

Belinda Study Guide

Belinda by Maria Edgeworth

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Plot Summary

Belinda is an English Society Novel written by Maria Edgeworth at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, published in 1801. It tells the story of Belinda Portman, who has been sent by her match-making aunt to stay with Lady Delacour, in the hopes of finding a good husband. Belinda helps Lady Delacour to reform her ways, giving up a life of unrespectable behavior and frivolity for domesticity and happiness. Along the way, Belinda falls in love with Clarence Hervey, makes new friends and enemies, is courted by Augustus Vincent, and eventually ends happily married to Mr. Hervey.

When Belinda is sent by her aunt, Mrs. Stanhope, to stay with Lady Delacour, she soon realizes that Lady Delacour is not a good role model for a young woman. Lady Delacour is concerned only with popularity and the admiration of London's high society. She pretends to be bright and lively in company, but is very unhappy at home. She is also dying of a cancer in her breast, which has caused her to give up all hope that she could live a good life. As such, she has rejected domestic life, is estranged from her daughter, and argues with her alcoholic husband. Belinda, along with Lady Delacour's friend Clarence Hervey, determines that she will help Lady Delacour find happiness. As they proceed to do so, Mr. Hervey and Belinda fall in love.

Belinda manages to reunite Lady Delacour with her daughter, who has been staying with her aunt Mrs. Delacour, and the Percival family. Lady Delacour is delighted with her daughter, and this encourages her to make the effort to live. She agrees to see Doctor X, who has befriended Mr. Hervey and Belinda, and decides that she will submit to an operation at some point in the future. However, Lady Delacour and Belinda's enemies soon interfere. Philip Baddely, after being rejected by Belinda and losing Mr. Hervey as a friend, is determined to have revenge. He puts about a rumor, with the help of Lord Delacour's scheming servant Champfort, that Belinda is after Lord Delacour's money and title and intends to seduce him. When Belinda tells Lady Delacour about the rumor, she is furious. She has already been betrayed by one friend, Mrs. Freke, and this clouds her judgment. She accuses Belinda of all kinds of things, and Belinda immediately leaves her house.

Belinda goes to stay with the Percival family, who represent the perfect family and the ideal of domestic bliss. Here Belinda meets Mr. Vincent, who falls in love with her. She still holds feelings for Mr. Hervey, but by now she has heard many rumors that Mr. Hervey keeps a mistress, and has even seen him drop a lock of woman's hair from his pocket. She is persuaded by Lady Anne to allow Mr. Vincent's affections, and slowly Belinda grows to accept and love him, though she feels no passionate or romantic love for him. Then one day, Lady Delacour's servant, Marriott, arrives and begs Belinda to return home. They have discovered Mr. Champfort's part in starting the rumor and Lady Delacour is very sorry for having thought badly of Belinda.

Belinda returns and persuades Lady Delacour to be more open and honest. Lady Delacour immediately tells her husband the truth about her illness, who is relieved she



has no secret lover - as he had thought - but is shocked that she is dying. He determines to do everything he can to help. Lady Delacour then brings her daughter Helena to her once again, and moves to a country-house to undergo the operation in hopes of saving her life. The surgeon looks at her and informs her that she has no cancer after all and will not need an operation. She had been fooled by a quack doctor into thinking she was dying so that he might continue to take money from her for treatments. Lady Delacour and her family are overjoyed, and the lady immediately begins to reform her ways, embracing a domestic life with her husband and daughter. She now turns her attention to trying to make Belinda happy.

Lady Delacour meets Mr. Vincent and likes him, but is suspicious of his friendship with her enemy, Mrs. Luttridge, who she knows has gambling tables at her house. Lord Delacour asks Mr. Hervey to spy on him, and he finds that Mr. Vincent has a gambling problem and has lost all his money. Mr. Hervey tries to help him, but Mr. Vincent keeps it a secret from Belinda and turns to a moneylender for funds. Mr. Percival discovers this and insists that Belinda be told. Belinda immediately breaks off the engagement.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hervey has problems of his own. He has been looking after a girl called Virginia since her grandmother died, trying to tutor her in order to be a perfect wife. He is now paying for this past mistake, as he does not love Virginia but believes that he has caused her to fall in love with him. He has also damaged her reputation, as she is believed to be his mistress. He feels guilty, and knowing that her happiness rests on him, he proposes to her. Virginia has been persuaded by her guardian Mrs. Ormond that Mr. Hervey loves and wants to marry her, and though she does not love him, she feels that she must say yes to prove her gratitude for his kindness. This messy situation is finally resolved when Lady Delacour manages to locate the man that Virginia does love, and Mr. Hervey finds that he does not need to marry her after all.

With both Mr. Hervey and Belinda finally free, Mr. Hervey declares his feelings for her. Lady Delacour wraps up the story by explaining that they are now happily married. The story is ended with Lady Delacour reformed, her family reunited, Belinda and Mr. Hervey together at last, and happiness for all the main characters.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 1 and 2: Characters and Masks

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 1 and 2: Characters and Masks Summary

Belinda is an English Society Novel set and written at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century. It tells the story of Belinda Portman, who has been sent to stay with Lady Delacour by her matchmaking aunt. She helps Lady Delacour reform her frivolous and distasteful ways and falls in love with Mr. Hervey in the process. However, it seems that Mr. Hervey keeps a secret mistress. When Mr. Vincent, a rich and handsome man falls in love with her, she encourages him, but Mr. Vincent has a shameful secret too. At the end of the book, all misunderstandings are finally resolved, Mr. Hervey declares his affections for Belinda, Lady Delacour has reformed, and the main characters are all given happy endings.

Belinda has been sent by her match-making aunt to stay with Lady Delacour in London. At first Belinda likes Lady Delacour but soon begins to grow concerned that the Lady's flirtatious behavior and bad relationship with Lord Delacour makes her an unsavory person to be connected with. Belinda has also begun to feel an attraction towards a dashing young man named Clarence Hervey and is jealous of his attentions to Lady Delacour. She writes a concerned letter to her aunt, who replies that she is being ridiculous. Belinda is horrified when Lady Delacour reads the letter, but she warms to her when she does not react angrily. She feels sorry for thinking badly of Lady Delacour.

Belinda and Lady Delacour attend a masquerade ball, a party in which guests disguise their faces with masks. There is a fancy dress theme, so the two women decide to dress as muses, inspirational goddesses from Greek mythology. Marriott, Lady Delacour's maid, insists that the Lady dresses as the tragic muse. Belinda notices that Marriott seems to have an unusual amount of power over her mistress. Belinda and Lady Delacour head to Lady Singleton's house for a gathering before the ball, where they quickly swap costumes. Now Belinda is the tragic muse and Lady Delacour the comic one.

Clarence Hervey arrives at the party, and thinking the tragic muse to be Lady Delacour, begins to insult Belinda to her and the surrounding guests. Of course, the tragic muse is actually Belinda, who is distraught and heart-broken to hear him talk about her in this way. Clarence believes that Belinda is deliberately trying to seduce him to trap him in a marriage, not realizing that she has genuine feelings for him. Belinda begs to leave, and Lady Delacour takes her away, at which point Clarence Hervey realizes his mistake. Belinda and Lady Delacour move on to the actual masquerade ball, then return home. Finally, the tired and emotionally drained Lady Delacour breaks down and reveals her secret to Belinda; she is dying of a fatal illness.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 1 and 2: Characters and Masks Analysis

Chapters one and two are important in establishing some of the main themes of the novel and in introducing the main characters. Belinda is shown as a respectable and sensible girl and Lady Delacour as vain and pleasure-seeking, but also a likeable woman. Belinda is concerned by Lady Delacour's flirtatious behavior and her relationship with her husband, writing a letter to her aunt expressing her worries. When her aunt replies that she is being too prudish, Belinda immediately feels very sorry for thinking badly of the woman who is kindly letting her stay in her house and regrets sending the letter. When Lady Delacour reads the aunt's reply, she is hurt and Belinda feels terrible. Belinda insists that Lady Delacour read her second letter, which expresses Belinda's regrets, after which Lady Delacour brightens and declares that Belinda has a very good and honest heart. This establishes that although Lady Delacour may seem frivolous, she has a kind and forgiving nature underneath. Lady Delacour's comment also shows the reader that Belinda is a different kind of person from the ones the Lady is used to. Whereas Belinda is honest and caring and able to learn from her mistakes, most members of London's high society are false. They will pretend friendship to a person, then secretly gossip and mock them behind their back.

Belinda has been sent to stay with Lady Delacour by her match-making aunt in the hopes that she will find a husband in London. This introduces one very important theme of the book—marriage. Marriage is shown as the main duty and role of a woman. Belinda's aunt prides herself on having married off so many of her nieces, Belinda is encouraged to seek a husband, and many other characters naturally assume that this is why Belinda has come to London. However, although a girl should be seeking a husband, it is seen as a bad thing for her to attempt to seduce or trap a man simply for his riches or her own security. Clarence Hervey thinks that Belinda is trying to do just that, rather than showing true feelings for him. He thinks she is behaving falsely in order to trap him.

Marriage is also shown as an important theme through the relationship between Lady Delacour and her husband. Lady and Lord Delacour appear to despise each other and are constantly arguing. Each takes delight in trying to hurt the other. This is not how a marriage ought to be, and Belinda is extremely disturbed by their behavior, feeling that she has not come to a respectable house. Lady Delacour fails in her domestic role as she cannot keep on civil terms with her husband.

Another important theme established in chapter one and explored further in chapter two is that of secrecy, falsity, and things not being what they seem. Belinda notes that Lady Delacour acts very differently in public than she does at home. She puts up a front to the public world, pretending that she is always happy, frivolous and fashionable. London's society envies her life, and knows her as a fun person to be around. At home, however, she is subdued and wistful. Underneath her make-up she looks old, thin and tired. Belinda also notes that she is keeping some kind of secret, something that her maid Marriott knows and allows her to have power over her mistress. At the end of



chapter two, this secret is revealed. Lady Delacour is dying, and she anxiously tries to keep this fact hidden from everyone else. She does not wish people to pity her and wants the public to go on thinking of her as a jolly, young-at-heart woman.

Lady Delacour is not the only person who acts falsely. As she notes, and as becomes apparent to Belinda, the whole of London society is extremely false. Women pretend to be friends with the lady only to betray her or gossip about her behind her back. Lady Delacour is familiar with this, and it does not seem to bother her too much anymore, but it comes as a shock to Belinda. When Clarence Hervey, who she has begun to develop romantic feelings for, insults her in public, she is heart-broken and begs to go home. Clarence assumed that Belinda was behaving falsely towards him, pretending to care and seduce him in order to win a rich husband. His mistake comes from comparing her to the rest of London society. He has only ever known false people and does not realize that Belinda is very different. Belinda is an honest girl who suddenly finds herself thrown into a strange, two-faced world. Lady Delacour finds it odd that Belinda is so upset but realizes that she is a straightforward and trustable girl. It is this that encourages her to share her great secret with Belinda.

This idea of things not being what they seem is reflected in the masquerade ball that Lady Delacour and Belinda attend. They wear masks to hide their faces, rather like the disguise that Lady Delacour and other members of society put up when they are in public. They also wear costumes, pretending to be someone that they are not. Belinda and Lady Delacour even add to the confusion by swapping dresses. Belinda now wears the tragic mask and Lady Delacour the comic mask. Lady Delacour matches her mask by acting in good humor all night, but reveals herself to be extremely upset when she gets home. Belinda finds herself thrown into confusion by the whole thing. The masquerade ball therefore perfectly symbolizes the falsity and pretensions of London society.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 4: Lady Delacour's History and The Same Continued

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 4: Lady Delacour's History and The Same Continued Summary

Lady Delacour recounts her history to Belinda. Lady Delacour was a rich heiress with many suitors, most of whom were just after her money. One man who courted her, Henry Percival, refused to flatter her completely, despite her faults. Annoyed by this, she married Lord Delacour, who pretended she had no faults. Lady Delacour was hoping to rouse Henry's jealousy, but it wasn't long before he found someone else. Lady Delacour was left married to Lord Delacour, a man she could not get on with. Worse, she is convinced that Henry truly loved her, and that she loved him. She hoped to be able to dominate her husband, but he became annoyed that people might think he was being 'governed by his wife.' In order to break his obstinacy, Lady Delacour decided to flirt with Colonel Lawless to make Lord Delacour jealous. This worked, and for awhile Lady Delacour was able to spend her money recklessly until they were almost broke. They were saved when Lord Delacour inherited a fortune, and now the tables were turned.

Lady Delacour became friends with a woman named Harriet Freke, whose risqué behavior bordered on being scandalous. One night Harriet took her to see a fortune teller who prophesied that Lady Delacour would marry again. Lawless was encouraged by this, and by Lady Delacour's flirting, to ask her to divorce her husband and marry him. She refused, but the word got back to Lord Delacour, who felt that this was an insult to his honor. He challenged colonel Lawless to a duel and won, killing Lawless.

Lady Delacour then entered into a dangerous rivalry with a woman called Mrs. Luttridge. Urged on by Harriet Freke, Lady Delacour challenged Mrs. Luttridge to a duel, dressed in men's clothes. When the time came, however, they agreed to call off the duel and simply fire their weapons into the air. Lady Delacour did so, but her gun recoiled and caused a painful injury to her breast. The women were then surrounded by a mob of angry men, who were shocked at their dress and behavior. They were saved by Clarence Hervey from being dunked in the river, and Hervey persuaded the mob to help him win a race and a bet against a Frenchman.

Lady Delacour continued her rivalry with Mrs. Luttridge but claims that her life was monotonous and depressing, with no real friends and a guilty conscience over Lawless' death. Finally, even Harriet Freke, who she thought was her one true friend, betrayed her. Harriet gave up her friendship with Lady Delacour to go stay with Mrs. Luttridge, who in turn agreed to support Harriet Freke's husband in an upcoming election. Lady Delacour was left depressed, dying of the injury to her breast, without a friend in the world.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 4: Lady Delacour's History and The Same Continued Analysis

Through Lady Delacour's history the reader gains a better appreciation of her character. Lady Delacour is frivolous and reckless, often indulging in behavior that is immoral or scandalous. Most of this behavior comes from the fact that she is desperate to be admired and envied and is easily led. From very early in life, she had great riches and numerous admirers, giving her the impression that to be loved and fawned over is the best thing in life. Because of this, she learned to attach value to false feelings, mistaking Henry Percival's honesty for disrespect. She allowed herself to be trapped by Lord Delacour, who the reader is told was simply after her money, because he flattered her. She allowed herself to be led into dishonorable behavior by Harriet Freke because she wanted to always be thought highly of. Harriet was able to make her do anything by insinuating that she was making herself look bad, or cowardly, or ridiculous. In these cases, Lady Delacour's pride was her downfall. Her pride was her downfall in her financial situation too, as she felt the need to always be seen spending money and wearing the latest fashions. Her pride dictated that she must live a life that others would admire and envy, rather than one filled with honesty and true friends. Even when admitting to Belinda that she has had a sad and tragic life, with no real friends, she still emphasizes the importance of others envying rather than pitying or helping her.

However, Lady Delacour has some redeeming features too. She feels genuine remorse over her actions with Lawless. She is aware that it was her flirting that led to the man's death, and feels as though she herself murdered him. She recognizes that the world she lives in is false, and wishes that it could be different. She now realizes that her life has been meaningless and full of sadness, and that she could have avoided this by looking for better things in life. She believes that she is beyond hope or redemption, but at least admits that she had behaved badly. She has learned from past mistakes and is now much shrewder at discerning a person's true character. One mistake she seems unable to learn from, though; she still uses flirting and jealousy as a weapon. She did this once and ended up married to a man she hates. She did it again and it led to a man's death. Now she is flirting with Clarence Hervey in order to appear attractive and enviable to society, without thinking of the consequences for Clarence, her husband, and even Belinda, who she knows holds feelings for Clarence. It seems that Lady Delacour still has much to learn and repent for before she will be able to redeem herself.

Lady Delacour's bad behavior is reflected in her inability to raise healthy children. Her first child was born dead, which she believes is because she refused to rest properly while pregnant. Her second child was very sickly, which she claims is because she nursed it herself rather than letting a nursemaid feed it, and this child also died. Lady Delacour's inability to play the proper woman's domestic role and to act as a proper lady should is reflected in her failure as a mother. Lady Delacour does not seem to be able to succeed in any of the traditional roles of a woman. Learning from her mistakes, she sent her third child to be schooled elsewhere, fearing that she would raise the child badly.



The best mothering Lady Delacour can give, it seems, is to separate herself as much as possible from her child.

The duel is an important episode in these chapters, as it shows how Lady Delacour was injured and came to think that she is dying. It also shows the peak of Lady Delacour's scandalous behavior, as dressing up as men and performing such an unladylike activity would have been considered extremely bad behavior at the time. Women were expected to remain modest and demure, not to emulate men. The duel, and its resulting injury, is also a symbolic punishment for Lady Delacour's flirtatious behavior towards Lawless, who was himself killed in a duel as a result. Even Lady Delacour points out the significance of this, calling it 'poetic justice.'



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 5 and 6: Birthday Dresses and Ways and Means

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 5 and 6: Birthday Dresses and Ways and Means Summary

Belinda thinks on what Lady Delacour told her and determines that she will learn from her bad example. This attitude is tested immediately when her aunt sends her money to buy a dress to be presented at court. Belinda resolves not to spend any more money, but Lady Delacour soon convinces her that buying new dresses will be a good idea, reasoning that it will show Clarence Hervey that she does not care what he thinks.

When Clarence Hervey visits, Belinda's cold behavior towards him convinces him that he was wrong about her. At a gathering at Lady Delacour's, he entertains the company by dressing in women's clothes, claiming he can handle the hoop (bustle) as well as any woman. When Lady Delacour quickly loosens Belinda's hair, he is amazed by the beauty of it, and impressed with her modest behavior. He now begs Lady Delacour to get Belinda to like him again. She agrees, but only if he will procure new horses for her carriage, which she claims Belinda desires. He does so, but Belinda still will not treat him warmly. Lady Delacour begs her to smile for Clarence, explaining that it was the price for the new horses. Belinda is outraged that Lady Delacour used her name to get the horses, and insists she use the money her aunt sent for the dresses to pay for the horses instead. She writes explaining this to her aunt, who is incredibly displeased with this use of her money. Belinda resolves that she will pay her aunt back from her own dowry.

However, Lady Delacour does not use the money to pay back Clarence Hervey, but to pay the coach maker instead, who has just delivered her new coach. Belinda is astonished and distressed, insisting that Clarence must be paid at once. Lady Delacour immediately explains the entire matter to Mr. Hervey, who had begun to think badly of Belinda again. He is pleased to hear that Belinda is still worthy of his praise, and realizes that he has feelings for her.

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 5 and 6: Birthday Dresses and Ways and Means Analysis

Belinda feels a mix of conflicting emotions concerning Lady Delacour's history, including pity for her misfortunes and contempt for her disgraceful behavior. Belinda shows herself to be kind-hearted in her concern for Lady Delacour, and in the fact that she did not immediately cast her off as an acquaintance. She also shows good sense and delicacy in her approach to her concerns about Lady Delacour. She resolves to learn from the bad example of Lady Delacour, to make sure she does not end up just as



unhappy. She has learned an important lesson, that money and popularity are not enough to make a person happy, and that outward appearance is not a good indicator of whether a person lives a good life. She decides not to spend any of her money while in London, as fashion and high society have only ruined Lady Delacour. In her reactions, Belinda presents a good example of how the author thinks a woman should behave.

Belinda's resolve is quickly tested, however, when Lady Delacour persuades her to buy a couple of new dresses in order to be presented at court (the household and society of the king or high nobles). Belinda is persuaded by the argument that she will show Clarence Hervey that she does not care what he thinks. Of course, it is very clear that she does care what Clarence thinks; it would seem that Belinda is getting sucked into Lady Delacour's dangerous world of pretense and falsity, where others' opinions are all that matters. Belinda's saving grace is that she worries more for her good reputation than Lady Delacour, who would rather be popular and envied. Though Lady Delacour may try to pull her into frivolity, Belinda will never allow herself to be led into anything dishonorable simply to make people like her.

Chapters five and six pick up the theme of dishonesty and falsity once again, this time in the manipulations of Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour begins to try to use Belinda, despite her bad experiences with Lawless and Harriet Freke; Lady Delacour does not seem to have learned her lesson. First she uses Belinda's name in order to obtain new horses, then begs Belinda to show favor to Clarence Hervey as payment. Belinda is shocked that Lady Delacour could use her in such a way, and Lady Delacour is suitably apologetic. However, it does not take long for Lady Delacour to take advantage of Belinda once again, this time to use her money to pay for a new carriage rather than to purchase the horses. When Belinda finds out, Lady Delacour once more pretends to be remorseful, before manipulating both Belinda and Mr. Hervey into forgiving her. Lady Delacour emerges from the situation with a new carriage and new horses, and nobody cross with her, an extraordinary achievement given how badly she used both people involved. Lady Delacour's behavior is shocking, and Belinda will have to find a way to avoid such situations in future if she does not want her own reputation to be damaged.

The theme of pretense, of things not being quite as they seem, is also reflected in Mr. Hervey's cross-dressing episode, which echoes the cross-dressing of Lady Delacour and Mrs. Luttridge. Mr. Hervey manages to fool Lady Boucher into thinking he is a woman until tricked by Lady Delacour into revealing himself. Mr. Hervey, like Lady Delacour and other characters, also shows himself to be a little too concerned with what others think of him. He behaves differently when in different company, and is at all times incredibly eager to please. At the end of chapter six, he is ready to declare his feelings for Belinda when some of his male friends arrive. Immediately he changes his mind, not wanting the men - who had previously mocked him for being pursued by Belinda - to know his feelings. The reader cannot help but feel that if all the characters worried less about what others thought and more about their own feelings and happiness, then there would not be so much confusion.



Whether Clarence Hervey is a suitable match for Belinda is also called into question in these chapters. Belinda worries that he only wants to flirt with her and that he would not make a good husband. Mr. Hervey himself seems to constantly change his mind, never sure of Belinda's character or his own true feelings towards her. Lady Delacour, meanwhile, is intent on holding on to him for her own purposes, using him to make others jealous and to give the impression of great influence and popularity. What effect this may have on the young man's reputation, and on anyone who associates with him, remains to be seen.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 7 and 8: The Serpentine River and A Family Party

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 7 and 8: The Serpentine River and A Family Party Summary

Mr. Hervey attends a wine-tasting contest with his friends sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochfort. They decide to take a walk in the park to clear their heads, and Mr. Hervey jumps into the Serpentine River despite not knowing how to swim. None of his friends are willing to jump in to save him, but luckily for Mr. Hervey, a gentleman called Henry Percival drags him out and another man called Doctor X revives him. Mr. Hervey finds out that Mr. Percival was once in love with Lady Delacour and wishes to know more. Percival invites him to dine with him, but Mr. Hervey's friends want him to eat with them instead. Hurt by their lack of care when he was drowning, Mr. Hervey chooses to go with Percival instead.

At Henry Percival's house, Mr. Hervey meets Lady Anne Percival, Henry's wife, and is impressed with her kindness and happiness. He is astonished to meet Helena Delacour, Lady Delacour's daughter, who visits Lady Anne often and is treated as one of the family. He learns that Lady Delacour sent her daughter away to be looked after by a school and by her aunt, who is referred to as Mrs. Delacour. Mrs. Delacour is very scathing of Lady Delacour, claiming that she has no heart and is a bad mother.

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 7 and 8: The Serpentine River and A Family Party Analysis

Mr. Hervey's behavior when he is with his friends is very different from when in polite company. His friends are not the most respectable or sensible people to go out with, even though they are rich and part of London's high society. Sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochfort are both a little ridiculous in their behavior and manner of speech, particularly the constant cursing ("Damn it, yes, where is Clary though?" p. 92), which is both humorous and uncouth. They are clearly a bad influence on Mr. Hervey, who is admonished for not running into the children in the park and almost drowns as a result of their outing.

However, with Doctor X and Henry Percival, Mr. Hervey behaves like a proper gentleman, and the sensible, kind-hearted nature of Lady Anne makes a big impression on him. He is perfectly polite to Mrs. Delacour despite her obvious disapproval of him, and apologizes when he thinks he may have upset Helena. He does not boast or make bets or perform silly dares as he did with Baddely and Rochfort. It is therefore a huge breakthrough in Mr. Hervey's character that he accepts Percival's invitation over Rochfort's. He shows that he is a good judge of character and that he recognizes at last



that his former friends are not the best people to be with. Making friends with Percival and Doctor X instead will ensure that his behavior is up to the standards it will need to be if he is to be worthy of Belinda.

Mr. Hervey is also given a huge surprise in chapter eight. He has no idea that Lady Delacour has a daughter when he meets Helena, and is shocked to hear of her history and the apparent neglect Lady Delacour showed. He refuses to think too badly of Lady Delacour yet, but he no longer considers her the happy woman he once did. Instead, he is hugely affected by the warm personality of Lady Anne, who he sees is a much better woman than Lady Delacour. He realizes that Lady Delacour's gaiety seems false in comparison to Lady Anne's easy, unpretentious happiness. In short, he now sees that Lady Delacour tries too hard to make everyone like her. Lady Anne, in contrast, does not have to try; it is her personality that makes people love her. This reminds him of Belinda, and significantly he says he prefers the tragic muse over the comic muse. This signifies that he has now decided that Belinda is a better woman than Lady Delacour, and that if made to choose, he would choose Belinda's sweet simplicity over Lady Delacour's false cheer.

Lady Anne is presented as the perfect woman, showing what the author's ideas of how a woman should feel and behave are. Most importantly, she is a good mother, even to the extent that she kindly mothers a child who is not her own. In contrast, Lady Delacour seems all the worse for having abandoned her daughter. Lady Anne is also a good wife, and fits perfectly into the domestic role. Mrs. Delacour scoffs at the idea that Lady Delacour could ever become domestic. Lady Anne does not seek flattery but puts people at their ease. She is warm and friendly, and makes people happy because she and her household are all happy. This is placed into sharp contrast with Lady Delacour's popularity, gained through making others envious of her, through false gaiety and extravagance, and always demanding more and more flattery. Finally, Lady Anne is shown to have a sensible attitude and a good heart. She reasons that there are many reasons for the way Lady Delacour acts, and refuses to think as badly of her as Mrs. Delacour does. Lady Anne tries to be generous with everyone, always assuming a person is better than they might appear to be. When Belinda is mentioned, she refuses to jump to the conclusion that she is as bad as her aunt and simply seeking to trap a rich husband. However, Lady Anne is not carried away by kind feelings; she is also sensible, and can condemn bad behavior when she sees it. Lady Delacour, on the other hand, does not appear to hold the same kind thoughts for other people, and very rarely seems to consider things with a sensible attitude. In conclusion, Lady Anne is the perfect woman, and is almost a complete opposite to Lady Delacour. Lady Anne is shown as everything that Lady Delacour is not, but should be, and everything that Belinda should aspire to be. It seems a shame that Belinda is being chaperoned by Lady Delacour, as Lady Anne would be a much more appropriate role model. However, when Mr. Hervey's thoughts turn to Belinda and he chooses the tragic muse, he shows that he already associates Belinda more with Lady Anne than Lady Delacour. If Belinda can continue to behave sensibly and thoughtfully, then it seems that she has a good chance of becoming like Lady Anne.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 9 and 10: Advice and The Mysterious Boudoir

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 9 and 10: Advice and The Mysterious Boudoir Summary

Mr. Hervey calls on Doctor X and begs him to visit Lady Delacour's house to tell him what he thinks of Belinda. He does so, and is not impressed with Lady Delacour but thinks very highly of Belinda. As he visits more often, he grows to like Belinda more and Mr. Hervey is pleased. Doctor X suggests that Clarence should spend less time in frivolity and put more effort into something useful in the world, such as medicine or politics. Mr. Hervey is moved by this and agrees to reform his ways. When his old friends visit to find out why he hasn't been to see them in awhile, he is cold towards them and refuses to give up Doctor X's friendship. Philip Baddely and Rochfort are annoyed, and renounce his friendship. Mr. Hervey does not seem too bothered.

Lady Delacour then comes in and Belinda reads a letter sent to her by Helena. Mr. Hervey is shocked to hear Lady Delacour talk of domestic life and children as 'evils', and secretly resolves that he will reform her by introducing her to Lady Anne and reconciling her with her daughter. After he leaves, however, Belinda and Lady Delacour's conversation reveals that Lady Delacour reads more of Helena's letters than she was letting on. She is upset that her daughter appears to love another more than her, and thinks that nothing can be done to resolve the situation. She also thinks that Lady Anne's care for Helena suggests that Henry Percival is still in love with her.

Lady Delacour attends a party in which she is determined to outshine Mrs. Luttridge. She urges the horses pulling her carriage to go faster than Mrs. Luttridge's horses, resulting in a nasty accident in which Lady Delacour is badly hurt. She is carried in by Clarence Hervey, but she protests that she is perfectly fine. Lord Delacour comes in, drunk, and demands to be let into Lady Delacour's private chamber, thinking that she is keeping a secret lover in there. Of course, the chamber is actually full of Lady Delacour's medicines and she is anxious not to let her husband or anyone else see them. Belinda jumps to her rescue and forbids Lord Delacour from entering the chamber, and he remarks that it must be Belinda's lover in there instead.

When Belinda has finally managed to get Lady Delacour to a room away from everyone else, she persuades the lady to allow Doctor X to come look at her. Doctor X sees the patient and Belinda shows him the secret chamber. He promises to keep Lady Delacour's secret. When he returns home he finds Clarence Hervey anxiously waiting there, upset about Belinda's possible secret lover. Doctor X assures him there is no lover, and Mr. Hervey is overjoyed. However, Mr. Hervey admits his own secret at the end of the chapter; he has his own past mistress to deal with before he can properly give his heart to Belinda.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 9 and 10: Advice and The Mysterious Boudoir Analysis

Lady Delacour's ambiguous character is emphasized in these chapters. She constantly seems to switch from saying something truly shocking to revealing that she actually does care. The reader is disgusted with her attitude towards her abandoned child and the people who take care of her, as she appears to consider children more trouble than they are worth and talks of domestic life and children as 'evils.' She is scornful of the people who do take care of Helena, supposing that they have nothing better to do, unlike herself. However, just as the reader thinks Lady Delacour is a horrible person, they are immediately made to pity her. Lady Delacour reveals that she does actually read Helena's letters, and in fact pays quite a lot of attention to them. Belinda is amazed that Lady Delacour would want to appear worse than she really is, but the reader can see that Lady Delacour is trying to protect her own pride and wounded heart. She feels a lot for her estranged daughter, and is incredibly upset that Helena appears to love Lady Anne so much more than her own mother. She thinks the situation is not resolvable, as the girl has now grown to think of Lady Anne as her mother and only wants to visit Lady Delacour out of a feeling of duty. She pretends not to care about Helena because it is too painful to admit, even to herself, that she desperately wishes she could have her daughter's love. In this respect, Lady Delacour is a tragic and pitiable character, rather than a despicable one.

Just when the reader thought they had Lady Delacour figured out, however, she does something unthinking and selfish again. Firstly, she causes a terrible accident simply because she is obsessed with 'out-doing' Mrs. Luttridge, a foolish rivalry that any sensible person would put an end to. Both Lady Delacour and Mrs. Luttridge are behaving like children. Then, when Lord Delacour insists on seeing inside her secret chamber, she allows Belinda's reputation to be damaged rather than tell her secret. Lady Delacour thinks that her pride is more important than Belinda's reputation and future, which is incredibly selfish, especially considering that Belinda is supposed to be her friend. These glimpses of Lady Delacour's honest feelings show the reader that she is a character that can still be redeemed, but it will obviously take some work.

Thankfully, Mr. Hervey has decided to take on the task of redeeming her. This is partly due to his own reform, as he has now resolved to become a less frivolous and more sensible man. Through his friendship with Doctor X, Mr. Hervey has become a better gentleman and a more worthy man for Belinda's affections. When Lady Delacour regretted that she may have turned out a better woman if she had friends like Doctor X, Clarence Hervey immediately feels moved to help her. Perhaps he realizes how easily he was led astray by his own inappropriate friends, and how Doctor X has helped him. He is now determined to help Lady Delacour in much the same way, by introducing her to better friends (Lady Anne) and resolving any regret and sadness in her life (by reconciling her with her daughter), and showing her that happiness lies a different way than she thought. Mr. Hervey was made to see that happiness lies in being useful rather than frivolous. So Lady Delacour must be taught that happiness for a woman lies in domesticity rather than popularity.



It seems that there is hope for Lady Delacour at last, not just from Clarence Hervey's resolution to help her find a better route to happiness, but in the visit of Doctor X. Now that a proper doctor knows her secret, perhaps she can finally begin to get help for her illness. A large part of Lady Delacour's behavior is formed from her knowledge that she will die soon. She now sees no point in life but to make others jealous of her and to 'go out with a bang' as one of the most popular women in London. However, if Doctor X can give her some hope for the future, then she can begin to embrace life again, seek happiness and begin to mend her past mistakes. Both Doctor X and Clarence Hervey's help will be necessary in her recovery, as she needs both medical and moral healing.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 11 and 12: Difficulties and The Macaw

Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 11 and 12: Difficulties and The Macaw Summary

Lady Delacour is now on the mend and begins to be visited by all of London's high society, whom Belinda must entertain when the Lady retires to her room. Belinda manages to ignore their flattery and not let their attention go to her head. However, while Clarence Hervey is visiting one day, he accidentally drops a lock of hair onto the floor. Belinda wonders if Mr. Hervey is keeping a mistress somewhere. After this, Mr. Hervey begins to act more coolly towards Belinda, and she is confused as to whether he loves her or not.

Doctor X informs Belinda that there may be some hope for Lady Delacour if she submits to an operation performed by a proper doctor, and Belinda resolves to make sure that she does. Lord Delacour apologizes to Belinda for shouting at her the previous night and trying to get into the locked room. Then, encouraged by Belinda, he begins to act a lot more civilly towards his wife.

At this point, Baddely begins to court Belinda. He is annoyed with Mr. Hervey for ending their friendship and hopes to pay him back by flirting with the girl he likes. He tells Lady Delacour that Mr. Hervey has a mistress, and Belinda is dismayed that his description matches the lock of hair that Mr. Hervey dropped. The following day Baddely proposes to Belinda but she refuses him, much to Baddely's astonishment, as he thinks himself the perfect catch. At this point Lord Delacour walks in and Baddely takes the opportunity to leave in a sulk.

Lady Delacour is losing sleep because of the noise that Marriot's macaw (a tropical bird and a type of parrot) is making. Lady Delacour demands that the macaw must go, but Marriot is insistent that she cannot get rid of it. Eventually, Belinda manages to persuade her, and takes the bird to be sold. As she is looking for a less noisy bird to be Marriot's pet, Lady Anne enters the shop, looking for a blue macaw for Mrs. Delacour. Helena comes up to Belinda and begs her to ask Lady Delacour if she might visit her, and offers to send her some goldfish as a gift. Belinda promises she will ask the lady, then gives Marriot's blue macaw to Helena to give to Mrs. Delacour. She hopes that this will begin to heal the fractured relationships of the family. At the end of the chapter, Belinda and Lady Anne are introduced to each other and find that they like one another.



Belinda. Volume 1, Chapters 11 and 12: Difficulties and The Macaw Analysis

Clarence Hervey seems to be hiding a shocking secret, a former mistress! This seems all the worse because of his suspicious thoughts concerning Belinda. He was always very changeable and quick to judge, demanding absolute purity of character from the girl he admires. Yet now it seems that Clarence himself was hiding an unsavory secret and that perhaps his suspicions came from the fact that he knows himself to be guilty. At this point the reader is forced to wonder if Mr. Hervey is the man we thought he was, and if a relationship between him and Belinda can ever be possible. However, Mr. Hervey's secret has been left mainly a mystery, with only small hints to give the reader a clue. Mr. Hervey referred to a 'mistress' but we do not know how involved with her he was, who she is, how long ago the relationship may have been, and whether he still keeps in contact with her. The evidence of the hair seems pretty damning, as he would not keep a lock of hair on him unless he still had feelings for her, or was attached to her in some way. Anything more, however, remains a mystery, and thus the reader is forced into the same position that Mr. Hervey has been in with Belinda until now; we can only be suspicious.

The macaw, while being an amusing episode in the story, is also a turning point for the characters. In getting rid of the macaw, Belinda is led to meet Lady Anne and Helena, the two people who have the best chance of helping to reform Lady Delacour and restore her happiness. Marriot's grip over her mistress is challenged and she is put back into her place as a servant, revealing that she really does care very much for Lady Delacour. Finally, with the gifting of the macaw to Mrs. Delacour, Belinda hopes that the broken family relationships surrounding Lady Delacour can begin to be mended.

In this way, the last chapter of volume 1 ends with hope for the future, and a sense that all characters are now united in their hopes and efforts to reform Lady Delacour and restore her happiness. However, in a story with so many twists and misunderstandings, and given the stubborn nature of Lady Delacour, we know that things are not likely to be quite that simple.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 13, 14 and 15: Sortes Virgilianae, The Exhibition and Jealousy

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 13, 14 and 15: Sortes Virgilianae, The Exhibition and Jealousy Summary

Clarence Hervey brings over Helena's gift of a bowl of goldfish for Marriott and Lady Delacour. Belinda and Mr. Hervey then introduce Helena to her mother, who is charmed by her daughter's kindness and affection. She resolves that she will submit to an operation, and that if she survives she will become a good mother to Helena.

At the gathering that evening, Lady Delacour decides to pick out a snippet of wisdom by randomly opening a book and reading from that page. The book falls open at a passage that Belinda had been reading and marked for herself, which discusses how a wife may handle a husband who worries that he is being controlled by his wife. Lady Delacour thinks that Belinda and Mr. Hervey had deliberately set this up in order to teach her a moral lesson, but they assure her that it was merely coincidence.

Later, however, Lady Delacour remembers this event with suspicion. She begins to wonder if Belinda might hope to win Lord Delacour's affections and marry him after her death. She thinks Belinda may have been reading that passage in order to prepare for dealing with Lord Delacour, and that her refusal of Baddely's proposal was because she was holding out for a richer husband. When Belinda tries to convince Lady Delacour to trust Lord Delacour with her secret, she imagines that it is because Belinda wants the Lord to be shocked and disgusted by her.

At a painting exhibition, Baddely shows Belinda and Lady Delacour a picture that he claims is of Clarence Hervey's mistress. Mr. Hervey tells Belinda that he is leaving London for a time, and warns her of a rumor spreading that she has designs on Lord Delacour. Later, Belinda receives a letter from her aunt expressing concern over the same rumor. Belinda informs Lady Delacour at once, but the lady will not believe that she is innocent, and begins to treat Belinda very harshly. Eventually, after many insults and accusations, Belinda decides to leave to go stay with Lady Anne Percival at Oakly Park.

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 13, 14 and 15: Sortes Virgilianae, The Exhibition and Jealousy Analysis

In chapter thirteen, Lady Delacour decides to try 'sortes virgilinae.' This is the random selection of a passage from Virgil, hoping that it will provide a piece of moral wisdom or



enlightenment. This was a game that could be played at gatherings to provide amusement for the guests. Virgil was a Latin poet from ancient Rome. Here, 'sortes virgilinae' is not used for Virgil alone, but applied to any book. Lady Delacour opens a book randomly and reads a passage from the page it opens on. Ironically, rather than providing a piece of wisdom or entertainment, the passage that she reads only sets up confusion and misunderstandings that threaten to destroy Lady Delacour's happiness.

Lady Delacour also refers to two French phrases often in these chapters. The first is "la femme comme il y en a peu" (p. 174), which means 'a woman like few others.' This is a phrase from Marmontel's *Tales*, a collection of moral messages with an emphasis on virtue. This is supposed to be the standard that Lady Delacour should set for herself. She should attempt to become a woman like few others in her virtue, a woman who could be held up as a good example and thus respected. This is suggested as the better route to happiness and greatness in a woman than Lady Delacour's desire to seek popularity and envy. Lady Delacour gives the phrase "la femme comme il n'y en a point" (p. 175) as an alternative. This means, 'a woman like no other,' suggesting that she is not satisfied merely to be held up as a woman of virtue with few equals. Instead, she wants to be entirely unique, so that no other woman could be compared to her. In her own head, this is what she achieves by her vivacious behavior and popularity in high society. However, she is beginning to lean a little more towards the woman of virtue now that she has met her daughter, and realizes that a life of respectful, domestic happiness could actually be possible for her. This is shattered when she begins to suspect Belinda of false behavior.

The main themes of these chapters are distrust, misunderstandings and jealousy. Lady Delacour constantly switches back and forth in her feelings towards Belinda. She begins to suspect Belinda of trying to catch Lord Delacour for herself, then the next morning regrets thinking badly of her friend. Later, she recalls her suspicions at various points, and begins to treat her friend coldly. When Belinda appears to do something to confirm her worries, she instantly thinks the worst, but when Belinda indicates feelings towards Mr. Hervey, Lady Delacour immediately thinks her innocent. Finally, when Lady Delacour hears of the rumor, which seems to confirm all her suspicions, she cannot possibly consider Belinda innocent, coming up with convoluted schemes that Belinda must be involved in. She begins to think of bad reasons for all of Belinda's seemingly honest or kind behavior. This does not seem very generous towards a friend who has always listened to her and cared for her and helped to keep an important secret of hers. Lady Delacour is overcome by feelings of distrust and jealousy.

Lady Delacour's reactions reflect her history and her character. She has never had a true friend, and she was introduced to false flattery and two-faced London society from a young age. She has never really experienced true friendship, and the only other person she thought a good friend turned out to be a treacherous woman who is now her enemy (Mrs. Freke). She has never met anyone who was interested in her for her own sake, rather than in what they might get out of her. Belinda's behavior is therefore confusing to her. She does not want to think badly of her friend, but finds it hard not to attach ulterior motives to her actions and kindness. She is terribly afraid of being taken in again by a so-called friend, as with Mrs. Freke, and so cannot help looking for



betrayal wherever she goes. She considers the betrayal of a friend to be the worst crime that could be committed against her, but does not think that in suspecting Belinda, she too is betraying a friend. Lady Delacour's jealousy reflects real feelings for Lord Delacour, which she is heavily denying even to herself, but it is even more indicative of her feelings for Belinda. Her extreme reaction reflects just how much she has come to trust and love Belinda, and she now feels that all this has been a mistake. What Lady Delacour really cannot stand, however, is to be thought 'a dupe', as she calls it. In other words, she hates the idea of people laughing at her and thinking that she is easily deceived. People will think that she is naïve and gullible, a situation that is unthinkable to Lady Delacour, who so anxiously seeks public approval at all times. Lady Delacour's suspicious nature - brought about by false London society - her jealousy, and above all her pride, have gotten the better of her.

These chapters are ended with a shattering of the hope that was established at the end of volume 1. With Belinda gone, how will Lady Delacour be able to reform and be a happy woman? Mr. Hervey has now left too, with no notice of when he will be coming back. More evidence is given of Mr. Hervey's mistress, and the chances of a relationship between him and Belinda is growing smaller. Belinda's own happiness is threatened by Lady Delacour's jealousy and suspicions, and her reputation could even be in danger if the rumor spreads.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 16 and 17: Domestic Happiness and Rights of Woman

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 16 and 17: Domestic Happiness and Rights of Woman Summary

Belinda finds the family at Oakly Park very welcoming and is extremely impressed with their way of life. She is convinced by their example that domestic bliss is the best kind of happiness. She writes to her aunt to explain firstly that the rumor is not true, and secondly that she will not accept Baddely's proposal as her aunt wishes, as she cannot love him. Her aunt angrily writes back that she will no longer help or care for Belinda if she does not marry Baddely. Belinda is upset to have to disobey her aunt, but will not marry a man she cannot love and respect.

At Oakly Park, Belinda meets Mr. Vincent, a Creole (white man born in the West Indies) who owns a plantation in the West Indies. His African servant, Juba, is being terrorized by visions of an 'obeah woman,' a powerful witch who he believes will kill him. He only sees the vision when visiting Harrowgate, where his master had lodged in the same house as Mrs. Freke. Belinda helps to unravel the mystery, explaining that Mrs. Freke has been able to conjure the vision by drawing it onto the wall in phosphorus, which gives off a glow when exposed to oxygen. She has done this in order to make Juba suffer for what she saw as his insolence. Mr. Vincent is so impressed with Belinda's kindness, intelligence and sensible nature that he begins to fall in love with her.

Mrs. Freke, meanwhile, attempts to persuade Belinda to come visit her and Mrs. Luttridge in Harrowgate. Mrs. Luttridge is anxious to try to draw back Mr. Vincent into her society. Belinda refuses, making an enemy of Mrs. Freke, who does not like to be opposed.

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 16 and 17: Domestic Happiness and Rights of Woman Analysis

In these chapters, Belinda and the reader are introduced to the perfect family: the Percivals. The Percivals are incredibly happy, and a large part of this seems to come from Lady Anne, who is the ideal wife, mother and woman. Lady Anne is presented as the ideal of what a woman should strive to be. She is kind, domestic and sensible, caring for her children and husband but not seeking any excessive flattery or praise. She is happy simply in keeping the members of her family happy. Her company is so pleasant that Belinda feels happy and at ease. However, Lady Anne is also intelligent and has a taste for literature. This is presented as a good thing, as her husband can talk



to her intellectually, on the same level as he would with his friends. This is important, as it states that men and women can be intellectual equals, even if a woman's role is placed firmly within the house. The author is writing a moral tale in which she presents her idea of the perfect woman, but the perfect woman does not need to be silent, dumb or submissive. Instead she should be caring, dedicated to her family, content with simple and natural pleasures, and sensible and respectable in her conduct. Aside from this, she is allowed to pursue literary and intellectual pleasures, and a studious nature is even encouraged.

This ties in with how Belinda is presented. Belinda is gentle, kind and sensible, but she is not simply a demure, obedient girl. She does not obey her aunt's wishes, which she considers counter to her happiness, and she will not be led astray by her friend. Belinda is allowed her own mind and a strong will, as well as a taste for literature and learning, just like Lady Anne. It seems that the most important thing for a woman, then, is reason, which should be used to find the best route to happiness. Belinda's choice in marriage should therefore be based on reason as well as love and respect, in which she is given the right to choose as she sees fit.

This is explored further in a long conversation between Lady Anne, Mr. Percival, Belinda and Mr. Vincent. They discuss whether ignorance in a woman can be a good thing or not, concluding that it is not helpful to want to keep a woman from learning and using reason. Belinda decides for herself on a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' uses of intelligence, based on different types of wit. Mrs. Freke's wit is compared to a noisy firework that demands attention but has no real substance. Lady Anne's, however, is an elegant firework, which holds many layers and is beautiful to observe. People cannot help their attention being drawn by the first, but it will be held by the latter, and it is the elegant firework that everyone wants to see. Therefore, intelligence in a woman is a good thing, but only if used and displayed properly, and not as a means of demanding attention or praise.

This idea of the perfect woman is contrasted with Lady Delacour, who is not at all domestic. However, Lady Delacour is also intelligent, strong-minded and capable of deep affection. She is shown not as a bad woman, but as a woman who could be good but has been led astray. She uses what could be virtue for bad ends. So, she uses her intelligence in order to be seen as witty, rather than to engage in pleasant conversation. She hides affection from public view and is concerned too much with her popularity. If she could spend these talents on domestic life instead, not only would she be a much better woman, she would also be a much happier one. The moral message is clear, as stated by the author in an aside to her readers: "Tastes that have been vitiated by the stimulus of dissipation might, perhaps, think these simple pleasures insipid" (p. 216). In other words, those who pursue harmful or unrespectable things in life do not realize that more simple pleasures, such as a domestic life, are what will make them truly happy.

These chapters also introduce an interesting element to the novel: issues of race. Juba, a black character, is patronized, and it is strongly suggested that his traditional beliefs are laughable and stupid. When his mistake is proved to him by western science, he immediately realizes his error and is thankful to the white people for saving him from his



harmful naivety. This treatment can be explained by the views of people at this time. This book was written at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, when black slaves were still used on plantations, and any non-white races considered inferior. Mr. Vincent himself, though born white, lives in the West Indies and has become 'tainted' by association. He displays foreign aspects and tendencies, and his face is excessively tanned. However, though these elements may seem distasteful to the modern reader, the book is actually ahead of its time in its approaches to race. Mr. Vincent is not put down for being Creole and associating with foreigners, but is considered a perfect gentleman and a very eligible match. Juba, too, though patronized, is presented as a much more likeable and noble character than Mrs. Freke or Mrs. Luttridge. It is not color or creed that matters to the author, but behavior and attitude, and it is these that mark Juba out as a better person than the two well-born ladies. We will see more evidence later of the author's progressive and tolerant views for her time.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 18 and 19: A Declaration and A Wedding

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 18 and 19: A Declaration and A Wedding Summary

Belinda is taken by surprise when Mr. Vincent declares his feelings for her, but is spared from having to answer him straight away when one of the Percival children comes in. Belinda still has feelings for Mr. Hervey and thinks that she cannot love Mr. Vincent, but Lady Anne persuades her to try. She suggests just taking time to get to know Mr. Vincent and makes him promise that he will not push Belinda for an answer.

The Percivals, Belinda and Mr. Vincent take a trip to Brimham Craggs to see some rocking stones. There they find Mrs. Freke standing high up on one of the stones, tormenting a young woman. Mr. Percival explains that this is Miss Moreton, who was led into disgraceful behavior by Mrs. Freke and now has no friends in the world. One of her relations, a clergyman called Mr. Moreton, had tried to warn her. In revenge, Mrs. Freke managed to get the nobleman who had promised Mr. Moreton a living to retract his word. Mr. Moreton was left poor, but was saved from ruin by Mr. Hervey, who heard of his good morals.

Belinda slowly begins to feel more for Mr. Vincent, but Lady Anne persuades him that she is not ready for a proposal yet. Then one day, at a wedding for Juba and a young woman called Lucy, Lady Delacour's carriage arrives and Marriott gets out. Marriott tells Belinda that it was Mr. Champfort, Lord Delacour's servant, who helped Baddely start the rumor about Belinda and Lord Delacour. Together, Marriott and Baddely's servant managed to get Champfort to tell the truth, then took this evidence to Lady Delacour. Marriott then told Lord Delacour that his wife would remain sick until Belinda could return, which she could not do if Champfort remained in the house. Lord Delacour immediately dismissed Champfort, and Lady Delacour wrote a letter begging Belinda to return. Marriott now hands Belinda this letter, and Belinda decides that she will return to Lady Delacour.

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 18 and 19: A Declaration and A Wedding Analysis

These chapters display some progressive attitudes towards race. Juba, the black servant of Mr. Vincent, is in love with Lucy, a white girl who is the daughter of an old couple living in the Percivals' porter's lodge. This is not looked on as a bad or disgraceful match, and Juba is not considered to be inferior to Lucy. In fact, both Lady Anne and Lucy's mother encourage Lucy, thinking that Juba would make a good husband for her. Lucy is even praised for being able to get over her initial shock at his



"black face" to see the person rather than the color of his skin (pp. 244-45). In chapter nineteen, Lucy and Juba are married, a cause for celebration without a hint of any distaste or disapproval.

This is an extremely progressive attitude given the time in which the book was written and published (published in 1801). As previously mentioned, black men and women, along with members of any non-white race, were not considered to be the equals of white people in eighteenth and nineteenth century western society. Slaves worked on plantations in places such as America and the West Indies, and many rich families obtained their wealth due to slavery. Mixed race couples were generally frowned upon, and it was not really thought proper for people of different races to marry. The fact that it is not an issue in this story highlights the author's views on what makes a person good or bad. She emphasizes that a person's morality, behavior and interaction with others is what they should be judged by, rather than color, wealth, popularity, or position in society. Several examples are given of high-born white men and women who behave despicably or make themselves ridiculous, such as Mrs. Freke, Miss Moreton, Philip Baddely and Rochfort, and to a certain extent Lady Delacour too. There are also many examples of poor, low-born or unimportant people who are nevertheless noble in their actions and morality. These include Lucy and her parents, Juba, Mr. Moreton (the clergyman), and in some cases Marriott. Put simply, it's not what is outside, but what is inside that really counts.

The match between Lucy and Juba is also highlighted as a good thing because she has used reason and a sensible attitude to arrive at a situation that will make her happy. She was not attracted to Juba at first, but after getting to know him, realized that he was a man she could love. He is also capable of supporting her and will make her happy. It is important not to get carried away by one's first impressions and feelings, and to instead think sensibly about what will make one happy. In this pursuit of happiness, as long as reason is consulted, a woman is free to come to any conclusion that will make her happy, whether the man be rich, poor, black or white. This is not only a progressive attitude towards race, it also puts greater emphasis on a woman's capability to choose for herself than other literature might do at this time.

The importance of using reasoned judgment in matters of the heart is a big theme in these chapters. Lady Anne attempts to convince Belinda that she must get to know Mr. Vincent before saying that she cannot love him, and that sticking with one's first love is not always sensible. She shows Belinda the example of Lucy's mother, who is now happily married to a man who was not her first love, and points out that Lucy can be happy with Juba despite not liking him at first. Later, Mr. Percival emphasizes the same point when he explores the foolishness of first love. He uses himself as an example, as he was once in love with Lady Delacour. He allowed himself to forget her, however, and came to love Lady Anne. He now believes that he is happier with Lady Anne than he ever could have been with Lady Delacour. He claims that the idea that first love is always true love is overly romantic, usually false and often dangerous. It can lead men and women to pine after another for the rest of their lives, or to miss out on better matches, or prevent them from loving the person that they do end up marrying. Here, of course, the reader will think of Lady Delacour, who only married Lord Delacour to make



Mr. Percival jealous. She has never quite let go of thoughts of Mr. Percival, and so has convinced herself that she cannot love Lord Delacour. She is therefore extremely unhappy. Mr. Percival, by contrast, has forgotten his feelings for Lady Delacour and embraced life with Lady Anne, and is now perfectly happy.

This idea of sticking with one's first love is explained by Belinda as a matter of female delicacy, as it would seem inconstant and perhaps even unrespectable to love another man after showing affections towards another. Even worse than this, if she were to then decide she could not love the second man after all, she would be accused of being a jilt (i.e., someone who leads another person on only to dump them later). In society at this time, a woman was expected to be extremely modest, and to only show feelings for a man whom she intended to marry. To be labeled a flirt was a very bad thing. Here the author subtly criticizes how society views female behavior. She questions how a woman can be expected to know if she loves a man unless she gets to know him; but in getting to know him she will be seen to be attaching herself to him. The woman is then obliged to marry him, dooming her to unhappiness if she does not love him after all. Alternatively, she could refuse him and be labeled a woman of loose morals.

The author also explores the dangers of forming overly romantic ideas. She links this specifically with reading too many romance books. Though the author criticizes romances, she does not intend her own book to be put into this category, as she views her writing more as a moral tale (as she says herself at the beginning of the book). She suggests that romance books give young women the idea that they should wait for the kind of man that is described in the books. Romance books give the impression that all first loves are true love, that good men are dashing and heroic, and that love should contain the kinds of adventures and rivalries found in these stories. Women who read too many romances will therefore get the wrong idea, expect the wrong things in life, and so be driven to unhappiness. Instead of judging a man based on romantic notions, she should use reason and intelligence instead. This is why it is so important for the author to show that characters can live happily despite not being with their first love, and that first impressions do not matter as much as people may think. This criticism is sometimes given in more modern times too, such as complaints that old Disney animated films taught young girls to wait for their 'prince' or 'knight in shining armor.' More recently, the Twilight books have come under criticism for presenting unrealistic and unequal relationships.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 20 and 21: Reconciliation and Helena

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 20 and 21: Reconciliation and Helena Summary

Lady Delacour and Belinda are reunited, and Belinda forgives her friend for her jealousy. Lady Delacour then decides to trust Lord Delacour with her secret. He is shocked to learn of her illness and resolves to do whatever he can to help her. When he shows jealousy over Clarence Hervey's letters, Lady Delacour is persuaded by Belinda to trust him to read them, as proof that nothing illicit is going on between them. Lord Delacour is delighted by her trust, and decides not to go drinking.

Lady Delacour determines to make Belinda happy, to repay her for her kindness. She believes the best way to do this is to encourage a match with Clarence Hervey. She writes to Mr. Hervey, persuading him that he should think of marriage and informing him of Belinda's relationship with Mr. Vincent, making it sound as though they will soon be married. By this she hopes to make Mr. Hervey jealous, so that he will hurry back to London and propose to Belinda before Mr. Vincent can win her.

Lady Delacour decides that she would like Helena to stay with her for awhile. Helena insists that she needs to speak to an old man outside her school and Belinda invites him to call at Lady Delacour's house. Helena explains to Belinda and Lady Delacour that the old man was a gardener who became ruined after a fine lady tricked him out of his prized plant. Lady Anne and Margaret Delacour had taken pity on him and hired him as gardener at Twickenham. Today he had been selling some flowers at Helena's school, and she now gives him the money she collected for him. Lady Delacour is ashamed that she is the fine lady that brought about the gardener's downfall and resolves to help him. She asks Lord Delacour to give an annuity to the man instead of buying her a diamond ring. She then finds that the estate he worked at, Twickenham, is to be sold, and decides that it will be perfect for her. They buy the house, and hire the old man as gardener. Lady Delacour now has a house in the country where her operation can be carried out in peace and quiet, and more importantly, in secret.

Meanwhile Champfort, paid by Mrs. Luttridge, has seduced one of the maids in Lady Delacour's house. He convinces her to try to find out what is kept in Lady Delacour's secret room. She manages to obtain the key while Lady Delacour naps, and sneaks to the door. However, before she can enter, she is caught by Helena. Helena tells Lady Delacour what happened, and the maid is dismissed. Lady Delacour now trusts Helena enough to tell her that she is dying, and Helena begs to be allowed to stay with her mother until the operation. Lady Delacour agrees, writes a last will in case she should die, and travels to Twickenham for her operation.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 20 and 21: Reconciliation and Helena Analysis

These are chapters of reconciliation and redemption. Lady Delacour is reunited with Belinda and reconciled with her husband, and at last resolves to be a better person. She finally trusts her husband with her secret and her honesty removes all his fears and jealousy. He promises never to visit Mrs. Luttridge again, proving that he cares more for his wife and that her own jealousy was also unfounded. It seems that both care for each other more than they realized or wanted to admit, and that both were trying to play with each other's emotions. When they can begin to be honest with each other, their relationship suddenly begins to mend and they act as though they are in love. As soon as Lord Delacour treats Lady Delacour with a little more kindness, she begins to praise him in many different ways, and declares that she would not stop raving about his talents if she had not been interrupted. It seems that Lady and Lord Delacour can hope for happiness after all.

Lady Delacour also finally places all her trust in her daughter, realizing that she is not only kind and sweet, but a sensible and loyal girl who loves her mother dearly. Lady Delacour is so delighted by her daughter that she is determined to live a domestic life should she survive her operation. She has even begun to make amends for her past mistakes and despicable behaviour. She is ashamed of her treatment of the gardener and immediately wishes to help him. She even sacrifices a beautiful diamond ring in order to give him money. This shows just how much Lady Delacour has changed, as previously she would not have been able to resist anything that she could show off to others to make them envious. She also would not have been able to resist owning a trinket that proved she held power over her husband. Now, however, expensive jewelry does not mean as much to her, and she is happier having her husband's trust and love than his gifts. At last, Lady Delacour is reformed, through the friendship of Belinda and Clarence Hervey, the kindness of others, and a good amount of honesty. The family is back together and held by strong bonds as Lady Delacour goes to face her operation.

However, readers should take note of the episode with the 'stupid maid' as they will soon see that this maid is not as slow-witted as she seems. When the maid went to try to open the secret door, she thought she heard a man's footsteps inside the room. In fact, this was the quack doctor whom Lady Delacour was paying off, now that she is intent on undergoing the surgery. She wanted this done in private so that her condition would not become widely known. The 'stupid maid' can report back that she heard a man's footsteps, and that she was dismissed simply for trying to open a door. This certainly looks very suspicious, and the reader cannot help feel that Mrs. Luttridge and Mrs. Freke are not done trying to harm Lady Delacour yet.



Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 22 and 23: A Spectre and The Chaplain

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 22 and 23: A Spectre and The Chaplain Summary

On the night of the operation, Lady Delacour begs the surgeon to postpone, as she is convinced that she will die that night. Later, she confesses to Belinda that she has been having visions of Lawless, the man whose death she feels responsible for. Belinda sees movement outside the window and tells Doctor X. The gardener then informs them that a thief has been caught in a trap by the cherry tree. It turns out that this 'thief' is none other than Mrs. Freke, dressed in man's clothes and spying on Lady Delacour. Mrs. Freke is annoyed to find that the man she thought she had caught Lady Delacour with is actually just her surgeon.

Lady Delacour realizes that her vision of Lawless was actually Mrs. Freke skulking about outside, and now happily submits to the operation. However, after the surgeon takes a look at her, he explains that she has no cancer at all, and that the quack doctor had been deliberately fooling her and making her ill in order to take her money. There is therefore no need for an operation, and Lady Delacour will live.

Lady Delacour begins to improve rapidly as soon as she stops taking the quack doctor's medicines. Doctor X now realizes that he needs to give her good religious teachings too, in order to bring her away from harmful Methodist beliefs. He recommends a clergyman, who turns out to be the same Mr. Moreton that Clarence Hervey helped out. With his help, Lady Delacour is able to gain a peaceful mind as well as a healthy body. Belinda now wishes to return to Oakly Park and the Percival family as she promised, and persuades Lady Delacour to come with her. She agrees to wait until Lady Delacour is ready to travel.

Belinda. Volume 2, Chapters 22 and 23: A Spectre and The Chaplain Analysis

Mrs. Freke is causing trouble yet again in chapter twenty-two, spying on Lady Delacour in the hopes of gaining some secret to gossip about and so ruin Lady Delacour and Belinda's reputations. In an amusing episode, however, Mrs. Freke is caught in a trap, injuring her leg. She has finally received punishment for her terrible behaviour, bringing it upon herself by sneaking around the house. Mrs. Freke's attempts to harm Lady Delacour and Belinda completely backfire; she has nothing to gossip about, Lady Delacour and Belinda are not engaged in shameful behaviour, and she has only succeeded in humiliating herself. This episode shows that bad behaviour such as



displayed by Mrs. Freke can only bring harm upon a woman in the end, and that seeking to destroy others is never a beneficial pursuit.

In these chapters, the theme of falsity and things not being what they seem is again picked up. Lady Delacour has been deceived by her quack doctor and led into emotional distress by Methodist teachings. The quack doctor caused harm by giving her false medicines that would only make her more ill so that she would continue to spend money consulting him. The Methodist teachings have caused harm by giving her false worries about the state of her soul, leading her to believe that she is doomed and irredeemable. Finally, the false visions of Lawless that were driving Lady Delacour to despair turned out to be Mrs. Freke lurking about outside. This last incident resembles the earlier episode when Belinda helped to show that Juba's visions were false. These, too, were caused by Mrs. Freke's malicious behaviour. It seems that everything surrounding Mrs. Freke is false or deceitful, as is most of what filled Lady Delacour's life before Belinda arrived. Lady Delacour must now learn to shake off harmful falsehoods to achieve truth and happiness.

The first step of this is revealing the quack doctor's lies. Now that Lady Delacour knows she will not die, she finally has hope for the future. She can now give herself to domestic life and enjoy a proper relationship with her husband and daughter, knowing that she will have plenty of time to enjoy this new life. She no longer needs to give in to despair. However, she is still troubled by the Methodist books that she reads. Methodism was a form of Christianity that emerged in the eighteenth century from the beliefs of a man called John Wesley. Many members of the Church of England at the time felt that Methodism was dangerous and could send weak minds mad with its fanatical sermons. With Doctor X's help, Lady Delacour is introduced to a clergyman who can give her true religious teachings, reassuring her that she need not fear excessively for her soul. She can now have peace of mind as well as health of body, two very important things in assuring Lady Delacour's happiness and continued good behaviour.

This also touches once again on the theme of the danger of reading. Reading and intelligence in women is shown as a good thing, but only if pursued and used in the correct ways. So, reading too much romance or fanatical religious texts can warp a person's mind, causing them to have false or harmful ideas. Reading moral tales, science and higher forms of literature, on the other hand, can open a person's mind to enjoyable conversation. Such a woman would be desirable for a man. However, such knowledge should not be used in the wrong way, such as a means of gaining attention, but rather to help one use reason to come to sensible judgments. Lady Delacour represents a woman who has got things all wrong; she held on to the idea of her first love despite the fact that she is married to another man and let herself be led astray by false advice and teachings. She read harmful books and used her wit to demand flattery and make herself popular. Now that she has been shown the error of all these ways, she can begin to live more like Lady Anne, who represents the ideal woman and the best method of gaining happiness.



As Lady Anne is such a good example of female virtue, she is to be used by Belinda as a kind of finishing school for Lady and Lord Delacour. Now that Lady Delacour has shown significant progress in her behaviour and a desire to live a domestic life, Belinda reasons that a stay at Oakly Park with the Percivals will serve to cement this idea in Lady Delacour's mind. It will show her that domestic life does lead to happiness and will prevent her from ever desiring to re-enter her old way of life. Belinda also hopes that it will stop Lord Delacour from going back to his drinking, as he might do if they were to return straight away to London. Above all, Lord and Lady Delacour must be kept away from false and harmful London society, which could easily corrupt them once again.

At the end of volume 2 there seems to be more hope for Lady Delacour than ever, but what of Belinda, Mr. Hervey and Mr. Vincent? There are still many loose ends to be resolved before a true happy ending can be reached.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 24 and 25: Peu a Peu and Love Me, Love My Dog

Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 24 and 25: Peu a Peu and Love Me, Love My Dog Summary

One day Marriott comes in with some news. Helena found a bullfinch (a small songbird with a pinkish-red breast) that was injured in the garden. While out buying seed for it, they discovered an advert asking for the return of a lost bullfinch. When Marriott followed the instructions, she was taken to a shop where she found out the address of the bird's owner, who rumor has it is the mistress of Clarence Hervey. She went to take the bird back, and there she found Virginia St. Pierre and her guardian, a woman called Mrs. Ormond, who holds a letter addressed to Mr. Hervey. Lady Delacour is shocked to hear this news, but is determined not to judge Mr. Hervey until she has heard his side of the story. Belinda, however, believes the story and swears that she is not jealous, as she no longer loves Mr. Hervey.

Mr. Vincent arrives and shows Belinda an anonymous letter that he received, claiming that Belinda had hopes of marrying Lord Delacour if Lady Delacour died. It also claims that she tried to trap Mr. Hervey in marriage and that now she is after Mr. Vincent's fortune. Belinda confirms that she was interested in Mr. Hervey for a time but that it is over, and that nothing else in the letter is true. She encourages him to show it to Lady Delacour, who immediately dismisses the letter as a creation of Mrs. Freke and then launches into a long speech praising Belinda's virtue. Mr. Vincent is delighted and leaves satisfied.

Meanwhile, Marriott manages to catch Mr. Champfort out in a criminal act. He stole money from Lord Delacour along with writing paper to compose the letter mentioned above. Mr. Champfort immediately gives up Mrs. Freke as his accomplice in writing the letter. Now she is shamed and he is in prison.

The Percivals write that they have been called away from Oakly Park, so Belinda, Lady Delacour and Mr. Vincent will have to delay their visit. As they are sitting together at Lady Delacour's house, Mr. Hervey arrives. He assures Lady Delacour that he did reply to her last letter but that the packet must still be at her house in London. He hints that the packet will contain all answers about his mysterious 'mistress.' Lady Delacour sends for it at once. Mr. Hervey seems awkward and unhappy, and soon leaves. Lady Boucher arrives and informs them of the latest gossip; Mr. Hervey is soon to be married. Later, Mr. Hervey's packet arrives, but Belinda shows no interest in its contents. Lady Delacour takes it to her room to read alone.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 24 and 25: Peu a Peu and Love Me, Love My Dog Analysis

The evidence that Mr. Hervey has a mistress now seems to be pretty damning. Mr. Hervey himself hinted that he had another love interest; he carried a lock of woman's hair; Philip Baddely claimed to have seen her, and his description matches the girl from Marriott's story. Lady Delacour is still determined, however, to wait for Mr. Hervey's own side of the story before she judges him. This is unusually sensible of her and shows great love and loyalty towards her friends. She has learned from her mistake with Belinda, when she judged too soon and almost lost a good friend. She is now making sure that she does not repeat the same error.

There have been several instances in the novel where people make assumptions about other characters' behavior, causing a lot of unhappiness that might have been avoided if simple questions had been asked instead, or the truth told in the first place. For example, Mr. Hervey judged Belinda by her aunt's reputation without finding out first if she deserved such a bad opinion. He hurt her and ended up realizing that he was wrong and feeling very sorry for it. Lord Delacour assumed that Lady Delacour was seeing a secret lover, but in fact she was trying to keep her illness hidden from him instead. He also worried that Mr. Hervey was her lover, until she showed him Mr. Hervey's letters and reassured him. In all cases, a more open and honest approach and giving each other the benefit of the doubt would have stopped the situation escalating into something worse. Lady Delacour's determination to allow Mr. Hervey to tell his side of the matter shows much progress on her part; she has left the false and dishonest ways of her old life behind and is trying to value the truth.

The episode in the shop in Marriott's story is important. A man seems shocked and exited by the bird, demanding to know more of the woman who owns it. Marriott is curious about this, but otherwise the event is passed over and forgotten in the shock of Mr. Hervey having a mistress. Who is the mysterious man and why did he recognize the bird? How did he know that the bird belongs to a young woman and why is he so interested in her? These questions are very important as they suggest that Virginia may have another lover besides Mr. Hervey, or could at least lead to more information about who she is and how Mr. Hervey knows her. Or perhaps it is this man who is her lover and not Mr. Hervey at all. The reader is not given the answers straight away, but the reader should take note and remember this event, as it will be sure to have repercussions later in the story.

Chapter twenty-five is titled 'Love me, Love my Dog,' which readers may find strange given the unimportance of the dog in this chapter. This is a clue that here is another event that will have repercussions later, though it seems unimportant now. Lady Delacour expresses a dislike for the dog, and even greater displeasure at Mr. Vincent's mention of being on friendly terms with Mrs. Luttridge. Mrs. Luttridge, as has been shown from past examples, is a woman who will stop at nothing to get what she wants and to take revenge on those she hates. One also knows that she wants Mr. Vincent as a friend and hates Belinda. Lady Delacour naturally does not like the fact that Mr.



Vincent is friends with her old rival, but she also seems suddenly suspicious, mentioning that Mrs. Luttridge is well known for her gambling parties. Belinda is surprised and uneasy, and Lady Delacour immediately reassures her and changes the subject. Though this is just a small part of the chapter, the reader should take note, as Lady Delacour is a very clever and perceptive woman. She may just have hit upon the truth, and she will certainly not let Belinda marry a man who may engage in bad behavior such as gambling. Mr. Vincent's dog starts a chain of events that will eventually lead to Mr. Vincent's downfall, as one shall see later. The dog will also be instrumental in solving the other mystery that is set up in this chapter, the one previously mentioned: who is the man who recognized the bullfinch?

Both of these chapters discuss at length the different types of love and how reason can be used in finding a husband. Belinda insists that there is a difference between loving someone and being in love with them. She claims that she loves Mr. Vincent without being in love with him. She also claims that she no longer cares for Mr. Hervey and has forgotten him as a potential husband. All her reasons for wanting to marry Mr. Vincent come from common sense: he is a good man, has money, will look after her, is respectable and kind, and he loves her. She points out that by using reason she can come to the conclusion that he would be an ideal husband, and that by getting to know him she has gradually come to love and respect him. However, she admits that she does not feel passionately about him and will never be in love with him. She does not feel that either of these are important. She does not believe in marriage merely for convenience sake, to a partner she does not love; however, she also does not believe in waiting for passionate 'true love' before she marries. She is convinced she will be happy with Mr. Vincent and that this is all that matters.

Lady Delacour is shocked and irritated by this reasoning. She sees no place for such calculations and reasoned argument in finding a husband. She believes that Belinda is fooling herself by making a distinction between love and being in love. Belinda thinks she can love Mr. Vincent as a husband, but it is clear to Lady Delacour that she can only love him as a friend. She also thinks that Belinda has not fully let go of Mr. Hervey and that deep down she is still in love with him. For Lady Delacour, love is all about passion and romance, not about cold philosophy. For once, Lady Delacour seems to be acting more sensibly than Belinda. She recognizes that Belinda still has feelings for another man and that it is not fair or right for her to marry a man she is not in love with and that it will not make her happy in the end. Belinda has seen the domestic happiness of the Percivals and listened to their arguments about not holding on to first loves. She has allowed herself to be influenced by this a little too much. While it is true that a person can easily be happy with a second love, the important word is 'love'. Lady Anne and Henry Percival love each other very much, which is why they are able to be so happy. Reason can only take a person so far. Though the author was insistent that reason was the most important virtue for a woman to possess, and holds Belinda up as a fine example of this, the reader cannot help sympathizing more with Lady Delacour. As Lady Delacour herself says, "I never wish to be as cool as you are, Belinda!" (p. 361).



Contemporary readers also agreed with Lady Delacour's assessment, finding Belinda too cold and unlike-able. This was the main criticism of the book at the time. The author defended the character of Belinda, claiming that she is a moral example of what a woman should be. The author firmly believed in using reason in matters of the heart. However, despite wanting to make this point, she still ended the story with Belinda marrying Mr. Hervey, and everything that happens in the book seems to push the two together. The character of Lady Delacour argues constantly with Belinda over her reasoning and her choice of Mr. Vincent, and in the end she is proven right and Lady Anne and Belinda are proven wrong. It seems that reason on its own cannot be enough, just as romantic passion cannot be enough if the match is completely unsuitable. Perhaps instead, the author is trying to show that a healthy balance between reason and passion must be reached. Either way, she champions the woman's right to choose for herself.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 26 and 27: Virginia and A Discovery

Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 26 and 27: Virginia and A Discovery Summary

These two chapters explain the contents of Mr. Hervey's letter, which is his story of how he became involved with Virginia St. Pierre. Virginia is actually called Rachel, and she lived in a cottage in the woods with her grandmother after her mother died. Her grandmother kept her away from men and other corrupting influences, wanting to keep her safe. One day, Mr. Hervey wandered into the wood and became lost. He asked at the cottage for directions and was impressed by the beauty and sweet naivety of Rachel. Later, when the grandmother died, he moved Rachel into the care of a woman called Mrs. Ormond, who looked after her as if she were her own daughter. Mr. Hervey decided that Rachel should be tutored in reading and writing and other matters until she was ready and of age to be a suitable wife. He re-named her Virginia, as he did not think the name Rachel was appropriate.

As Virginia was being educated, Mr. Hervey decided to see the world and enjoy high society. He met Lady Delacour and was greatly impressed with her. Then he met Belinda and fell in love with her. When comparing her to Virginia, he realized that Belinda would make an excellent wife, whereas Virginia would not. However, as he was resolving to break off any ties with Virginia, Mrs. Ormond persuaded Virginia that she should marry Mr. Hervey, assuming her to be in love with him. When Mr. Hervey came to visit, Mrs. Ormond told him Virginia was in love with him, and he realized that it was his duty to marry her.

Then Mr. Hervey heard news that a man called Mr. Hartley was looking for his lost daughter, and thought it might be Virginia's father. He sought him out, but could not find him. This was his reason for putting the painting of Virginia into the exhibition, in the hopes of finding her father. A clue took him to Portsmouth, but he could not find the man. He then received Lady Delacour's letter about Belinda and Mr. Vincent, and hurried back. However, Virginia seemed to be as much in love with him as ever, so he was forced to propose to her. He then visited Mrs. Delacour, who by chance was seeing a man named Mr. Hartley. Mr. Hartley turned out to be Virginia's father after all, and was very grateful to Mr. Hervey for looking after his daughter. Thinking Mr. Hervey in love with her, he encouraged his daughter to accept his proposal.

Mr. Hervey's fate is now sealed; he is committed to marrying Virginia. It is at this point that he visits Lady Delacour and Belinda, meets Mr. Vincent and tells Lady Delacour about the packet.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 26 and 27: Virginia and A Discovery Analysis

Mr. Hervey's letter is not presented as a letter but as a summary of its contents. However, there are points where it is obvious that Mr. Hervey could not possibly know what is being described, such as Virginia's private conversations with Mrs. Ormond and with her father. In fact, if Mr. Hervey did know what had been said in these conversations, he would guess that Virginia does not love him and would not now be in such a mess. These chapters then, are being told from the omniscient viewpoint of the narrator, for the purpose of filling the audience in and giving them a greater insight into the situation than Mr. Hervey has. As such, the reader should not assume that Mr. Hervey and Lady Delacour know every detail of what is being described.

Finally the reader finds out exactly what is going on with Mr. Hervey's 'mistress.' Though it is a relief to know that she is not actually his mistress and so he is not a bad man, it is still a very difficult and tragic situation. Mr. Hervey now seems completely entangled with Virginia, and there is little hope that he can somehow end up with Belinda now. This is particularly sad because Mr. Hervey does not love Virginia and has come to the conclusion that she will not make him happy. He still loves Belinda and wants to be with her. His resolve to make Virginia happy and marry her, despite his feelings, shows that he is kind and honorable. He is willing to make up for his past mistake, recognizing that it is his fault that Virginia loves him and he would be in the wrong to abandon her now. This idea might seem a little strange by modern standards, as we would probably consider it better for him to break her heart now than force her to live with a man who doesn't really love her. In the end, that situation could not make either of them happy. At the time, however, it would have been considered extremely despicable behavior to lead a person on, make them love you, and then break it off with them. Whatever Mr. Hervey's feelings towards her, the honorable thing to do at the time was to marry her.

Mr. Hervey's initial attraction to Virginia was based on the idea of the beauty of the natural state, gained from philosophy such as Rousseau's, who wrote during the eighteenth century about the State of Nature. According to Rousseau, man in his natural state does not act morally or immorally, and it is society that corrupts (as well as makes it possible for a person to be truly good). His philosophy tends to focus on the negative effects of society, such as in this quote from *Discourse on Inequality*, 1754: "The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said 'This is mine,' and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody."

Because Virginia was brought up in innocence and naivety, she is child-like in her knowledge of the world. She acts like a person somewhere between the State of Nature and society. Like Rousseau, her grandmother believed that society corrupts, and made Mr. Hervey swear not to hurt Virginia. Mr. Hervey promised, but in trying to help Virginia



began trying to educate her to enter society. By bringing her into society, instead of leaving her in her cottage, he unwittingly put her in danger. Now Virginia is considered his mistress, and her reputation has been damaged. It would seem that Virginia's grandmother and Rousseau are correct; society does corrupt.

Virginia's child-like innocence leads her to reject worldly things in favor of more 'natural' pleasures, just as man in the State of Nature would do. She chooses a rose-bud over diamonds, and reacts with horror at the idea of piercing her ears. She shows little interest in learning to read, write and paint, until it is suggested that it seems ungrateful for her not to learn. However, as pointed out in this chapter, she only rejects the diamonds because she does not know or understand their worth. She sees two pretty things and picks what she considers prettier. She is more used to seeing rose-buds, and so in fact may even attach greater value to them than to the diamonds. It is not virtue that makes her reject the diamonds, but ignorance. The same can be said for her other 'charming' rejections of the elements of high society. She is not a more moral or virtuous woman, as she does not have the experience to be so. In fact, in this she fits the philosophy of Rousseau perfectly, as she cannot be virtuous because she has not been brought up inside society's moral codes. Mr. Hervey mistakes this for self-restraint, misunderstanding the philosophy and the woman. He realizes his mistake too late, when he meets Belinda and compares her goodness to Virginia's naivety.

Belinda, in comparison to Virginia, is able to show real restraint, virtue, modesty and simplicity. She knows the worth of things, but still prefers simple pleasures over expensive items and frivolity. In fact, she has been put into the very middle of temptation, living in an affluent household with a woman used to luxury. Rather than being pulled down by Lady Delacour, she learns from her bad examples and even sets about reforming the lady, earning her a great deal of respect from Mr. Hervey. Most importantly, Belinda is intelligent and learned; she reads, is capable of wit and understanding, and of holding an interesting conversation. When Mr. Hervey talks to her he finds he is talking to an equal, and enjoys being able to use all his abilities. When talking with Virginia, however, he cannot use his abilities or hold very intellectual conversations. He must 'dumb down' his conversation to her level, and cannot talk with her as equals. He finds that this is one of the most important things in a wife. From being charmed by Virginia's naivety, he now recognizes it for what it is; ignorance. He finds that though she is sweet and pleasant, she is just not that interesting a person. This reiterates the important point that the author is trying to make; that women need to read and learn in order to be good partners for men. This was the focus of feminist arguments at the time. They argued that ignorance should not be encouraged in women, as men will find that they are much happier in a marriage if their partner is their equal.

In attempting to mold Virginia to be the perfect wife, Mr. Hervey set out on a very dangerous experiment. He imagined that he could create her how he wished her to be, even going so far as to change her name simply because he did not like the name Rachel. This was extremely arrogant and unfeeling of him. He did not take into consideration her feelings, or the fact that his experiment could backfire or achieve undesirable results. Mr. Hervey now finds himself caught in his own version of the



Pygmalion story, a Greek myth in which a man sculpts the perfect wife out of ivory and falls in love with his creation. The statue is then brought to life to be with him. Welsh mythology has a similar story, in which a woman called Blodeuwedd is made from flowers to be the wife of Lleu. This backfires, as she does not love him, and falls in love with another man. Mr. Hervey also attempted to create a perfect wife for himself, but in a reversal of these myths, now finds that he cannot love his creation. Like the myths, she also does not possess the intended feelings towards him, though he does not realize this at the moment. In fact, his experiment has been a complete failure.

Once again, the idea of the danger of reading the wrong types of books is brought up. Virginia's mother, the reader is told, was ruined by reading too many romances and consequently was swept away by the first young man who resembled one of the fictional heroes she had been taught to value. Led by romance and passion rather than reason, they defied the displeasure of his family and eloped. When the consequences hit and the family forced him to abandon her, she was left unhappy and died soon after. If she had been able to temper passion with reason, she might have waited until the family accepted her, or realized that he was an inappropriate match. Though it may seem to a modern audience that the man was more in the wrong than the woman in this case, the author wants to make it perfectly clear that Virginia's mother was also to blame for her own lack of good judgment. Now Virginia, too, is becoming spoiled by reading romances. She has come to love the heroes of the books, in particular Paul from the popular novel that her name was taken from; *Paul et Virginie*, by Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. She is now thrown into a confusion of emotions, feeling obligated to Mr. Hervey, feeling drawn to the characters of the books, and imagining herself in love with the ideas found there. She cannot associate Mr. Hervey with the types of heroic and passionate men in the books, and cannot imagine a romance that is not like the ones in the stories. Mr. Hervey becomes mixed up with her fantasies about the heroes of the novels, infecting her dreams and making her unhappy.

Virginia's feelings are certainly confused in these chapters. It is hard to tell exactly what she is thinking, but it certainly seems clear that she does not actually love Mr. Hervey. Instead she talks of obligation to him, and repeats over and over that she must show him she is not "ungrateful" (pp. 382, 383, 386, 388, 389, 399, 400, 413, and 414). It is obvious from the amount of times she mentions her need to show her gratitude that this is her main motivation in accepting Mr. Hervey's proposal. Her dream speaks volumes for her, revealing what she does not dare to say. She is in love with the ideas found in the books she reads, but does not love Mr. Hervey in the same way. She feels obligated to marry him and imagines that his happiness rests on this. She has been convinced by Mrs. Ormond, who means well, that Mr. Hervey loves her and wants to marry her. Now she feels trapped, but also feels an enormous amount of guilt over the fact that she cannot love Mr. Hervey as a husband, only as a friend and father-figure. This is why she dreams that she is the cause of Mr. Hervey dying, who calls her ungrateful and is slain by one of the heroes of her novels (p. 388). Mrs. Ormond completely misinterprets this dream as anxiety brought on by love. By trying to help Virginia, Mrs. Ormond has actually made the situation so much worse. She has convinced both Virginia and Mr. Hervey that the other is in love with them. When it seems that her fate is fixed, Virginia expresses a wish to still be a child, and her unhappiness at the idea of marriage is plain



to see. As at other points in the novel, a terrible situation has arisen from simple misunderstandings, caused by the fact that nobody can speak the plain truth to each other. Although this situation seems doomed, the audience can hope that the misunderstandings will be cleared up before Virginia and Mr. Hervey find themselves stuck in an unhappy marriage.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 28 and 29: E O and A Jew

Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 28 and 29: E O and A Jew Summary

Clarence Hervey is asked by Lord Delacour to spy on Mr. Vincent to see what he does when he visits Mrs. Luttridge. They are worried that he gambles at the E.O. tables (an old game similar to roulette). If he does, then he will not be a suitable husband for Belinda, and Mr. Hervey is instructed to try to make him see the error of his ways. Mr. Hervey heads to Mrs. Luttridge's, where he notices that the E.O. tables are rigged so that Mrs. Luttridge always wins.

Mr. Vincent had gambling problems in the past, but was cured of the habit by Mr. Percival. However, the temptation at Mrs. Luttridge's was too much, and he began to gamble again. Mr. Hervey now catches him betting on the E.O. tables and decides to let him lose. This will teach him a lesson and hopefully break the habit, after which he can get the money back from Mrs. Luttridge by threatening to publicly reveal that her tables are rigged. What he doesn't know is that Mr. Vincent has already lost huge amounts of money to Mrs. Luttridge, and tonight loses every last coin he has. He is now ruined. He goes back to his room at a nearby hotel and prepares to commit suicide with his pistol.

Mr. Hervey runs in just in time to stop him. Mr. Vincent swears to reform, and Mr. Hervey helps him to get his money back. However, all the other money he had previously lost is gone forever. When Mr. Percival asks him to repay a sum of money he lent him, he is forced to either come clean, or borrow from a moneylender. He does the latter, but has to hide the moneylender when Mr. Percival arrives unexpectedly. Juba catches the moneylender hiding in the next room and thinks him a thief. Mr. Percival hears the ruckus and Mr. Vincent is forced to explain. Mr. Percival is shocked, and Mr. Vincent begs him to explain the matter to Belinda, as he does not dare to himself. Belinda sends him a letter back calling off the wedding, as she cannot be with a man who has a gambling problem and who lied to her for such a long time.

Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 28 and 29: E O and A Jew Analysis

Now that the reader knows Mr. Hervey is not guilty of despicable behavior and that he still loves Belinda, it is necessary for the author to get rid of Mr. Vincent, who is the first object standing in the way of Belinda and Mr. Hervey getting together. This is done quickly and efficiently by introducing a vice that cannot be easily forgiven. Mr. Vincent is caught gambling, after losing all his money. This shows a complete lack of restraint or forward thinking. In itself, this might not be bad enough to condemn him, but Mr. Vincent



has already been helped by Mr. Percival and seemingly learned his lesson. By giving in to his desires again, it shows that he really does have a gambling addiction, one that is likely to recur and be a problem for the rest of his life. This would make him a very bad and dangerous husband, not worthy of the heroine of a moral story such as this.

However, Lady Delacour was redeemed, and Clarence Hervey can make up for past mistakes. So why can Mr. Vincent not still be redeemed? The author makes sure that Mr. Vincent is given a chance to reform. He is saved by Mr. Hervey, and promises to behave better. He then continues to keep his secret from Belinda, giving her only a useless half-answer about having lost most of his money, though he claims this is the fault of others rather than himself. This is not really true; although Mrs. Luttridge rigs her tables, it was still Mr. Vincent's choice to play and to bet his money in the first place. Not only does he continue to lie to Belinda, he attempts to hide his mistake from Mr. Percival and goes to a moneylender to do so. This will only get him into greater debt and trouble, as moneylenders were notorious at the time for extracting as much money as possible from their clients (through interest on the loans). Using a moneylender was seen as a very undesirable thing to do, and moneylenders often considered unsavory types. By taking this method, Mr. Vincent proves that he is just as untrustworthy as ever, and that he still makes stupid, rash decisions. When Belinda is told the situation, no one blames her for her decision to break off her engagement to him.

To modern readers, however, Belinda's decision may seem very cold. Mr. Vincent is obviously completely in love with her, and drives the reader to pity when he almost commits suicide. He is afflicted with an addiction that he desperately wants to break but cannot do so. A gambling addiction is a very bad trait, and would be considered even worse at the time, yet it seems like something that a partner might want to support their loved one in trying to conquer. Even if Belinda were to decide, as she does, that she cannot be with him, one might expect a little more sadness and pain at having to end the relationship. This really proves that Belinda does not love Mr. Vincent. She does not feel despair at having to end their engagement and does not seem particularly upset that he is leaving. To modern readers, it may seem a little like Belinda was using him in order to gain a husband who could look after her but dropped him at the first sign of trouble. It seems cruel for her to have played with his feelings in this way. The ease with which she then thinks of Mr. Hervey again makes her seem a little fickle. This was certainly not the author's intention, who meant Belinda to seem kind but sensible, not overcome with passion but able to make reasoned decisions. It is up to the reader to decide whether this results in an appealing character or not.

The reader should also take note of the incident with the dogs in this chapter. When a fight between Mr. Vincent's dog and Baddely's dog breaks out, it leads to a fight between Juba and Baddely. Juba is hurt, and Baddely runs off with a personal letter. Juba is helped and healed by Lord Delacour and another gentleman, and Baddely is told off and made to give up the letter. Lady Delacour tells Belinda that she will have to wait until a later time to be told the good bit of this story, and so too the reader will have to wait. It is ironic that Mr. Vincent's dog, which led to him returning to Mrs. Luttridge's and so to gambling again, is instrumental in freeing both Belinda and Mr. Hervey from their previous engagements, as one shall see later.

With Mr. Vincent removed, there is only the problem of Mr. Hervey and Virginia's engagement to solve. Though this seems impossible at present, all the events of the book seem to be pulling Belinda and Mr. Hervey together, and the readers can be confident that the novel will have a happy ending.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 30 and 31: News and The Denouement

Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 30 and 31: News and The Denouement Summary

Lady Boucher comes to call and tells them the latest gossip, that Mr. Hervey is already married to Virginia and that no one will visit her because she used to be his mistress. Mrs. Delacour asks Belinda if she will visit poor Virginia with Lady Delacour in order to show that they do not believe the malicious rumor about her being Mr. Hervey's mistress. Belinda agrees.

When they get to Mrs. Delacour's house, Lady Delacour gives Virginia a present but will not allow her to open it until Mr. Hervey arrives. When he does, she pulls the curtain and sees a portrait behind it, which she faints at the sight of. They revive her, and Virginia then explains to Mr. Hervey that the portrait is of the man of her dreams, the one she once saw a portrait of long ago. She has never met the man, but fell in love with the image. She finally admits that she does not love Mr. Hervey, and tells him of her feelings and dreams. He realizes that Mrs. Ormond mistook her feelings and that they are all the victims of misunderstanding.

Lady Delacour now explains where the portrait came from. She was curious about the man from Marriott's story, who recognized the bullfinch and was so anxious to hear about its owner. She asked about him, and found out that he had gone away distressed when he found out the rumors about Virginia being Mr. Hervey's mistress. Later, when Juba and Baddely fought over the dogs and the letter, a man called Captain Sunderland came to Juba's aid along with Lord Delacour. Marriott recognized Sunderland as the man who asked about the bullfinch's mistress, and immediately told Lady Delacour. She demanded to be introduced to him, and then asked about Virginia.

Sunderland told her that he had heard of the beauty living in the forest, and was curious to see her. Using his telescope, he watched her and soon fell in love with her. Soon, he was called away, as he was a lieutenant in the navy at the time. He gave a bullfinch to Mrs. Smith, who was known to Virginia, to give to the young girl. Virginia never knew who it came from, but she accidentally saw the man's portrait in Mrs. Smith's house, which Mrs. Smith let Virginia keep. It is this portrait that Virginia fell in love with.

Lady Delacour then invites Sunderland to come in, and Mr. Hartley is surprised that it is the same man who once saved his life during a slave revolt in the West Indies. Mr. Hartley is happy to give his consent to Sunderland to marry Virginia, and Mr. Hervey confesses his love for Belinda. Lady Delacour wraps up the story by explaining that the two couples were married. At the very end, she claims that the story had a moral message, and charges the reader to figure out what it is.



Belinda. Volume 3, Chapters 30 and 31: News and The Denouement Analysis

These last chapters serve to wrap up loose ends, solve problems, and establish a happy ending. Now the problem of Mr. Hervey and Virginia's engagement is resolved, as each finally admits that they do not love or want to marry the other. Virginia is allowed to stop feeling guilty and Mr. Hervey is free to declare his feelings for Belinda. The mystery of the man who was so interested in the bullfinch's owner is cleared up. Importantly, Virginia is given another man to love and be happy with, as it would not be an entirely fair ending to leave her on her own after everything that she has been put through. How she will mend her damaged reputation is not explained, but it is enough to know that she is finally happy. Mr. Vincent, noticeably, was not afforded the same luxury, but merely dismissed from the novel with no happy ending. This is partly punishment for his unwise and rash actions, and partly because a man does not need a wife as much as a woman needs a husband at the end of these kinds of books. Maria Edgeworth is writing an English Society Novel, in which the convention was to happily marry off women at the end. Men were not seen to be as much in need of finding a partner as a woman, who relied on a man to take care of her, and men were rarely the focus of such novels anyway.

By the end of the book, all major themes have been resolved. Lady Delacour has been redeemed and is now a happy woman who has resolved to live a domestic life. Belinda is married to Mr. Hervey, the man she fell in love with at the beginning. It is interesting to note that despite all Belinda's reasoned judgment and philosophical arguing, she does still end with her first love. Helena is re-united with her mother and Lord Delacour is reconciled with his wife. Mrs. Freke has been shamed beyond her ability to recover in society, Champfort is in prison, and Mrs. Luttridge's scheme of rigging gambling tables has been foiled, meaning that she no longer has a ready source of money. All characters have made up for their past mistakes and have learned from each other's and their own experiences. They are no longer pulled along by the falseness of London's high society, and all have learned the danger of not being honest and open with the truth. All misunderstandings have been cleared up, and now all the characters the reader cares about have a happy end. This is symbolized in the final scene, in which Lady Delacour positions all the characters as if they are on stage, showing off the newly paired couples and her own reunited family.

In the last two pages of the novel, Lady Delacour begins to sum up the future of the characters as if she were the narrator of the book. She asks if she should finish the novel, and they discuss the various endings that books might have, and their respective worth. She describes the future as if it has happened already; in a sense she has become the narrator, with an omniscient view. This links with all the mentions of books and reading, heroes and heroines, throughout the novel. All these references, and particularly this last scene of the book, reminds the reader that a novel is only a constructed reality. The characters and events are not real, and are in fact only there to serve a purpose, whether for entertainment or for moral reasons. The author again stresses the importance of her own work being a moral tale, challenging the reader to



work out what the messages are. These include the importance of reason, allowing a woman to make her own independent choices and avoid unhappiness; the importance of domestic life and avoiding unrespectable behavior; the importance of truth and honesty and how damaging it can be to jump to unfounded conclusions; the importance of learning from one's own and other's mistakes; that riches and high society can be damaging; and that happiness is closely linked to virtue and a good life. At the end, all the characters who are allowed a happy ending have resolved to live good, respectable lives, enjoying family, friendship and honesty, rather than popularity and high society.



Characters

Belinda Portman

Belinda is the main character of the novel, and is presented to the reader as an example of a young woman who learns what is most important in life and behaves admirably throughout. When she begins her stay with Lady Delacour, she is at first concerned about associating with a lady who behaves so shamefully. She is shocked at Lady Delacour and Lord Delacour's volatile relationship and feels uncomfortable when they argue. However, she quickly realizes that Lady Delacour is a good, kind woman who has been led astray. Lady Delacour's history shocks Belinda but also convinces her that the lady could be happy if she would only turn to the right sort of activities and pursuits and the right sort of friends. Belinda determines to learn from this bad example and not repeat the same mistakes herself. Belinda is a sensible and respectable girl right from the beginning of the book, so her main task in the novel is to avoid bad influences and help Lady Delacour to reform herself and her life. Because of this, at points it can seem more like Lady Delacour is the main character, with Belinda as a mentor or background figure.

Belinda falls in love with a man named Clarence Hervey who is handsome, witty and charming. At first, Mr. Hervey does not like Belinda, as he imagines that she must be fortune-seeking, like her aunt. In fact, the association with her aunt effects Belinda throughout the novel, as almost everyone judges her before they know her properly. Belinda manages to overcome this stigma with her own sensible, down-to-earth and friendly personality. When Mr. Hervey gets to know Belinda better, he finds that she is not at all like her aunt after all. He feels terrible that he judged her so harshly, and that she accidentally overheard him talking so badly of her. He admires her all the more for her sensible and dignified character in the face of her aunt's and Lady Delacour's bad examples, and for how she acts towards him. Belinda has the same effect on other characters in the novel, causing Lady Delacour to consider her a loved and valued friend; Mrs. Delacour to go from disapproving of her based on her aunt, to praising her as one of the best of women; and Mr. Vincent to fall in love with her. Belinda is a girl who makes all good people love her and all despicable people hate her (one of the biggest compliments to her is that Mrs. Freke hates her).

Belinda loves Mr. Hervey but is very reluctant to admit this to herself or to Lady Delacour. Even when Mr. Hervey makes it clear that he also has feelings for Belinda, she does not want to assume anything until he declares his feelings for her. As he does not do this, she continues to insist that he does not love her, and that there can be no attachment between them. When Belinda hears rumors of Mr. Hervey's mistress and sees the woman's hair that he is carrying in his pocket, she immediately resolves to stop thinking of him. She is a respectable woman who could not associate with a man who keeps a mistress. At this point in history, it was considered extremely bad behavior to sleep with anyone before marriage. It was perhaps known that some men did do this, but society did not like to talk about it and would look down on a man who they knew did



it. If a woman were to engage in such behavior, she would be instantly dropped from good society, avoided by respectable people, and considered a very unsavory person. Her reputation would be damaged forever. Because women's reputations were so precious and delicate, Belinda is determined not to make a match with any man who does not behave properly. Though it may seem harsh by modern standards to drop friendships and relationships with people based on one mistake, it would have been considered sensible to do this at the time. Belinda does a very similar thing with Mr. Vincent when she is finally informed of his gambling addiction.

Belinda's ability to forget Mr. Hervey and think of Mr. Vincent, and then to just as easily forget Mr. Vincent and go back to Mr. Hervey, may seem incredibly cold and fickle. Contemporary readers thought so; they found Belinda just a little too practical and sensible to care about properly. They felt that she should have remained more constant to Mr. Hervey. For example, *The Monthly Review* in 1801 claimed that "old as we are, and cold too, perhaps, as critics ought to be, we have still so much romance within us, as to deem the virgin's first love an almost sacred bond." The author defended her heroine, claiming that women must be allowed to learn from mistakes, and to realize that first love is not always the right love. The author also believed that reasoned judgment should play a large part in women's decision making, particularly in matters of the heart. Women should not be moved entirely by passion, as they will find that they make bad choices and end up unhappy. This is what has happened to Lady Delacour and Virginia's mother, among others. Belinda is therefore an example of how the author believes a woman should act: with good sense and reason. Belinda considers the good points of Mr. Vincent and insists that getting to know a man is an important aspect of love. She resolves to forget Mr. Hervey and marry Mr. Vincent, as she is sure she can be happy with him. Later, when she finds reason not to marry him, she sensibly breaks off the engagement. Now that Mr. Hervey's name is cleared and he is available again, she happily goes back to him (though she insists she will still need to take time to get to know him better too). Whether this paints a picture of a sensible and admirable girl, or a fickle, cold and unlikeable one, is ultimately up to each individual reader to decide.

Lady Delacour

Lady Delacour is not the main character of the novel, but in many ways she does seem to be. She takes a bigger role than Belinda through most of the book, only being pushed into the background when Belinda visits the Percival family. It is Lady Delacour who has all the traits of a main character; she has a fatal flaw - worrying too much about society's opinion; bad friends, a bad marriage and an unhappy life, which is turned around by the end; she behaves badly but is reformed; and she has a happy ending that places her in an opposite position from which she started in. By contrast, Belinda does not really have anything to learn, no opinions or behavior to be drastically changed, no redemption, and no huge role reversal, though she does end happily married as all heroines of English Society Novels do. Lady Delacour also takes charge of Belinda's love life and is instrumental in solving all the mix-ups and problems, allowing a happy ending for all. She wraps up the book at the end, taking center stage and explaining what happens to all the characters. She also has the last lines of the book, challenging the reader to look



for a moral message; at this point it is almost as though Lady Delacour and the author's voice have become one. Though the novel bears Belinda's name and she is the character the reader is supposed to follow and admire, many have suggested that Lady Delacour is the real main character of the novel, and many more admit to liking her better.

Lady Delacour has a shameful and sordid history. She has not behaved as a proper lady should, even daring to dress up as a man and engage in a duel with pistols. This, one of the most disgraceful things she does, has repercussions that effect the rest of her life, as she thinks that she has developed a cancer from the wound of the pistol recoiling. This seems like poetic justice, as Lady Delacour helped to cause the death of a man named Lawless, who she flirted with, thereby angering her husband. Her husband challenged him to a duel and Mr. Lawless was killed. Lady Delacour hadn't even been interested in Lawless at all; she simply wanted to make her husband jealous. This awful behavior and the death it caused has haunted Lady Delacour ever since, which shows that she is not as bad a person as she may seem. She is not an unredeemable person.

In fact, from her story, one can see that everything she did was the influence of bad friends or corruptive society. She was introduced into the falsity and hypocrisy of London's high society from an early age, corrupted by a large fortune that she inherited. Because of her fortune, she had many admirers who all flattered her and gave her a warped opinion of herself. She now expects flattery from people and is annoyed if she doesn't get it. In fact, the one man - Henry Percival - who did not give her exactly what she wanted and refused to flatter her, could have made her happy. Lady Delacour was annoyed at the time, and married Lord Delacour out of spite. She now believes that Henry Percival did actually love her and regrets her actions. Because of these regrets, she could never bring herself to love her husband properly or treat him right. Her bad behavior and inability to act like a proper woman had damaging effects on her domestic life. She tried to be a good mother but lost two children, unable to birth and nurse them properly. She sent her third child away, convinced that she cannot be a good mother. Lady Delacour is now convinced that domestic life is not for her, and has become spoiled by her fortunes and the attentions of high society. Her story is a sad one, made up of bad influences and unwise choices. If she had better role models, or perhaps had not been corrupted by a large fortune, she may have turned out better and been happier. She is a tragic character that the reader can both look down on and at the same time feel great sympathy for.

Lady Delacour's reformation begins with Belinda, who impresses her with her kindness, good sense, and respectability. She has already begun to realize that her false life is making her unhappy, and appreciates having Belinda to confide in. Being able to admit her mistakes and wishing it could have been different shows that she is willing to change. First, however, she needs incentive. At the moment she does not believe that there is any point in changing. Belinda and Mr. Hervey conspire to re-unite her with her estranged daughter Helena. This is the first big stage of Lady Delacour's redemption, as she loves Helena and wishes she could be a good mother to her. Later, after the shock of losing and then re-gaining Belinda's friendship, Lady Delacour realizes what is



important and resolves to be more truthful. She understands that secrets and assumptions and jealousy almost lost her Belinda's friendship, and so she immediately tells Lord Delacour the truth. He is shocked and determined to help her. He does not want her to die, and in his actions proves his love for her. She is touched, and this, along with Helena's affections, is enough to give her hope once more. If she can survive the operation on her cancer, she resolves to live a domestic life. Finally, the revelation that she has no cancer and can live a long life gives her a future back. She now has plenty to live for and a long time to enjoy it. She embraces domestic life and gives up her flirtations and frivolity. All it took to redeem her was a good example and a good friend in Belinda, a caring family, and hope.

Lady Delacour provides an example of how not to act and how society and riches can corrupt. She also shows how it is possible to mend one's ways, no matter how bad it may seem, and be redeemed. And finally, she shows that the real route to happiness is through good friends, loving family, and a domestic life. Lady Delacour is therefore the most important character in the novel for conveying the moral message that the author wants to impart.

Clarence Hervey

Clarence Hervey is Belinda's main love interest and the male hero of the novel. He is presented as a lively, charming young man, who is witty and fun to be around. He adapts to any company, changing his conversation and actions to entertain them and make himself popular. In many ways, he starts out as a male version of Lady Delacour. He is concerned with what people think of him, wants to be popular, fits perfectly into high society, uses wit to charm people, and is perhaps a bit of a flirt. Like all members of high society, he is also too quick to jump to conclusions, making assumptions about Belinda before he has had a chance to get to know her better. Whereas some of these characteristics would be seen as inappropriate and frivolous in a woman, Mr. Hervey is not judged harshly by society for his behavior. However, as Doctor X notes, it is a shame that he wastes his intelligence and talents on his own entertainment instead of making himself useful to society in some way. He is also not an unrespectable man, but is on the verge of being pulled into distasteful behavior by inappropriate friends, Rochfort and Baddely in particular. When associating with them, Mr. Hervey lowers his behavior in order to please and entertain them, and in doing so drinks too much wine and almost drowns in the Serpentine River. Later, the reader finds out that he made some very bad mistakes in his youth, playing with the life and feelings of a young girl called Rachel and getting himself into a very difficult situation. He even had the audacity to change her name to Virginia simply because he did not like the name Rachel. This showed a lack of sense and foresight; he was carried away by his own importance, pride in his abilities, and attraction towards Virginia's simple qualities, which he mistook for virtue. However, he did have good intentions, and when he grew up and gained more wisdom and common sense, he deeply regretted his actions. So, while Mr. Hervey is not a bad man, he certainly has some growing and changing to do before he can be an appropriate husband for Belinda.



Mr. Hervey has three people to thank for his change into a better man. After seeing the true character of Belinda and falling in love with her, he determines to win her respect and love. This encourages him to try to sort out the situation with Virginia and make up for what he did to her. When he finds out that she has feelings for him, he tries his best to get rid of them, by giving her time and trying to find her father to remove any sense of obligation. When he thinks that nothing can alter her affections, he decides he must marry her. He recognizes that the situation is his fault, and sees it as his duty to make her happy, as she will be devastated if he rejects her affections. He proposes to her, knowing that she cannot make him happy. He is willing to sacrifice his own happiness for others and to make up for his mistakes. This marks him as an honorable and kind man. His love for Belinda also proves that he appreciates honesty, simplicity and virtue over the extravagances of Lady Delacour, and later one finds out that he only ever considered Lady Delacour to be an entertaining distraction. His love for Belinda shows that he is a character worth respecting, and it also helps him to become a better person.

Two other people who help Mr. Hervey to change are Lady Anne Percival and Doctor X, the first by example and the latter by direction and friendship. Lady Anne shows Mr. Hervey what an ideal wife can be and proves to him that a domestic life can be a wonderfully happy one. He sees that the entertainments of high society are nothing to family and love. He also feels that being around Lady Anne makes him happier and more at ease than being around Lady Delacour, whose wit and constant need for flattery can be very tiring. By contrast, Lady Anne seems more naturally charming, whereas Lady Delacour seems to be faking her own gaiety. From meeting Lady Anne, he is able to appreciate that finding a sensible, affectionate and more virtuous woman would make him very happy, and he begins to think more and more of Belinda. It is also from meeting Lady Anne that he decides to try to help Lady Delacour, as he is now convinced that a domestic life will make her happier. Through helping Lady Delacour he helps himself, by presenting a good example to her and encouraging better, less frivolous things in life. Doctor X, who he meets around the same time as Lady Anne, soon becomes a good friend, and through him Mr. Hervey gains an even greater appreciation of Belinda. His friendship with Doctor X also encourages him to break off ties with his bad friends, Baddely and Rochfort, and to think about becoming more useful to society. He resolves to change his ways and make better use of his talents, rather than wasting them on frivolity. In this way, by the end of the book, Mr. Hervey has changed into a better man and a suitable match for Belinda.

The Percivals

The Percivals represent the perfect family who Belinda goes to stay with after arguing with Lady Delacour. They have a loving mother and wife, Lady Anne, a respectable father and husband, Henry Percival, who loves and appreciates them, and intelligent, enthusiastic and loving children. The family enjoy each other's company and are blissfully happy together. They challenge each other with intelligent conversation and a healthy interest in the world, but do not encourage wit for the sake of flattery, gossip or scandal. When both Mr. Hervey and later Belinda meet the family, they are



overwhelmed by the difference between staying with them and staying with Lady Delacour.

Lady Anne is the ideal woman. She is kind and affectionate, but also sensible and respectable. She is a good mother and wife, filling a domestic role perfectly and happily, never wanting more from life. She does not seek flattery or praise, preferring to put people at ease, but she is also perfectly capable of holding intelligent conversations with her husband and with others. She is therefore the perfect wife, as she is an equal to her husband. Anything less than this would make a man dissatisfied and eventually unhappy in his marriage, as Mr. Hervey realizes would be the case if he were to marry Virginia. Lady Anne is the direct opposite of women like Mrs. Freke and Mrs. Luttridge, and is presented as an excellent role model for Lady Delacour. It is through association with Lady Anne that Belinda and Mr. Hervey are able to reform Lady Delacour and make her happier. Lady Anne is also a role model for Belinda, who admires her and follows her advice. Finally, she is a role model for the reader, as the author intends her to be an example of what every young woman should aspire to become. Lady Anne represents the idea that only a domestic life can bring a woman true happiness, and also stands for the author's opinion that a good woman can also be an intelligent woman.

Henry Percival was once in love with Lady Delacour, but was rejected by her because he was too honest and refused to praise her faults. This shows that he has always been a principled and sensible man who does not like pretense or falseness. When it did not work out with Lady Delacour, Mr. Percival did not cling on to his first love and compare all other women to her, but allowed himself to forget her and fall in love with someone new. He is now married to Lady Anne, who is the perfect woman and wife and makes him very happy. He has a wonderful family and an enviable life. He therefore represents a message that the author is keen to get across; that sometimes first love does not work out, and second love can be even better. Traditionally, romance novels would show people clinging on to their first love, and gave the impression that only a first love can be true love. The author denies this and thinks it a dangerous idea. She feels that people, especially women, should be allowed to learn from past mistakes and experiences and move on to find happier solutions. She shows this happening several times in her novel; Mr. Percival is happy with Lady Anne, Lucy's mother is better off with her second love, Lady Delacour learns to let go of her past and appreciate Lord Delacour, and Mr. Vincent hints that his first love was somehow inappropriate.

Though the Percivals are almost perfect in every way, they are capable of mistakes. Both Mr. Percival and Lady Anne are fooled by Mr. Vincent. They think that he is a respectable man and a good match for Belinda. Mr. Percival even knows that Mr. Vincent had gambling problems in the past but thought that he had managed to overcome the habit. Both encourage the match between him and Belinda and are proven wrong when Mr. Vincent gambles away all his money, then keeps his problem a secret from them and from Belinda. This shows that even the best people, with good common sense and respectable values, can be taken in by dishonesty.



Augustus Vincent

Mr. Vincent acts as one of the main obstacles in Belinda and Mr. Hervey's relationship. Because of this, Mr. Vincent is dealt with harshly and expelled very quickly from the novel as it approaches its happy ending. Mr. Vincent is an awkward inconvenience that must be gotten rid of in order for Belinda to end up with Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Vincent is a seemingly respectable and affectionate man, with a large fortune made from a plantation in the West Indies, most likely using slave labor. This was not looked upon as a bad thing at the time. Mr. Vincent falls in love with Belinda and tries to win her affections. She is encouraged by the Percivals to take the time to get to know him, and decides that he would make a good husband. She finds all his manners and characteristics pleasing, but does not feel passionate love for him. He, on the other hand, loves her intensely, much more than she does. He is generally quite a rash and passionate man, being led easily into anger and fights. At one point he challenges Baddely to a duel, after finding out that this is the man who hurt Juba. He is injured in the duel, which delays his own wedding to Belinda. He also gets led easily into gambling away all his money and then tries to keep this secret from Mr. Percival and Belinda. This leads him to borrow from a moneylender, a very rash and unwise action. He lets his feelings run away with his head, and as such is a very unsuitable match for the much more practical and calm Belinda. When she breaks off the match with him, the reader cannot help feel sorry for him. She does not seem distraught over losing him, but he is deeply affected, having loved her very much. Though it was certainly the sensible thing to do, Belinda's lack of feeling at breaking off the engagement makes her seem very cold.

Harriet Freke

Mrs. Freke is the main enemy of the novel. She used to be Lady Delacour's friend and is now her enemy, and she becomes the enemy of Belinda too. She is an unrespectable, wild woman who behaves shamefully without the slightest remorse. She does not particularly care what people think of her as long as she is being talked about. She is a huge attention seeker and enjoys making other people the butt of her jokes. She led Lady Delacour on, pushing her into bad behavior and leading her into a situation in which she injured her breast. She also helped bring about the death of Lawless. These two events had a huge impact on Lady Delacour's life, causing her a lot of guilt and taking away all hope for the future. Mrs. Freke was a very bad influence on her, and one of the main reasons that she is now so unhappy. She made Lady Delacour think she was her good friend, but Mrs. Freke really only cares about herself. She betrays Lady Delacour to make friends with her rival, Mrs. Luttridge, instead. This makes it hard for Lady Delacour to properly trust her friends again, causing her to almost lose Belinda's friendship. Mrs. Freke stands for everything that is bad and shameful in a woman. As a wife, she is the direct opposite of Lady Anne, and as a friend she is the direct opposite of Belinda. She ends up shamed and unhappy, not being able to destroy any of her enemies. Her plans for revenge are foiled, and she is made to look



ridiculous, even injuring her leg in a trap. Mrs. Freke stands for the fact that bad behavior can only make a person unhappy in life and will never pay off in the end.

The Servants: Marriott, Champfort and Juba

Marriott is Lady Delacour's servant, and for awhile she is the only person besides the quack doctor that she trusts with her secret. Marriott loves her mistress and enjoys serving her, even giving up her pet bird so that she can stay with her. While Lady Delacour is intent on keeping her secret from everyone else, Marriott is able to hold an unusual amount of power over her. She insists on Lady Delacour wearing a certain dress, and is annoyed when she swaps with Belinda. However, Marriott does not blackmail Lady Delacour and is not trying to hold power over her on purpose. She only ever tries to help her and does what she thinks is best for her. She is an example of a good, loyal servant, an opposite of Champfort, Lord Delacour's servant. Champfort does enjoy having power over his master, which is why he does everything he can to keep Lord Delacour from having a good relationship with his wife. He believes that when Lord Delacour is in a happy relationship he will be less able to manipulate him. This is ironic, as Lord Delacour is so worried about being governed by his wife, but does not realize he is being governed by his servant. Marriott hates Champfort, and is constantly trying to catch him out or prove that he is acting badly. Eventually she manages to do just this, proving first that he was the reason for the rumor that caused Lady Delacour to drive Belinda away, and second that he stole money from Lord Delacour. Champfort ends up in prison, proving that bad things come to bad people.

Juba, like Marriott, is a good servant. He is perfectly loyal and loving, and willing to do anything for his master. He is generally sensible, but still holds on to his old superstitions from Africa. Juba is a black man, and some of his characteristics seem a little patronizing, suggesting that he is driven mad by his silly beliefs, and showing how grateful he is to western common sense for dispelling his superstitious worries. However, he falls in love and marries a white girl, a situation that is incredibly progressive for the time, as other races were generally considered inferior. This marks the book as being extremely ahead of its time in views of race and color; Juba is presented as a good character because of his personality, ignoring the color of his skin. He is therefore a good match for Lucy, and there are no objections to the match from any of the other characters. Unfortunately, the author was criticized for this and decided to change her story in later editions, removing all suggestions of inter-racial marriage.

Lord Delacour

Lord Delacour is Lady Delacour's husband. He is unhappy and often drunk, defied and disliked by his wife, and obsessively worried about being seen to be 'governed' by his wife. He argues with Lady Delacour constantly, and likes to defy her wishes whenever possible. Despite having a very unhealthy relationship with his wife, he still seems to care about her. He becomes jealous very easily, which Lady Delacour likes to encourage as a form of revenge, or in order to get her way. When he finds out the truth



about her illness, he is shocked and upset and says he will do everything he can to help her. He shows that he does in fact love her very much, but has not been willing to show affection to a wife who so obviously detests him. Lady Delacour is surprised by his emotions and resolves to act better towards him. As soon as he is shown kindness, and more importantly trust, he warms to Lady Delacour again and acts like a perfect husband. He gives up drink, and vows never to go visit Mrs. Luttridge again. Lord Delacour's reform is easier than Lady Delacour's, only requiring a small display of trust and respect.

Doctor X

The reader is never told the doctor's real name, who is only ever referred to as Doctor X. This, along with some other names of people and estates in the book, is either hidden because it is based on a real person, or to add a sense of realism to the novel. Doctor X is a sensible, respectable and kind man, who keeps good friends and is very trustworthy. He offers hope to Lady Delacour by suggesting that her cancer may not be as bad as she thinks, and suggesting an operation. He likes Belinda and encourages his friend Clarence Hervey's affections for her, considering her a much more soothing personality than Lady Delacour. He compares Belinda to a calm green color and Lady Delacour to more dazzling colors. This shows that he can look beyond mere appearance and outgoing personalities to appreciate the person within. Through Doctor X's friendship, Mr. Hervey is persuaded to seek to better himself in life and to sort out his dealings with Virginia before pursuing Belinda. Mr. Hervey also lets go of old inappropriate friends through the good influence of Doctor X.

Virginia St. Pierre/Rachel

Rachel is a young girl who was brought up in simplicity, away from society and contact with other people. Mr. Hervey helped her after her grandmother died and arranged for her to be looked after and educated, even changing her name to Virginia. She is extremely naïve and child-like. At first, Mr. Hervey mistakes her ignorance for virtue, but when he encounters Belinda, he recognizes real virtue. The reader is shown that true virtue comes from understanding temptation and resisting it. Virginia does not know the worth of the diamonds, so it is not really anything special that she resists them in favor of a rose-bud. Belinda lives in the opulence and extravagance of high society, with bad role models all around her, but still behaves properly and still values simplicity. She is therefore much more virtuous than Virginia. Mr. Hervey also realizes that Virginia is not educated enough to be his wife, as he needs to be married to an equal to be properly happy.

However, Virginia is extremely affectionate and anxious to please, and it is hard not to sympathize with her, even though she gets in the way of the match between the heroine and hero. At the end, therefore, she is allowed a happy ending. Unlike Mr. Vincent, she is entirely innocent, and it would seem unfair to leave her without closure. She is paired off in a very different way from Belinda. Belinda has learned to use reason and her own



good judgment to determine which man is right for her. She loves Mr. Hervey for who he is. Virginia is obsessed with romance books and longs for her man to be like the heroes of the novels. She dreams of a painting that she has seen and fallen in love with. It turns out that this is a painting of a real man, Mr. Sunderland, who loves and wishes to marry her. Though she has never even seen him before (only his picture), and he has only admired her from a distance, the two are completely in love. This is a fairytale romance and completely unrealistic. Even the other characters observe that it is all a little silly, and Lady Delacour calls Virginia half-mad. With this, the author is trying to contrast the 'traditional romance' of Virginia and Mr. Sunderland, with the much more sensible and desirable romance of Belinda and Mr. Hervey.

Mrs. Luttridge

Mrs. Luttridge is the main rival of Lady Delacour, and until Mrs. Freke turned against her, is her main enemy. This is in large part due to the fact that Lord Delacour visits her and Lady Delacour is jealous (though she hates to admit this to herself). In their ridiculous rivalry, Mrs. Luttridge and Lady Delacour have both harmed their reputations, behaved without dignity and respect, and have caused themselves and others a lot of harm and grief. In the end, this is all shown to be for nothing, as Lord Delacour is willing to drop her in an instant to please Lady Delacour as soon as Lady Delacour begins to trust him and behave nicely to him. Mrs. Luttridge is also a gambler and a criminal, fixing her tables so that she can rob rich men of all their money. This she does to Mr. Vincent, but is caught in the act by Mr. Hervey. All her plans to get revenge on her enemies fail, and she eventually cuts off her association with Mrs. Freke, who has been shamed. Mrs. Luttridge is left no better off than she was at the beginning of the novel.



Objects/Places

Early 19th Century London

The book is set at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century. London is the capital city of England, so most rich and important people had houses there. Many of the very wealthy would also have country estates or houses. At this time, London was bustling, dirty and smelly, with sewage often thrown into the streets and rivers, and the poor areas would have been very overcrowded. This book deals with the richest members of society, who lived in large townhouses with servants. They would use carriages to travel in the city and to visit the theatre, balls and parties. In general, sellers such as dress-makers and hat-makers would come straight to the rich person's house. Department stores had not yet been invented. People selling food and coal would come to the servant's entrance of the house and deal directly with the cook or house-keeper (the servant in charge of running the house). Rich people would rarely have to lift a finger around the house and spent most of their time in leisure.

London's High Society

At this time, there was a much greater social divide between classes, based on wealth and breeding. A middle-class had emerged, made up of people from poor families who had managed to create their own wealth, such as merchants or lawyers. These people wanted to live like the wealthier members of society, but were looked down on by them, as they did not come from 'good stock.' London's high society was therefore not just rich, but also born of good families. They would visit each other, make friends and enemies of each other, and attend the same parties and events. Poorer people trying to break into this society by marriage were looked down on, which is why Belinda's association with a 'match-making aunt' causes her some trouble at first. In this book, London's high society is depicted as being very false. Friends will talk about other friends behind their backs, and everyone loves to gossip and discuss the latest scandal. The very richest people are bored with their lives and so enjoy every new kind of frivolity that they can. They spend far too much money and spend far too much time on pointless activities and rivalries. It is shown as being a very corruptive and decadent society to be part of.

Oakly Park

Oakly Park is the country estate of the Percival family, situated near Harrowgate in the north of England. It is a happy place, full of children's laughter. Belinda enjoys herself greatly when she comes to stay here. Oakly Park, like other Georgian estates, was most likely made up of a grand house with beautiful gardens and extensive farmland.



Lady Delacour's house at Twickenham

This is the estate that employed the gardener whose life Lady Delacour inadvertently ruined. When she hears of this, she buys the estate and re-hires the gardener. She retires here to have her operation. It is probably a similar kind of country house to Oakly Park. It is described as having a beautiful cherry tree in the garden.

Harrowgate

Harrowgate (now called Harrogate, or Harrogate Spa) is a town in the north of England. It is a very pretty town, nestled in beautiful Yorkshire countryside. At the time it was known for its water (which was a popular health treatment) and would have been a fashionable country retreat for characters such as Lady Delacour, Mrs. Freke and Mrs. Luttridge. Mrs. Freke tries to get Belinda to enter Harrowgate society while she is staying at Oakly Park, but she refuses to be corrupted by the woman and the people she associates with. She chooses to stay at Oakly Park with the Percivals instead.

The West Indies

The West Indies are the Caribbean islands, which at the time were occupied by the British, French, Spanish, Dutch and others. There plantations (sugar, tobacco, etc) were created, using slave labor. Black slaves were brought in from Africa to work the land. This was not illegal or considered immoral at the time. Mr. Vincent, Virginia's father and Mr. Sunderland have all made their money from plantations in the West Indies. Mr. Vincent is referred to as a Creole, meaning that he is of European lineage but was born in the West Indies. He is not of a different race or color, but at the time might be considered somehow 'tainted' by his connection with the foreign country and his black slaves.

A Woman's Reputation

At this time, a woman's reputation was considered incredibly important. It was precious and delicate, and easily lost. A woman was expected to be modest, polite, demure and respectable. She was not supposed to flirt too obviously with men, and was expected to remain constant to a man she showed affection for. She should act sensibly, and not try to be too bold or to act like a man. She was not supposed to show her arms or ankles in public or to let her hair down where men could see. However, despite these rules, Georgian dresses did tend to show off more cleavage than the later Victorians would allow.

A wealthy Georgian woman was not expected to work. She might read books, sew, play instruments, write and draw. Wealthy women were expected to learn these skills, called accomplishments, in order to make themselves desirable partners for men. A woman



could also attend balls and parties, but an unmarried girl must be chaperoned when around men.

A Man's Honour

Men, especially richer men, were supposed to maintain a code of honor. For a rich man, this meant being a 'gentleman.' This involved being polite and respectable, generous to others, sensible, prudent with money, and gallant to women. The latter might involve opening doors for them, picking up objects they drop, helping them to get out of high carriages, etc. If a man were to make a mistake, he should try to fix it or make up for it. This is why Mr. Hervey considers it to be on his honor to marry Virginia when he thinks that it is his fault that she loves him. Like a woman, a man should not lead a partner on only to reject them later. Examples of dishonorable behavior include drinking excessively, gambling, being rude, keeping a mistress, and lying to others.

Court

'Court' refers to the household of the king or other very important people. The king's court at this time was called the Court of St. James, named after St. James' Palace in London. This court was basically the society of the king, his relations, his most trusted advisors, and some of the most important people in the land. To be introduced 'at Court' meant being introduced to extremely wealthy, important men and women, and attending some of the best balls and parties. It was a great honor to be able to associate with such society.

Carriages

There were no cars at this time, so people travelled on foot, horseback, or in horse-drawn carriages. Carriages were the respectable way for women to travel, and could range from simple, practical ones to the more expensive and fashionable varieties (much like modern cars). Balls and parties were always travelled to in carriages, and the type of carriage one arrived in would make a first impression of how wealthy and important its occupant was. This is why it is important to Lady Delacour to have a fancier carriage and better horses than Mrs. Luttridge.

E O

E O was an old gambling game, similar to Roulette. It involved a round table split into Evens and Odds, like the Reds and Blacks of Roulette. It was a game of pure chance rather than skill.



Clergyman

A clergyman is a religious professional, such as a priest, vicar, preacher, or pastor. At this time, Christianity was much more important and prominent in day-to-day life. Most people would visit church every Sunday, and all marriages were religious affairs. Clergymen, however, might not always be the most devoted or holy men. Second sons who would not inherit their father's estates, or other gentlemen without much money, would often enter the clergy as a living. They would be given a small, modest house, money to live on, and would preach to the local community, as well as provide religious services for the wealthier families when required. While some took their duties very seriously, others might not. As most of the country was Protestant at this time, clergymen were allowed to marry and have families.

Servants

Wealthy households were run by a large staff of servants, including maids, a butler, a cook, a head house-keeper, and more personal servants. These personal servants were very important, holding a higher status than other servants because of their closeness to the master or mistress, and because of the amount of trust placed in them. Marriott is in such a position of trust with Lady Delacour, Champfort attends Lord Delacour, and Juba is Mr. Vincent's personal servant. Their duties would be to wait on their master or mistress, help them wash and dress, maintain their rooms and clothes, take messages for them and carry out other tasks as required. Servants were usually poorer members of society, serving the wealthier families in order to earn money to live. Some poor families might send children away to serve in such households, where they would then live in the servants' quarters and could be assured of being looked after by the master of the house.



Themes

The Ideal Woman

The author insists that her book has a moral lesson, and a large part of this is concerned with how a woman should act, and what an ideal woman would be like. For the author, the answer is a domestic woman, a good mother and wife, who acts respectably and sensibly but is still affectionate and kind. This is encapsulated in the character of Lady Anne Percival, who is presented as a role model for every young woman to aspire to. Characters such as Belinda and Mr. Hervey are so impressed by her that they are driven to try to remold Lady Delacour in her image. In doing so, they manage to make Lady Delacour happier, just as Lady Anne and her family are blissfully happy. From Lady Anne's example, Belinda can see that happiness does not lie in frivolity, riches and popularity, but in a domestic life with a loving family. This reinforces the traditional role of the woman - in the home and mothering children. Above all, the author shows that not only is this the most respectable life for a woman, but it will also bring the most happiness, and so is the most desirable.

Lady Anne is kind and gentle, but she is also sensible and practical. She persuades Belinda to give Mr. Vincent a chance, and Belinda is so impressed with her reasoning and good sense that she begins to try to imitate her. Belinda learns to use her own reasoned judgment to make decisions, especially in matters of the heart, and this is shown as one of her greatest triumphs. She is able to think for herself and make her own choices, without resorting to first impressions, silly romantic notions, or the manipulations of people like her aunt. By using reason, it is shown, a woman can take her life into her own hands and have a much greater chance of ensuring her own happiness.

Lady Anne and Belinda are also intelligent women. They read, they understand things, and are capable of holding meaningful conversation with men. They are shown as being men's equals in many ways, and this is emphasized as being an incredibly important trait in a woman. It is explained that a man could never be happy in a marriage with a wife too stupid to understand him, and he would find his talents and wits wasted. However, a woman's intelligence should be used in the right way. Belinda compares the intelligence of Lady Anne, who puts people at their ease and never demands praise, to the wit of Lady Delacour, who seeks attention and popularity, demands flattery, and is always trying a little too hard to be the cleverest in the room. Many characters express a preference for Lady Anne or Belinda's easy-going intelligence over the demanding and out-going nature of Lady Delacour.

The author does not just give good examples; she also backs up her point with examples of women who behave appallingly. Mrs. Freke and Mrs. Luttridge are the worst kinds of women. Mrs. Freke does not care for anyone but herself, imitates men and even dresses as a man, enjoys pulling other people down, enjoys causing shock and scandal whenever possible, and often makes herself seem ridiculous or engages in



shameful behavior. Mrs. Luttridge is vain and unkind, likes to gamble and encourages others to do so too, and even rigs her gambling tables in order to steal rich men's money. Both women are also outrageous flirts. Mrs. Freke, the very worst that a woman could be, is punished in the end as she never gets what she wants, is shamed beyond even her tolerance, and is physically hurt in a trap while trying to spy. The author's message is clear: bad actions will bring bad results.

Lady Delacour at first seems like a shocking example of everything that could be bad in a woman, and is barely better than Mrs. Freke. What marks her out, however, are her true feelings. She is unhappy with her life, hiding this behind a mask of happiness and extravagance when in public. She would like to change, but feels that the situation is hopeless. She has been led astray by bad friends and the corruptions of a large fortune and bad society from an early age. She has never had any good role models. Her guilt over her past behavior, especially the death of Lawless, show that she is a good-natured woman who can be redeemed. When Lady Delacour is finally given the good friendship of Belinda, a role model in Lady Anne, the regained affection and trust of her family, and hope for the future, she at once begins to change. As soon as she makes changes, she finds herself becoming happier, proving that good, respectable behavior and a domestic life are the true route to happiness.

Feminism

Belinda can be read as a feminist book in certain ways. The author is intent on arguing that intelligence and reason are not only good things in a woman; they are, in fact, essential. Lady Anne is intelligent and enjoys reading, as does Belinda. Lady Delacour possesses huge amounts of wit, and has a very sharp mind and perceptive abilities. Though Lady Delacour needs to be redeemed, her intelligence is never questioned, and it is one of the few things that she is allowed to keep. All the important female characters, therefore, are intelligent, and provide a role model for young women to aspire to. By contrast, Mrs. Freke, who is presented as a bad woman, pretends to be intelligent but cannot hold a meaningful conversation with Mr. Percival, who makes her look ridiculous despite all her efforts. At a time when many argued that women should remain ignorant, the author of this novel argues very strongly that they should not.

At various points in the book, characters discuss reading and the importance of developing the female mind. In all such conversations, the arguments come down heavily in favor of women being encouraged to read and learn. This is shown as vital for several reasons. One is so that women will be better able to make sensible judgments and help themselves in life, rather than relying on fanciful ideas or the bad influence of others. It is shown as a very desirable thing if a woman can think and stand up for herself, and will help her to avoid being led astray by women like Mrs. Freke, or by silly ideas such as those found in traditional romances. The second and more important reason, however, is that an intelligent woman will make a better wife. A husband will be much happier if he marries an equal, as he will find that none of his talents are wasted, and will enjoy being able to hold meaningful conversations with her. This may not seem like a very good reason for promoting female intelligence to modern readers. Can such



a view be considered feminist? At the time, this was what major feminist works were arguing, such as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Women had to first present the argument in terms of a woman's traditional role, if they were ever to be paid any attention by men. Rather than simply showing that women deserve to be men's equals, they showed that this would actually be more beneficial for men too. As such, their ideas were more likely to appear sensible and acceptable. It should also be noted that the author of *Belinda* believed that a domestic life was the best life for a woman. She was not arguing for women's rights so much as for women's happiness, which to her rested so heavily on a happy marriage.

Belinda is also taught the importance of using reason, which the author shows as being a very important trait in a woman. With reasoned judgment, *Belinda* is able to make her own choices and find a man suitable to marry. So, whereas marriage is essential to a woman, and she should still fulfill a domestic role, the author holds that the choice should be entirely hers. As long as she uses good sense and reasoning to choose her man, her choice is valid, whether it be for rich or poor, black man or white.

Less progressive aspects of the novel rest in its condemnation of any woman who tries to act like a man. Mrs. Freke likes to dress as a man at various points, and is looked down on for doing so. Lady Delacour's engagement in a duel, a male activity, is considered very shameful, and she is severely punished for doing so. Women are never encouraged to step out of their traditional domestic roles, and there are many places where there seem to be double standards for men and women. For example, Mr. Hervey acts a little like a male Lady Delacour at the beginning of the novel, but is not condemned to anywhere near the same extent as she is. He is also not as damaged from the gossip about his mistress as a woman would be in the same position. The author seems less concerned about re-assessing gender roles or suggesting radical changes in female behavior, than she is with more internal changes. Her women are more intelligent, independent, sensible, brave and free-spirited than earlier novels and society might think appropriate. To the author, it is in these ways that women should be equal to men.

Reason

The importance of reason is a major theme of this book. *Belinda* learns to use her own reasoned judgment to make choices, especially in matters of the heart, and is encouraged to do so by Lady Anne and Henry Percival. Reason should govern a woman's behavior, helping her to avoid bad influences and rise above silly ideas, such as those found in traditional romances. She uses practical good sense to see that Mr. Vincent would be a good match, and so she gets to know him better. Through this, she grows to love him, and is convinced that she will be happy if she marries him. She has been able to let go of first love and learn from her mistakes.

However, *Belinda* not only comes across as cold and a little too practical by following her reason rather than her heart, she also appears to be slightly deluding herself. She does not feel passionate love for Mr. Vincent, only a sort of deep respect and mild



affection. It seems doubtful that she could be happy with him in the long run. While being able to let go of the past and learn from mistakes is a good thing, Belinda does still seem to be in love with Mr. Hervey, and perhaps now is too soon to be looking for another man. The ease with which Belinda rejects Mr. Vincent and re-attaches herself to Mr. Hervey may be supposed to show her good sense and reasoned judgment, but instead she comes across as a little fickle. Modern readers may find her heartless, and older readers found her unlike-able.

Belinda and the Percivals are also shown to be mistaken in their judgment of Mr. Vincent. It seems that reason will only get a person so far. Mr. Vincent fooled everyone by his charming ways and sensible, respectable behavior, but under this he was hiding a bad gambling addiction and soon lost all his money. It would seem that Belinda cannot rely quite so much on her head as she thinks, as it can be deceived just as easily as her heart. Lady Delacour expresses a similar sentiment, claiming that the Percivals were wrong after all and she was right. As Belinda does indeed end up with Mr. Hervey, who never stopped loving her, Lady Delacour does seem to have backed the winning man. Lady Delacour, for all her mistakes, recognized that a marriage based on love would be a much more desirable and happier match than one based simply on reason and respect.

What reason can save a woman from, however, are the false ideas that romance books might provide. Romances teach of the importance of first love, and make girls long for the dashing heroes of the stories. Virginia and her mother are examples of women who were carried away after reading romances, making unwise decisions and matches. Virginia even falls in love with a portrait of a man she has never seen and is willing to marry him the second she finds out he is real. This seems very foolish, and the author compares her with Belinda to show why reason and good sense can help a woman find happiness. If Virginia represents one extreme, and Belinda's rather cold behavior the other, then perhaps the redeemed Lady Delacour, by listening to both head and heart, has got things just right.

Conventions of Society

The author questions various conventions of society throughout the book. She shows that expecting a woman to always remain constant to her first love is unreasonable, as first impressions do not always provide a good example of what a person is really like. Belinda's attachments prove this point. At first, she likes Mr. Hervey, but it turns out that he has a mistress. This is unacceptable to her, so she allows herself to get to know Mr. Vincent. Mr. Vincent turns out to have a gambling problem, but by this point Mr. Hervey's name is cleared so she returns her affections to him. If society demanded that a woman stuck with a man she showed favor to, then she could be left in some fairly sticky messes.

Society will also gossip about a girl if she spends too much time in the company of one man. This is unacceptable to the author, who believes that people need time to get to know one another before they can decide if they can love each other or not. By the time



they have found this out however, society will have begun to connect them as a couple and the woman is in danger of losing her reputation if she then breaks things off with the man. The author shows Belinda getting to know Mr. Vincent, and shows society beginning to gossip about it until Lady Delacour observes that they are inextricably linked. There is also a conversation between several characters in the novel through which the author complains about this unfair aspect of women's conduct.

The author also shows the hypocrisy of high society, and its falseness. In it, people gossip about each other, pass on rumors, and behave one way in public and another in private, such as Lady Delacour's forced gaiety in company and unhappiness at home. This is parodied with the masquerade ball, in which Lady Delacour and Belinda wear masks of comedy and tragedy, hiding their own true feelings. In the mix up, Mr. Hervey even mistakes Belinda for Lady Delacour. The nastiness of this false nature of society is summed up in Mrs. Freke, who pretends to be Lady Delacour's friend, leads her astray, and then abandons her for her worst enemy.

High society is not only false; it can also be extremely corruptive. The author challenges the notion that popularity and riches can make a person happy, showing that they will only corrupt instead. When her characters are taken out of society altogether is when they are most happy, such as at Oakly Park or the estate at Twickenham.

Finally, she reveals the pointlessness of judging others before getting to know them. At many points in the story characters judge each other and jump to the wrong conclusions, leading to a lot of unhappiness and trouble. Examples are Mr. Hervey's mistress, Belinda's match-making aunt, the rumor concerning Belinda and Lord Delacour, and Lady Delacour's secret boudoir. If only the characters could simply be more open and honest, then things would move a lot more smoothly for all.

Falseness and Pretence

Pretense is a large theme in this book. It can be seen in the behavior of London's high society, who are very false in their relationships with each other, and in Lady Delacour's pretenses. The latter is parodied in the real masks of the masquerade ball that Belinda and Lady Delacour attend. Lady Delacour also insists on keeping her illness a secret from everyone else, and is terrified of people finding out her true unhappiness. Mr. Hervey, too, acts differently when he is with different people, and his bad friends, Rochfort and Baddely, do not even care enough for him to try to save him from drowning. Lady Delacour is led to believe that she is dying by the lies of a quack doctor who just wants her money. Mrs. Freke pretends to be Lady Delacour's friend, then betrays her to go to her enemy. This leaves Lady Delacour paranoid, which leads her to accuse Belinda of plotting behind her back. She is so used to everyone else behaving in this way that she cannot understand that Belinda is honest. It would seem that in London, no 'friend' is a true friend.

This is contrasted with the open, much more honest world of Oakly Park and the Percival family. Here nobody expects anything of anyone else, and there is no pretense



of forced gaiety necessary. Several characters note how wonderful it feels simply to be at ease and to be themselves here, and conclude that this easy domestic life is bliss. Similarly, when the Delacour family begins finally to trust one another, they realize how much simpler and happier life is when people just tell the truth.

However, falseness and lies can creep into this world too. Juba is fooled into thinking an 'Obeah Woman' is after him, and Mr. Vincent hides his gambling problem, lying to everyone who trusts him. This eventually causes his own downfall, just as Mrs. Freke's actions cause hers. The moral message is clear: honesty and openness bring happiness; falseness and pretense can only ever bring misery.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from third person point of view. The author is omniscient, knowing all characters' motivations and feelings. There are so many misunderstandings in the story, and assumptions and mistaken judgments, that this would quickly become very confusing without one authoritative voice to bring all things together.

The story stays mainly with the main character, Belinda, but does skip to different characters now and again. This allows important events to be shown that Belinda is not present for. Although events are often shown through Belinda's eyes, she can be a very difficult character to get any sense of emotion from, and as such, scenes with Mr. Hervey and Lady Delacour are often much more lively. Because of this, Belinda is often engaged in dialogue that is designed to bring out her true feelings towards matters, and the author prefers this method than simply telling the reader what she is thinking.

At two points in the novel, the story is told in a very different manner. Lady Delacour gives her history in first person narration over two chapters near the beginning of the book. This gives a deeper look into her feelings and motivations and allows the reader to feel a greater connection with and sense of sympathy for her. Later, Mr. Hervey tells his own story through a letter to Lady Delacour. However, this is not told in first person from Mr. Hervey's viewpoint, but from third person, using the author's voice. This allows the author to describe events that Mr. Hervey could have no knowledge of, which puts the reader at an advantage. The reader can see misunderstandings developing, giving a deeper sense of irony and tragedy to the situation.

At several points the author speaks directly to the reader, giving the book a more personal touch and helping it to feel less like a traditional novel, which the author wanted to avoid. At the end, Lady Delacour also speaks directly to the reader, challenging them to find the moral lesson in the story. This breaks the fourth wall, reminding the reader that the story is simply a constructed reality and that none of the characters are real. This helps to reinforce the idea that the book is meant as a moral tale rather than a novel.

Setting

The book is set at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century in England. For the first half of the book events take place in London. Later, Belinda visits the Percivals at Oakly Park in the north of England. Lady Delacour then purchases an estate at Twickenham and moves there for her operation. Oakly Park and the Twickenham house are country estates, comprised of a large house, gardens, servants' quarters, and extensive farmland. The London houses would have been tall townhouses in the rich areas of the city. London at this time was dirty and smelly, and the air clogged with



smoke from coal fires. Rich people, such as those of this book, would travel around in carriages and rarely set foot on the dirty streets. In their houses, they were taken care of by servants and would rarely have to lift a finger.

At this time, women still filled traditional domestic roles. They were valued as wives and mothers, and supposed to remain chaste and modest before marriage. They attended balls and parties in order to meet men and find husbands, and were expected to make good matches. Wealthier women were not expected to work, but stayed at home and read, played instruments, sewed and painted instead. They were expected to develop these skills, known as accomplishments, in order to make themselves more desirable wives. Men, on the other hand, were expected to earn and manage money, to be brave and strong, and to be respectful towards women. Rich gentlemen might make their money from their land or property, in which case they had a lot of idle time to spend in leisure.

'Society' was the meetings, balls, parties and gatherings of people in a certain place, with enough money and a good enough lineage. For example, the middle classes of a country town would probably never mix with the high society of London. London's high society is shown in this novel as being extremely false and corruptive. It is full of gossiping busybodies and two-faced friends. This is parodied in the masked masquerade ball which Lady Delacour and Belinda attend, in which everyone is literally two-faced. Oakly Park and the estate at Twickenham, in contrast with this, are peaceful, lovely places where the characters can embrace domestic life and at last be happy.

Language and Meaning

The language of this book can sometimes be quite stilted, formal and complex. This is because it was written at the beginning of the nineteenth century and so can seem very old-fashioned and odd to modern readers. This would not necessarily have been a difficult book for literate people of the time to read, though some of the ideas, jokes and witticisms are a little challenging. The author relies a lot on the reader having read other works, or being familiar with specific artists at the time. There are also a lot of French phrases put in which may baffle the modern reader. At the time, members of the wealthier classes would have been much more familiar with the language. However, these are also put in intentionally to make the work more intellectual and less like the trashy novels that the author is so dismissive of. She wants her work to be respected and understood as a moral tale, and is aiming it at the higher members of society. She is also trying to argue for the importance of intelligence in women, and so must prove a certain amount of learning on her own part.

Language also helps to distinguish different characters' traits and personalities. For instance, Philip Baddely is instantly ridiculous with his awkward speeches and compulsive need to repeat the word 'damme' at every opportunity. Mr. Hervey, in comparison, speaks in a much calmer and more gentlemanly tone. Mrs. Freke often seems to be repeating phrases that she has read without fully understanding them, making her own arguments ridiculous, whereas Mr. Percival is extremely eloquent in his



arguments. Lady Delacour and Mr. Hervey prove their intelligence by batting about witticisms and making puns and jokes, whereas Belinda is much quieter and more reserved, but also much more open and honest. Much of what Lady Delacour says has a double meaning, or is meant to cover her true feelings. Lady Anne, like Belinda, speaks more simply and to the point, but both can hold intellectual conversations when needed. Virginia, unlike other characters, is very child-like, repeating certain phrases and ideas over and over, making it clear what her true motivations are. This only adds more irony and tragedy to the situation, as the reader can see what Mrs. Ormond cannot, that she does not love Mr. Hervey but feels obligated to him instead.

In comparison to the rich characters, the servants show their status by their more simple manner of speech. Marriott has a tendency to ramble, but is quite abrupt with her opinions of people. Juba's slightly odd speech marks him out as a foreigner, and his uncomplex sentences show that he is not as well educated as others.

Structure

The book is separated into thirty-one short chapters in three volumes. The chapters can mainly be taken in pairs, following specific themes, characters or ideas. For example, Lady Delacour's history and Mr. Hervey's letter are both detailed in pairs of chapters, as is Belinda's visit to Oakly Park.

The three volumes roughly divide the novel into three main story arcs. The first is Lady Delacour's sordid history and need to reform. This introduces the characters, sets up the main moral themes and begins the love story of Belinda and Mr. Hervey. The main themes of this volume are the falseness of society and of Lady Delacour's life and of the need to help her change. By the end of this volume things look hopeful for all characters and it seems that Lady Delacour's family can be reunited. Volume 2 then breaks this situation apart, separating Belinda from Lady Delacour by jealousy and misunderstanding and taking her to Oakly Park, beginning the 'romance' of Belinda and Mr. Vincent. When the misunderstanding is resolved and Belinda returns to Lady Delacour, her reformation can continue. Lady Delacour is given hope again and she redeems herself, choosing a domestic life and finally feeling happy. She then determines to help Belinda find happiness too. Volume 3 is then concerned with Belinda's love life, separating her from Mr. Vincent and Mr. Hervey from Virginia so that Belinda and Mr. Hervey can finally get together. The book has a happy ending.



Quotes

"The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale."
Author's introductory note, 1801, p. 3

"I have sacrificed reputation, happiness - every thing, to the love of frolic. All frolic will soon be at an end with me - I am dying - and I shall die unlamented by any human being."
Lady Delacour, Chap. 2, p. 30

"I can tell you, that nothing is more unlike a novel than real life."
Lady Delacour, Chap. 3. p. 36

"Ambitious of pleasing universally, I became the worst of slaves - a slave to the world."
Lady Delacour, Chap. 3, p. 41

"As to love, you know with me, that is out of the question; all I ask or wish for is admiration."
Lady Delacour, Chap. 4, p. 64

"At a distance, lady Delacour had appeared to miss Portman the happiest person in the world; upon a nearer view, she discovered that her ladyship was one of the most miserable of human beings."
Chap. 5, p. 69

"it was now obvious to Belinda, that neither the title of viscountess, nor the pleasure of spending three fortunes, could ensure felicity."
Chap. 5, p. 69

"If lady Delacour, with all the advantages of wealth, rank, wit and beauty, has not been able to make herself happy in this life of fashionable dissipation,' said Belinda to herself, 'why should I follow the same course, and expect to be more fortunate?'"
Chap. 5, p. 70

"The unconstrained cheerfulness of lady Anne Percival spoke a mind at ease, and immediately imparted happiness by exciting sympathy; but in lady Delacour's wit and gayety there was an appearance of art and effort, which often destroyed the pleasure that she wished to communicate."
Chap. 8, p. 98

"I turned my eyes from lady Delacour upon miss Portman, as a painter turns his eyes upon mild green, to rest them, when they have been dazzled by glaring colours."
Doctor X, Chap. 9, p. 111

"I believe that half the miseries of the world arise from foolish mysteries - from the want of courage to speak the truth."
Clarence Hervey, Chap. 14, p. 194



"To a certain point, respect for the opinion of the world is prudence; beyond that point, it is weakness."

Lady Anne, Chap. 18, p. 246

"From poetry, or romance, young people usually form their early ideas of love, before they have actually felt the passion; and the image which they have in their own minds of the beau ideal is cast upon the first objects they afterwards behold."

Mr. Percival, Chap. 19, p. 22

"Her incessant comparisons between her first love and her husband excited perpetual contempt and disgust in her mind for her wedded lord, and for many years precluded all perception of his good qualities, all desire to live with him upon good terms, and all idea of securing that share of domestic happiness that was actually in her power."

Chap. 20, pp. 276-75

"Our tale contains a moral, and, no doubt, you all have wit enough to find it out."

Lady Delacour, Chap. 31, p. 478



Topics for Discussion

The character of Belinda has often been accused of being too cold and calculating. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. Does the character work as a means of conveying a moral message, or is she simply too cold, unlike-able, or boring to care about?

The author claims that the book is a 'moral tale.' What messages does she intend her readers to gain from the story?

Is this a feminist novel? Consider both modern and contemporary attitudes in your answer.

Some critics have suggested that the title of the book should not be 'Belinda' but 'Lady Delacour' as she is a more prominent, interesting and important character, and in many ways it is really her story that is being told. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

Discuss the theme of Disguise and Pretense in this book. Who pretends to be something that they are not? Who hides their feelings or keeps secrets? Who betrays other characters? Which characters behave falsely?

What is the greatest triumph of the story? Is it Belinda's marriage to Mr. Hervey, Lady Delacour's redemption and transformation, the defeat of Mrs. Freke and Mrs. Luttridge, the development of Belinda's ability to rely on her own reasoned judgment, or something else? In your answer, you should consider both modern and contemporary views.

How does the book represent the importance of reason? In your answer, you should consider how various characters act and what their motivations are, whether women and men are shown to possess equal amounts of reason, and Belinda's attempts to apply reason to finding a suitable husband. Why is reason shown as such an important virtue for women to possess?

What is the author's opinion of novels and reading? Can reading books ever be damaging? Are certain books good to read? Should women read?

Is there a difference between love and being in love? Can love come through reason, or does it come from the heart? Is passion essential to love? Can someone be happy marrying a person they are not in love with? Back up your answer with examples from the text. In your answer, you should consider both modern and contemporary views, the intention of the author, and your own opinion.

How are race and color represented in the book? Can the novel be described as progressive, and if so, in what ways? What do you think would have been people's reactions at the time?



Does Belinda behave unfairly to Mr. Hervey and Mr. Vincent? Does she lead either one on, or give them up too easily? Should she show more trust and faithfulness? Does she come across as sensible, or heartless, or fickle? Back up your answer with examples from the text.