Ann Radcliffe (*The Female Advocate* [1799]) and Priscilla Wakefield (*Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* [1798]), Sarah Harriet attempts to articulate an identity free from patriarchal colonization and the domestic sphere, contributing to shape a feminist discourse which opposed the dominant one. In her *oeuvre* there are some echoes from Wollstonecraft's radical writings and Hays's idea of perpetual babysm (Todd, 1989: 201) since Emma's accomplishments are restricted to "the art of drawing patterns through a window; of spotting and *dotting* upon muslim" (Burney, 1808, II: 24). Like Wollstonecraft, Sarah Harriet recognizes female educability, and, in *Geraldine*, Ferdinand has the impression that women are educated

like eastern slaves, destined for a Harem, to attend only, in their impenetrable seclusion, to the cultivation of their exterior accomplishments, and the preservation of their beauty, have no real character, but take the bent of those whom they first chance to associate on emerging from retirement. During a short period, perhaps, the pretty puppet would allow her husband to guide her in the choice of her pursuits and the selection of her companions: but, in a very little while, she would grow sick of such submission [...] I loathe the thought of having a full-grown baby to direct and watch: if I found that her capacity was slender, I should despise her; if she was

obstinate, I should hate her; and if she was too tame and complying, perhaps I might be brute enough to become her tyrant. (Burney, 1808, I: 24-5)

It seems that Ferdinand has always been his mother's favorite and Julia Lesmore adds about the education of men and women: "Son, particularly only sons, have a prescriptive right to be considered as animals born to be spoiled: but why one amiable daughter out of three amiable daughters, should be thus distinguished, I never should satisfactorily comprehend" (Burney, 1808, II: 236).

The Edgeworths centre their volumes on the British context—they only deal with French educational institutions in the first chapter of *Professional Education* (1809)—and they eschew commenting on social differences between classes, which does find a fictional representation in *Moral Tales* (1801) and *Popular Tales* (1804). Similar tenets are expressed in *The Renunciation*. This story hinges on the experiences of Agnes Danvers, aged eleven, who is kidnapped to lead the life on the dead aristocrat Lucy de Vere until a painful discovery forces her to leave home and support herself as an artist in Italy. The mystery surrounding her existence is unravelled at the end of the story: in order to keep his first wife's patrimony, Mr. Wharton kidnapped a girl who could pass for the aristocrat Lucy de Vere, Mr. Wharton's dead stepdaughter. The protagonists cannot get married until the mystery surrounding Georgiana, the hero's half-sister, is solved and they have an uncle's sanction since Mr. Wharton finally obtains Agnes's forgiveness and flees to America where he marries a wealthy widow. *The Renunciation* provides the opportunity to contrast education in England with French education:

The English women wanted that conciliated, and almost benign amenity of expression a French woman of high breeding knows so well how to throw into her voice and countenance; and which, duly modified, is so welcome an encouragement on a first introduction, to the young and the diffident. (Burney, 1839: 152)

Finally *The Hermitage* is a short Gothic fiction dealing with the mysterious murder of Ernest Ormond. In this story, Ruth Nelson's surprising upbringing is relevant since she was educated with an earl's daughter. Ruths becomes their playfellow

and their governess takes her into favor so she remains with these children until she is sixteen. The intercourse breaks off because there are sons in the family. When Ruth leaves, Ernest asks his sister Ella if she thinks that Ruth is happier for having had an education above her status. He maintains that she is not: "Because she is too humbly born, and too destitute of fortune to become the object of an honorable attachment to any man above her own class" (Burney, 1839: 88).

4. CONCLUSION

An analysis of Sarah Harriet's *oeuvre* demonstrates that she was deeply concerned with educational issues. Through a series of coincidences and departures from the Edgeworths' essays, we have shown that Sarah Harriet's stories dissected social conventions and practices, though with some restrictions. Unfortunately, Frances's half-sibling did not go so far as to offer an innovative model of female education in negotiation with the dominant ideology of feminine propriety and political allegiances. Still, Sarah Harriet hinted at a radical reform of education.

On the one hand, all her productions deals with parental authority and indulgence, and she is not only critical of children's education, but also of their parents' role. Possibly influenced by the Edgeworths' pedagogy, Sarah Harriet also includes opinions about children's passions insisting on the need for a dialogue between parents and children and applied the Edgeworths' idea of absentism to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, Sarah Harriet scrutinizes the role of mothers. She questions the utility of female education at that time and the separation of male and female spheres. For her, the prevailing model of female education as based on accomplishments and social graces is useless as well as gender-based education. Her writings also reflect the debate on the power of female erudition and she even touched on the relationship between social class and education, a point on which Maria Edgeworth refused to make any explicit observation. Like the Anglo-Irish authors, Sarah Harriet embraced a new ideology regarding the family and patriarchal relationships and for this reason she merits a place of their own in studies of nineteenth-century British literature by women.

WORKS CITED

- ARMSTRONG, N. (1987). *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political Study of the Novel*. New York: New York UP.
- BARNEY, R. A. (1999). *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP.
- BUTLER, M. (1972). *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- CLARK, L. J. (1995). "Jane Austen and Sarah Harriet Burney." *Persuasions* 17: 16-25.
- . (1997). *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*. Ed. L. J. Clark. Athens and London: the University of Georgia Press.
- . (2000). "Sarah Harriet Burney: Traits of Nature and Families". *Lumen* 19: 121-34.
- . (2003). "From the Margins to the Centre: The Spinster as Author, Narrator and Actor." *The Burney Journal* 6: 36-54.
- . (2007). "Frances and Sarah Harriet Burney: The Novels in the Family and the Family in the Novels." In *A Celebration of Frances Burney*. Ed. L. J. Clark. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press. 38-56.
- DAVIDOFF, L. and C. HALL. (1987). *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. London: Routledge.
- EDGEWORTH, M. (1805). *Letters for Literary Ladies: To Which is Added an Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification*. Harlow: Printed by B. Flower.
- EDGEWORTH, M. and R. L. EDGEWORTH. (1825). *Practical Education. Works of Maria Edgeworth. Complete in Thirteen Volumes. Volume One*. Boston: Samuel H. Parker.
- FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, C.M. (2012). "Sarah Harriet Burney, Maria Edgeworth and the Inordinate Desire to Be Loved." *The Burney Letter* 18.2: 14-5.
- . (2013a). "The Quest for Acceptance in Sarah Harriet Burney's Works." *Op. Cit* 2.2: 1-15. <https://docs.google.com/r?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWVpbnxhcGVhYWRpcmVjYW98Z3g6Mzg4MjVlZDZIM2ZIM2Y1NQ> (Access 20 November 2013).
- . (2013b). "The Ties That Bind Us to Each Other: Masculinity in Sarah Harriet Burney's Oeuvre". *Raudem* 1 (2013): 237-57. <http://www2.ual.es/raudem/index.php/Audem/article/view/16/16> (Access 14 February 2014).
- GILBERT, S. M. and GUBAR, S. (1984). *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- HARE, A. J.C. (Ed.). (1894). *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*. Arnold: London.
- HÄUSERMANN, W.C. (1952). *The Genevese Background*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- JONES, V. (1990). *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*. New York: Routledge.
- KERTZER, D.I and M. BARBAGLI. (2002). *The History of the European Family: Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century 1789-1913*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- KOWALESKI-WALLACE, E. (1989). "Reading the Father Metaphorically." *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*. Ed. Patricia Yaeger and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP. 296-311.
- . (1991). *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah Moore, Maria Edgeworth and Patriarchal Complicity*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP.
- MAGNIER, M. (1977). "Locke, Rousseau et des éducateurs britanniques aux dix-huitième siècle". *Bulletin de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 5: 59-73.
- ROGERS, K. (1982). *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*. Brighton: the Harvester Press.
- SPENDER, D. (1986). "Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and the Height of the Achievement." *Mothers of the Novel: a Hundred Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*. London: Pandora. 270-300.
- TODD, J. (1989). *The Sign of Angellica*. Ed. J. Todd. London: Virago.

This essay is part of the outcome of the research group Rede de Lingua e Literatura Inglesa e Identidade II, R2014/043, Xunta de Galicia.

Contact: <c28fernandez@gmail.com>

Title: Educando a la familia: Sarah Harriet Burney y Maria Edgeworth sobre educación.