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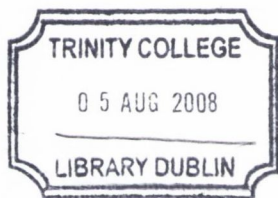
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THOSIS
8547

MARIA EDGEWORTH: A SENSE OF PLACE

Katharina Dedem-Laurens

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy of the University of Dublin, Trinity College,
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Research Supervisor: Dr. Aileen Douglas
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Summary

The life of Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was characterised by one event which was to have a lasting influence on her self-definition as a person and a writer. This event was her move in 1782 to Edgeworthstown, a small village in County Longford, Ireland, where her father's estate was situated. This thesis argues that the relationship which developed between Edgeworth and her new place of residence in the Irish midlands is vital to our understanding of her life and works. It explores the multiple ways in which her life in Edgeworthstown affected Edgeworth's development as an individual and a writer and charts her changing sense of place.

Whereas previous scholarly approaches to Edgeworth's home-region have confined themselves to the identification and discussion of historical associations and incidents, which fed their way into her fictions and which are peculiar to the County Longford of her period, this thesis shifts the critical focus of attention onto Edgeworth's domestic existence in Edgeworthstown. In doing so it argues that the exploration of Edgeworth's domestic life permits a fruitful reassessment of the established critical view of Edgeworth as a 'regional' writer.

The thesis begins by considering the formative influence of Edgeworthstown on Edgeworth in the years 1782-1800. Subsequently it investigates how Edgeworth deployed the literary form of the moral tale to explore the nature of place –and cultural difference- in stylised, almost abstract, terms. An important emphasis in the thesis is the way in which both Edgeworth's concept of the domestic woman, discussed in Chapter Three, and of the gentleman-hero, the subject of Chapter Four, evolved over time. In Edgeworth's final Irish tale, *Ormond*, affective ties to place are represented as the crucial feature of the hero. Chapter Five, looks at Edgeworth's later travels. Edgeworth traveled remarkably little within Ireland until 1825 and the chapter charts her responses upon encountering regions of Ireland of which she had no previous knowledge.

The increased focus on Edgeworth's domestic life, which underlines the approach of this thesis, is singularly appropriate, given that Edgeworth herself placed such immense importance on her domestic life, and that she famously privileged accounts of domestic life above those which official histories can afford in her literary master-piece *Castle Rackrent* (1800).

This thesis makes extensive use of two sets of memoirs which are of importance in relation to the exploration of Edgeworth's domestic life in Edgeworthstown. These are Richard Lovell and Maria Edgeworth's *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (1820) and Frances Edgeworth's *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth* (1867). It also draws on a number of published collections of Edgeworth's letters. These are Augustus C. J. Hare's *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* (1894), Christina Colvin's *Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813-1844* (1971) and Colvin's *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth Family Letters* (1979).

However, its main source of information consists in the many hundreds of letters which Edgeworth penned over the course of her life from her home in the Irish midlands. Edgeworth's domestic letters are contained in *The Papers of Maria Edgeworth*, a microfilm collection, which includes her personal as well as her family's correspondence. Many of the letters contained in this important and large collection of letters have remained, to this day, unread, even by Edgeworth scholars. By drawing extensively on the material contained in these letters, much of which has not been previously consulted, this thesis contributes substantially to redress this imbalance.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would have been inconceivable without the skilful guidance and patient support of my long-suffering supervisor, Dr. Aileen Douglas. I wish to thank her for her constructive criticism and continuous encouragement, which sustained me through the various stages of this project. I must also thank two fellow Edgeworth enthusiasts whom I am fortunate enough to count among my friends. Dr. Sharon Murphy read early drafts of the thesis, gave me encouraging feedback as well as invaluable advice, and provided moral support at critical stages in the project. Haruko Takakuwa helped me with her thoughtful observations and generously shared with me her own findings on Edgeworth. Without the expertise and ready assistance of the staff of Trinity College Library this work would have been impossible. In particular I would like to thank Trevor Peare of the Berkeley Library, Isolde Harpur of the Ussher Library, and also Helen Beaney and Simon Lang in the Department of Early Printed Books. Likewise, staff of the National Library of Ireland were very helpful. I also wish to thank two inspirational teachers who have helped me along the way. Günter C. Wilkin, whose consummate teaching of the German Classics instilled in me a love of eighteenth-century literature, and Renate Lauber, who taught me the beauties of the English language and encouraged my nascent Anglophilia. I must thank my family, both in Ireland and Germany, for their interest and support in this long drawn out project. My step-daughter Ariadne Laurens-Conlon has listened patiently to my occasional grumblings on the phone, my parents Gisela Dedem and Dr. Manfred Dedem as well as my brother Philipp Dedem have encouraged me throughout my studies, and my aunt Ute Baumann, of whose solicitude I have been the frequent recipient. My husband Edward J. Laurens, to whom this thesis is dedicated, has been everything to me and words cannot adequately express the full extent of my gratitude to him. I will, however, thank him for cooking, relieving me of dog-walking duties, and proof-reading. Last but obviously not least is my debt to Edgeworth herself, in whose intellectually demanding but highly stimulating company I have had the privilege to spend the past several years.

Abbreviations

Frequently cited works and collections of letters

- MRLE* *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth; Begun by himself and concluded by his daughter Maria Edgeworth, Richard Lovell and Maria Edgeworth, 2 vols.(1820; Shannon University Press, 1969).*
- MME* *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth with a Selection from her Letters, ed. Frances Edgeworth, 3 vols.(Privately Printed:1867).*
- Letters form England* *Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813-1844, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).*
- Life and Letters* *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth, ed. Augustus J. C. Hare, 2 vols. (London: E. Arnold, 1894).*

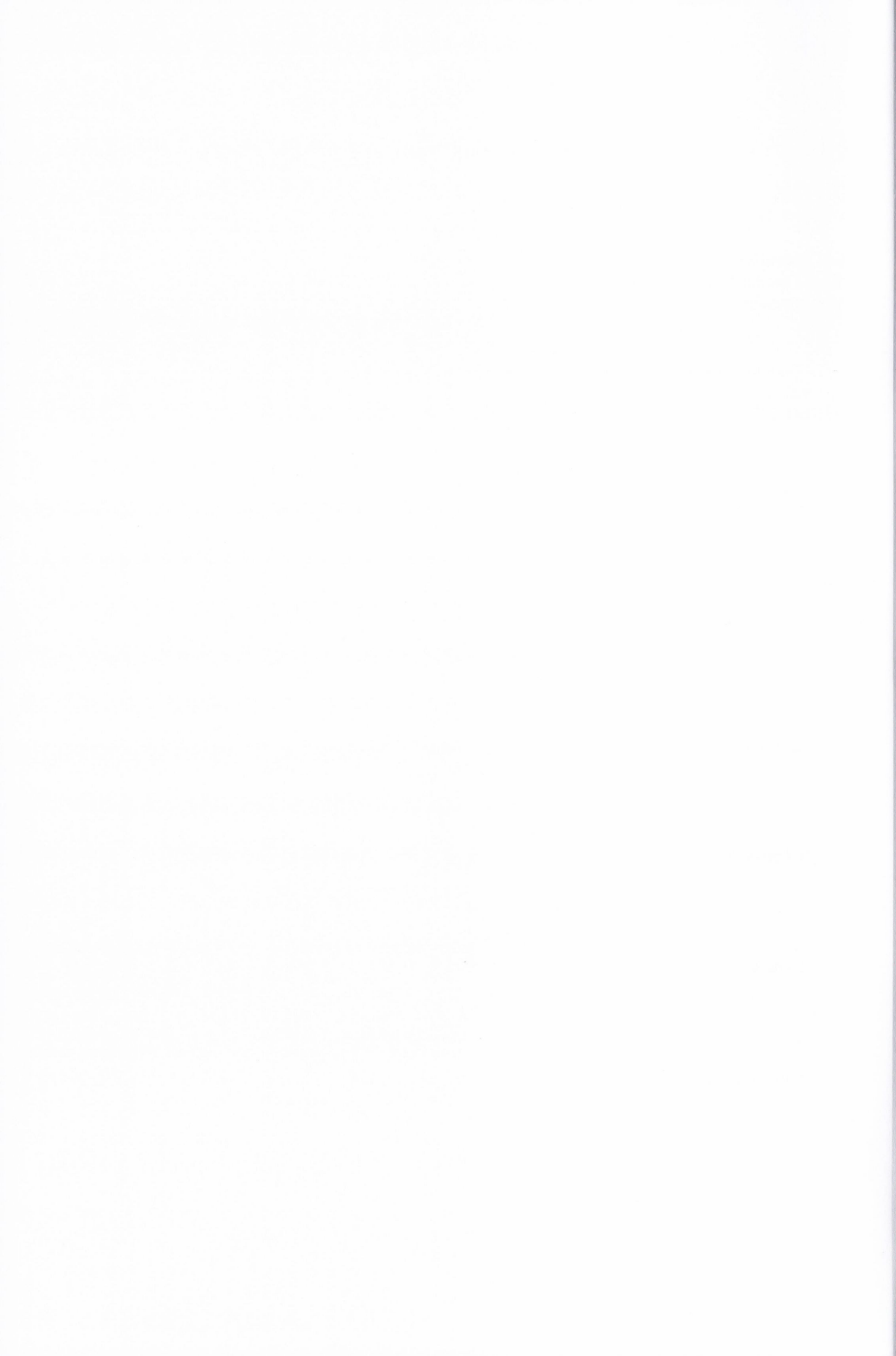
Correspondence

ME	Maria Edgeworth
RLE	Richard Lovell Edgeworth
FE [FB]	Frances Edgeworth [née Beaufort]
WB	William Beaufort
CSE	Chareles Sneyd Edgeworth
HE	Harriet Edgeworth
MPE	Michael Pakenham Edgeworth
Mrs. R.	Margaret Ruxton [Mrs.]
JR	John Ruxton
SR	Sophy Ruxton
MR	Margaret Ruxton
LR	Letty Ruxton
FR[FW]	Fanny Wilson [née Robinson]

All the letters referred to are, unless otherwise stated, contained in the microfilm edition entitled *The Papers of Maria Edgeworth, 1768-1849* (Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications, 1994) . Some of the letters in this collection are individually numbered. Where this is the case, I have included the numbers in my references. In all other cases I have provided the number of the reel on which individual letters are contained.

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Introduction

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was born at Black Burton in Oxfordshire as the third child to Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his English wife Anna Maria (née Elers). Although Edgeworth spent her childhood in England, she moved, in 1782, at the age of fourteen, to Ireland, where her father returned with his family in order to settle permanently at the estate which he had inherited at Edgeworthstown. Edgeworth's new home in Ireland was located adjacent to a small village in County Longford, one of the counties belonging to the Irish midland's region, and Edgeworthstown became the place where, except from occasional visits to England and two tours to continental Europe, she was to live for the remainder of her life. Edgeworthstown, apart from being the locality where Edgeworth lived, as member of a large family and extended household, for over six decades, was also the locality from which she produced the large body of her literary oeuvre.

Edgeworth was a prolific writer and a pioneer not only in the field of education and children's literature¹ but also with regard to the novel, a literary genre which she made her own and to whose overall development she contributed significantly. Indeed, it was Edgeworth's reputation as the author of *Castle Rackrent* (1801), until recently regarded as the first regional novel in the canon of British literature, which not only made her famous in her own life-time but which also helped to assure her a place in the ranks of great Irish literary innovators². *Castle Rackrent* was, however, only the first among three additional novels by Edgeworth which are set in Ireland (to wit, *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817)) and an entire series of other novels, such as, for instance, *Leonora* (1806), *Patronage* (1814), *Harrington* (1817) and *Helen* (1834), which are played out against the backdrop of the metropolitan and fashionable world of early nineteenth-century England.

¹ Edgeworth co-authored *Practical Education* (1798), one of the first works dedicated to the systematic representation and investigation of late eighteenth-century approaches in pedagogy. She was also a writer of children's literature. The late Mitzi Meyers was one Edgeworth scholar who pointed repeatedly to the innovative qualities and complex socio-political dimensions which are the hallmarks of Edgeworth's short stories for children.

² Ian Campbell Ross is one critic who has drawn attention to a number of other Irish writers, who from 'the late seventeenth-century' onwards 'produced fiction that reflected, in quite divergent ways, the divided country they inhabited'. He names Robert Boyle, Sarah Butler, William Chaigneau, Charles Johnstone and Thomas Amory as writers belonging to this distinct school of writing. See Ian Campbell Ross's "Irish fiction before the Union", in *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*, ed. Jacqueline Belanger (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 35. Edgeworth's role within Irish literary history is nonetheless pivotal.

Seamus Deane, for instance, remarks of her: 'Maria Edgeworth is the central figure in Irish literary history between Swift and the modernist generation of Shaw and Yeats'. See *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), 1011.

Yet, notwithstanding Edgeworth's multiple literary achievements, she remains, to this day, also a writer who has proven very difficult to place. One factor which complicates a straightforward categorisation of Edgeworth, and one which I have already touched upon, is that she worked throughout her career as a writer with and in a number of different genres³. An unfortunate consequence of Edgeworth's literary versatility has been that a tendency to carve her works up into separate categories has become an established critical practice over the years. W. J. McCormack is one critic who has commented explicitly on this phenomenon in connection with Edgeworth studies. He observes:

One of the self-obscuring features of literary tradition has been a relentless, if unconscious, classification of Edgeworth's fiction into mutually exclusive categories. Thus, there are 'the Irish novels' beyond which few Irish critics have bothered to direct their inquiries. 'The fiction for children' holds a fascination reserved, it seems, for educationalists. Further off are the 'English novels', too long unfavourably compared with the achievements of Jane Austen.⁴

The peculiar custom to artificially divide Edgeworth's oeuvre into works, which are perceived almost as separate entities from each other in the manner described above by McCormack has meant that until the last decade critics have worked on particular aspects of Edgeworth's writing almost in isolation from each other. The balance has only begun to be redressed recently, with the Pickering & Chatto series of *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth* (begun in 1999), in which scholars working in a number of different literary fields have for the first time come together in order to pool their expertise and share their collective findings on Edgeworth's writing. The result has been impressive and helped to highlight the major themes and socio-political concerns which thread their way through the body of Edgeworth's works.

However, despite the fact that the Pickering & Chatto edition represents, in many respects, a new dawn on the horizon of Edgeworth studies a lot of work still remains to be done, especially with regard to understanding the unique perspective which Edgeworth, as a woman writer who was highly acclaimed and influential throughout Britain but who lived in, and worked from, Ireland, brought to bear on her works.

³ The *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1801), a work written in partnership with her father, is an example of Edgeworth's experimentation with yet another literary form. In this work Edgeworth takes a satirical look at commonly held English misconceptions about late eighteenth-century Irish humour.

⁴ See W. J. McCormack's "The Tedium of History: An Approach to Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814)", in *Ideology and the Historians*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1991), 84.

In this respect, Clíona Ó Gallchoir's innovative approach of considering the significance of her works with reference to the key-eighteenth-century discourses on women, enlightenment and nation, which informed so much of Edgeworth's thinking and writing, has demonstrated one very interesting possibility of moving things forward in Edgeworth's studies.⁵ Another and most welcome contribution has been the recent appearance of *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, a collection of critical responses to Edgeworth's oeuvre which, by pairing her works in new ways and establishing important connections between them, effectively manages to cut across the encrusted concept of firm generic boundaries, which has so often conspired to work against the thorough evaluation of her works.⁶

Any critical assessments of Edgeworth and her works is always going to be complicated by the circumstance that, as a landlord's daughter in Edgeworthstown, she belonged to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. As a member of the ruling class in Ireland Edgeworth's own sense of cultural identity and allegiance was not only complex but also subject to shift in accordance with the major political developments which characterised Anglo-Irish relations in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century. Although some critics, such as Julian Moynahan, for instance, have included Edgeworth in a particular kind of female Anglo-Irish literary tradition⁷, there are aspects of her writing which make it questionable whether such a classification is accurate or even helpful⁸. As Marilyn Butler, for instance, points out:

Edgeworth's level of encryption in the Irish tales is ... a distinctive phenomenon, not recurring elsewhere in her own works or in the work of Irish predecessors or contemporaries. It is an intellectually self-conscious attempt at a group portrait of a hybrid, often disunited people who may have their own languages, some of them secret. It plainly addresses different readerships, either within the nation or outside it. There is an implicit assumption behind this mode of writing that the English Protestant reader and the Gaelic Catholic reader will have a different reading experience.⁹

⁵ See *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005).

⁶ See *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Adlershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

⁷ He sees Edgeworth as the initiating force in a long line of Anglo-Irish woman writers in which he also includes Somerville and Ross and Elizabeth Bowen. See Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁸ Ó Gallchoir makes this point. She poses the question: 'How can one compare, for instance, Edgeworth, from an improving landed family in the immediate post-Union period, with Elizabeth Bowen, whose experiences were those of the War of Independence, the Free State and the Second World War?'. See her "'Big House Novelist' or 'Irish Woman Writer' ", in *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation*, 177.

⁹ See Marilyn Butler's "Edgeworth's Ireland: History, Popular Culture, and Secret Codes" in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 34:2 (Spring 2001), 268.

As Butler's above comment on Edgeworth's methods of weaving in elements which are of different significance to her two distinct readerships underlines, her's was an approach to fiction-writing which was unique.

Paradoxically, even the renewed and intense interest in the history and development of the Irish novel which has characterised much of the decade from 1990 onwards has not necessarily worked in favour of a closer examination of Edgeworth's works.¹⁰ Butler has commented on the 'school of Anglo-Irish postcolonial criticism', in which she includes Tom Dunne, Seamus Deane, Terry Eagleton and Kevin Whelan, which has developed alongside this particular field of critical interest.¹¹ She has drawn attention to the circumstance that due to these critics' overall aim of defining Edgeworth's precise role within the canon of Anglo-Irish literature they are 'not closely concerned with the text' but, rather, with the ways in which 'the writing of Ireland' can be seen to reflect 'the colonial relationship' and anxieties which informed much of the work which 'Anglicized and Protestant Irish writers' produced over the course of the nineteenth-century for their English target-readership.¹²

The problem identified above by Butler may have been a contributing factor in the notable lack of interest, which Edgeworth scholars and critics have exhibited to date, in the place from where Edgeworth produced her works. Given that Edgeworth made her reputation as a regional novelist it is certainly striking that her 'region' remains so little investigated. More recently, leading Edgeworth scholars have begun to acknowledge their failure to locate Edgeworth more specifically in her home ground of Edgeworthstown. Butler herself concedes that the degree to which 'Edgeworth's Irish tales are grounded in the history and topography of her native Longford' is only now beginning to be taken into account.¹³ She further observes: 'Edgeworth's tales, it is now clear, incorporate many people, stories, crimes and escapades from other family histories associated with different strands of the population of Longford' and concludes that 'The unusual, sophisticated localism out of which Edgeworth constructs her Ireland has not yet been fully recognized'.¹⁴

¹⁰ An exception in this respect is Ina Ferris, who in connection with Edgeworth's Irish works, has highlighted her pivotal role in the development and popularisation of the national tale. See Ferris's *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹¹ See Butler, *Edgeworth's Ireland*, 267.

¹² Butler describes Kevin Whelan as 'most dogmatic in fitting the colonizer-stereotype to Edgeworth'. See *Ibid*, 267.

¹³ See the general introduction in *Volume 1 of The Novels and Selected Works by Maria Edgeworth* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), xxiii.

¹⁴ General introduction, xxvii; xxviii.

In agreement with Butler I consider a more thorough inquiry into Edgeworth's home-region of Edgeworthstown not only a worthwhile but indeed a necessary and long overdue project. Especially in consideration of the fact that Edgeworth, as I will discuss later on, travelled relatively little within Ireland and that she herself repeatedly stressed the extent to which her knowledge of the country stemmed, in the main, from her personal experience of life in Edgeworthstown.

McCormack is one scholar who has been at the forefront of investigating the importance of Edgeworthstown as a source and inspiration for Edgeworth's Irish tales.¹⁵ Approaching the subject from the perspective of historical scholarship W. A. Maguire has also contributed substantially to the immense and on-going undertaking of disentangling historical facts, local incidents and associations from within Edgeworth's Irish fictions.¹⁶

Although the efforts of Mc Cormack and Maguire are most welcome and have already helped to afford us a better understanding of the subtle and multiple ways in which historical conditions and circumstances peculiar to the Irish midland's region fed into Edgeworth's Irish tales, there is a need to focus the investigative lens on Edgeworthstown more closely still. For, whenever the significance of Edgeworthstown normally comes under discussion (other than in connection with its role as Edgeworth's home region), it tends not to be in relation to Edgeworth herself but, rather, in connection with landlordism in Ireland and her father's attempts to establish new landlord-tenant relationships on his estate in Edgeworthstown. In this context Tom Dunne has famously accorded the status of an 'experimental [social] laboratory' to Edgeworthstown.¹⁷

However, when considering the significance of Edgeworthstown in relation to Edgeworth's oeuvre it is important to remember that although it constitutes the centre of her region and was also the seat of her father's estate, to her, it was primarily a place which she called home. In line with this more immediate definition of place, I will focus in this thesis on Edgeworthstown house itself and Edgeworth's everyday life there, as well as the implications which the experience of her domestic life had for her, both personally and for the opinions she expressed in her works. There are a number of reasons why I deem it to be of vital importance

¹⁵ See his "Setting and Ideology: with reference to the Fiction of Maria Edgeworth", in *Ancestral Voices; The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature: A Collection of Interpretations*, ed. Otto Rauchbauer (Dublin & Frankfurt: The Lilliput Press in association with Georg Olms Verlag, 1992), 33-60.

¹⁶ See Maguire's "Castle Nugent and Castle Rackrent: fact and fiction in Maria Edgeworth", in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Iris an dá chultúr*, ed. Thomas Bartlett and Kevin Barry, *Volume 11* (Dublin, 1999), 146-159.

¹⁷ See Dunne's "'A gentleman's estate should be a moral school': Edgeworthstown in Fact and Fiction, 1760-1840", in *Longford: Essays in County History*, ed. Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1991), 95-168.

to investigate the day-to-day domestic life which Edgeworth led in Edgeworthstown more closely.

First of all, Edgeworth's development as a writer is inextricably bound up with her experience of growing up in the distinctive intellectual atmosphere which prevailed in her family home in Edgeworthstown. For instance, it was due to her coming of age there, in a home and among a family, where education was accorded a pivotal role that Edgeworth's life-long interest in this particular field was initiated. Her experience of assisting in the teaching of her many younger siblings meant not only that Edgeworth began to research and actively engage with late eighteenth-century approaches to pedagogy but, crucially, that she began to consider the question of which kind of education was most appropriate to her own gender.

It was also during her early years in Edgeworthstown that Edgeworth, who had access to her father's well-stocked library, began to read widely and familiarise herself in particular with French literature. The literary tastes and preferences which she developed during her adolescence profoundly influenced Edgeworth; both with regard to her attitude to the novel as a genre as well as her own and subsequent approach to novel-writing.

Moreover, Edgeworth's experience of growing up as a landlord's daughter in Edgeworthstown differed in significant ways from the life most of her female contemporaries lead in England. This difference manifests itself, among other things, in Edgeworth's early awareness of political and social issues which are pertinent to women of her generation and her class in Ireland.

Second, Edgeworth's experience of her domestic life in Edgeworthstown must be of interest to anyone who is interested in her fiction-writing. In a sense all of her fiction (including her regional, children's and adult fiction) belongs to the category of 'domestic fiction' as it is Edgeworth's invariable practise to introduce and compare a variety of homes in her works for the benefit of her reader. Significantly, all of Edgeworth's fictional characters are seen to evolve out of, and react to, the particular sets of home and family from which they spring. In this respect Edgeworth is party to a school of writing which imagines 'the home as the powerfully influential space' which is responsible for the development of character and identity in the individual.¹⁸ In their study of the domestic space Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd

¹⁸ See Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, *Domestic Space: Reading the nineteenth-century interior* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.

describe this concept of home as the site where behaviour and values are created as a form of 'domestic environmentalism'.¹⁹

What is evident from Edgeworth's novels is that she subscribed to the above mentioned concept and also that she attributed great importance especially to the figure of the domestic woman. I argue that Edgeworth's conception and fictional engagement with the ideal domestic woman was influenced by her experience of growing up in Edgeworthstown. At home Edgeworth had not only the opportunity of comparing the three distinctly different personalities of the women who successively became her step-mothers but also came into contact with other women who were to have a lasting effect on the definition of femininity which she began to articulate in her fictions. There were female visitors to Edgeworthstown, such as the Edgeworths' neighbour Lady Moira, who early on during her years in Edgeworthstown encouraged Edgeworth in her pursuit of reading and writing. Her aunt Mrs Margaret Ruxton (her father's sister) and her cousin Sophy (one of Mrs Ruxton's daughters), both of whom lived in Navan, Co. Meath, but who sometimes visited Edgeworthstown and with whom Edgeworth was in regular correspondence, were also important women in Edgeworth's life.

Moreover, the familial composition of Edgeworthstown itself changed significantly over the course of the years, so that subsequent to her father's death in 1817, Edgeworth's home gradually turned into a household which was peopled entirely by women (i.e. Edgeworth, her step-mother Frances, her elderly aunts and remaining younger half-sisters). We have become so used to perceiving Edgeworth as an individual whose life and career suffered from being subjected to the domineering influence and personality of her father²⁰ that the extent to which the women in her life contributed to her development as a person and a writer is a factor which is even nowadays rarely acknowledged.²¹ For this reason I will pay particular attention in my thesis to the relationships which Edgeworth developed over the years with her female relations and friends.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ I have in mind here studies of Edgeworth such as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's *Their fathers' daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and patriarchal complicity* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²¹ A notable and most welcome exception in this respect is Frances R. Botkin's recent essay "Finding her Own Voice or 'Being on Her Own Bottom': A Community of Women in Maria Edgeworth's *Helen*", in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, 93-108.

Another reason why it behoves us to look at her day-to-day life in Edgeworthstown is that Edgeworth, throughout her life, described herself in terms of being a domestic woman.²² Whilst it is tempting to dismiss such a description of herself as a strategy which allowed Edgeworth to eschew the description of female novelist — a description which, as I shall discuss, posed a number of difficulties for many a woman writer of her own period — an entirely different consideration may have propelled her to do so. For, growing up in Edgeworthstown Edgeworth came to regard the act of writing as an activity which was not divorced from her everyday experience as a domestic woman. Rather, as her step-mother Frances explains, writing was seen by Edgeworth as an integral part of her ordinary daily routine in Edgeworthstown. Frances Edgeworth comments on how Edgeworth wrote every day and ‘almost always in the library, undisturbed by the noise of the large family about her’.²³

Lastly, Edgeworth’s domestic life in Edgeworthstown warrants our critical attention not least because she herself placed so much value on it. As I will discuss later, Edgeworth’s correspondence abounds with statements which testify to her deep attachment and long-lasting commitment to Edgeworthstown. Importantly, even at the high-point of her literary career Edgeworth expressed a decided preference for her domestic life in Edgeworthstown over the life which was on offer to her in Paris or London where she was lionised as an authoress. In her biography of Edgeworth, Butler also stresses the immense significance of Edgeworthstown. She observes that ‘Home was the emotional centre of Maria [Edgeworth]’s life’; that Edgeworthstown amounted, in fact, to Edgeworth’s ‘whole world’.²⁴ Given that Edgeworth lived for over six decades in Edgeworthstown and that she came to define much of her life and works through the special bond which came to tie her to her home in the Irish midlands, her domestic life there ought to constitute an area of special interest and importance to Edgeworth scholars.

²² See Frances Edgeworth, *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, 3 vols. (London: Joseph Masters & Sons, 1867), 3:259.

²³ See Frances Edgeworth, *Memoir*, 3:266.

²⁴ See Marilyn Butler’s *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 55; 94. Although her biography of Edgeworth is still, by far, the best and most comprehensive introduction to Edgeworth’s life and works it is by now over thirty years old and betrays its composition at a time when Butler herself regarded her subject as a minor novelist and a writer who compared rather unfavourably with someone like Jane Austen. Butler’s biography contains a chapter dedicated to Edgeworth’s early years in Edgeworthstown House. However, she centres her discussion of Edgeworth’s domestic life around the influence which father began to exert on her.

In relation to Edgeworthstown it is important to keep in mind that although it was Edgeworth's home and a gentleman's family residence, as a place it was also characterised by its lively intercourse with the outside world. As a number of historical scholars, among them Leonore Davidoff, Catherine Hall and Amanda Vickery, have pointed out it is a gross simplification to perceive of the middle-class and genteel family home as a private place which is cut off from the concerns and occurrences of the environment in which it is situated.²⁵ Edgeworth's home in Edgeworthstown was no exception in this respect. Apart from being a space where matters pertaining to the management of the estate, such as meetings with tenants and the receiving of rents, were routinely carried out, the house's prominent location within sight of the main road, which lead from Dublin through Edgeworthstown (i.e. the town itself) onwards to the West of Ireland, ensured that Edgeworth's family home had a steady stream of callers.

Some of these callers were visitors to the family. In 1811, for instance, Edgeworth reported to her cousin Sophy:

[Today] we had a course of visitors from 8 A. M. till 4 P.M., beginning with Judge Daly, who breakfasted with us, and who is a most agreeable, frank, well-bred man; three Miss Featherstones, and Mr. and Mrs. Whitney, and Miss Godley, and Mr. and Mrs. Thompson of Clonfin, Mrs. Bourke and her three daughters, and in the midst of the crowd came Mrs. O'Beirne of Newry, and a Miss West.²⁶

Edgeworth's above description of her busy day at home conveys a sense of the socially interactive nature of her domestic life in Edgeworthstown. Especially from around 1810 onwards the Edgeworths regularly received visitors, some of whom would remain for extended stays.

Leaving visitors to the family aside, Edgeworth would have been in daily contact not only with the Edgeworthstown locals but also with people like the journeyman, who travelled the country in search of work, or a character like that of the blind peddler whose services she was known to employ on occasions when she wanted to send books and other articles to her aunt or cousin in Navan. In this respect, Edgeworth's contact and interaction with the visitors

²⁵ See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) and Amada Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988).

²⁶ See Frances Edgeworth, *Memoir*, 1:241.

and callers, whom she encountered as part of her normal domestic life, reflects the regional dimension of her life in Edgeworthstown.

In exploring Edgeworth's domestic life in Edgeworthstown this thesis makes extensive use of two sets of memoirs which are important in connection with Edgeworth. These are the *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (1820) and *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth* (1867). The former work, although concerned with the life of her father, was completed by Edgeworth subsequent to his death.²⁷ As this is a work which contains a lot of Edgeworth's personal comments and observation on the life of her father and family in Edgeworthstown it is a rich source of information also with regard to her own life in the Irish midlands. The latter work is a collection of Edgeworth's letters, which was compiled by Frances Edgeworth some years after her step-daughter's death in 1849. Importantly, this work also contains Frances's reminiscences of her personal conversations with Edgeworth. Some of these shed light on the attitudes and feelings which Edgeworth expressed with regard to her domestic existence in Edgeworthstown.

However, my most important and most frequently referred to source in connection with Edgeworth's home-life consists in the many hundreds of letters which she penned over the years from Edgeworthstown²⁸. Strangely, many of these letters, as Margaret Kelleher has pointed out, 'remain [to this day] uncirculated and undiscussed', even among Edgeworth scholars.²⁹ The large-scale neglect of her domestic letters on the part of Edgeworth scholars is all the more unaccountable as Edgeworth's voluminous correspondence has become much more accessible since the publication of the microfilm edition of her letters.³⁰ In this respect, Eve Tavor Bannet's recent essay "Maria and Rachel: Transatlantic Identities and the

²⁷ Although her father had written a substantial part of his *Memoirs* the work remained unfinished by the time of his death in 1817. Bound by a promise she had made him Edgeworth was left with the difficult task of completing her father's *Memoirs*. For this reason the second part of this two-volume work was written entirely by Edgeworth.

²⁸ Butler estimates that, excluding the various published collections of Edgeworth's letters, there are at least 2,000 of her letters which have hitherto remained unpublished (i.e. in book-format). She also observes that, leaving Edgeworth's personal letters aside, there are an additional 2,000 letters written by other members of the family. See *Maria Edgeworth*, 4.

²⁹ See Margaret Kelleher's comments on Edgeworth's correspondence in her "Philosophic Views"? Maria Edgeworth and the Great Famine', in *Éire-Ireland* (Spring 32 (1): 1997), 45.

³⁰ The adoption of the microfilm format means that Edgeworth's letters have been made available for inspection by Edgeworth scholars in most of the larger British and United States academic libraries. The microfilm edition offers the added bonus of containing hundreds of other letters which belonged to the Edgeworth family correspondence.

Epistolary Assimilation of Difference”³¹ is an exception and moreover a model for what can be achieved by a careful and sensitive reading of Edgeworth’s domestic letters.

Although a number of conventionally published collections of Edgeworth’s letters exist, most of these do not offer the same degree of intimate access and insight into the private world of Edgeworth’s thoughts and feelings. The problem, for instance, with Augustus J. C. Hare’s late Victorian two-volume edition of Edgeworth’s letters is that it is in itself based on the letters published previously by Frances Edgeworth in her *Memoir* of her step-daughter. Moreover, the difficulty with both of these letter collections is that they were published at a time when some of the persons Edgeworth had discussed unfavourably in her letters were still alive. Afraid of giving offence both Frances Edgeworth and Hare took the step of editing out any observations and comments on Edgeworth’s part which could be considered as disparaging or even just indelicate. As a result many of the letters which are included in their respective collections are heavily abridged versions of the originals. In fact, in some instances the content-pruning of Edgeworth’s letters has been so severe that it is difficult if not impossible to recover their meaning.

However, scholars who wish to investigate Edgeworth’s domestic life in Edgeworthstown encounter a more fundamental problem in connection with even the modern published selections of her letters. For instance, Christina Colvin, editor to a collection of letters which Edgeworth wrote from England, justifies her exclusion of three-quarters of the letters which make up Edgeworth’s correspondence from Edgeworthstown by arguing that these merely concern the domestic details of Edgeworth’s life, and as such, can be of little interest to readers.³² The assumption implicit in Colvin’s approach is that the letters which Edgeworth wrote from Edgeworthstown are too incidental in nature and scope to be accorded the status of important correspondence. The practice of only engaging with those of her letters which Edgeworth wrote from interesting locations abroad (such as the letters she wrote during her visits to England and Europe) or those whom she addressed to important figures in public life, effectively prevents us from gaining insight into the very area of her life which should be of particular interest to Edgeworth scholars; to wit the day-to-day reality of Edgeworth’s existence in her home-region of Edgeworthstown.

³¹ Bannet’s essay is contained in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, 31-55.

³² See *Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813-1844*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), introduction, xxxi.

What the dismissal of Edgeworth's domestic letters also illustrates is that certain critical practices with regard to the evaluation of letters generally have become so deeply ingrained as to be repeated over and over again. For instance, the very arguments which are made in connection with Edgeworth's domestic letters were also made in relation to Jane Austen's correspondence. During the course of her excellent discussion of two of Austen's letters, Susan C. Whealler draws attention to generations of scholars who expressed their disappointment with regard to 'temporary' and 'local' nature of Austen's letters.³³ Whealler stresses that even leading Austen scholar R. W. Chapman, who was responsible for the publication of the complete collection of Austen's letters, failed to recognise the significance of the letters which he described as 'made up of family news, mostly commonplace and largely meaningless'.³⁴

Even Butler, who is usually so sympathetic in her reading of Edgeworth, occasionally strikes an almost apologetic tone in relation to her subject's early domestic letters. For instance, in relation to Edgeworth's adolescent correspondence with her English friend Fanny Robinson, Butler stresses the immature and egocentric qualities, which she detects in some of these letters. In connection with Edgeworth's early correspondence with the Ruxtons, Butler reduces the significance of these letters to Edgeworth's wishing to create the right impression with her relations. Alluding to Edgeworth's self-conscious attempts to compose letters in line with the eighteenth-century tradition which perceived of the letter as carefully crafted 'artefact', Butler concludes that the bulk of Edgeworth's letters to the Ruxtons 'cannot be taken at face value'.³⁵

There are several points which have to be made with regard to the opinions which Butler expresses above. Of course Edgeworth, as someone who even during her adolescence declared her express admiration for Madame de Sévigné's witty, elegant and celebrated style of letter-writing, was well versed also in the rhetorical flourishes and intricate etiquette which characterised much of the eighteenth-century correspondence tradition. In that sense it is true to say that all eighteenth-century letters (Edgeworth's included) are written rather self-consciously.

³³ See Susan C. Whealler's "Prose and Power in Two Letters by Jane Austen", in *Sent as a Gift: Eight Correspondences from the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Alan T. McKenzie (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 173-200.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁵ See *Maria Edgeworth*, 127.

In the case of Edgeworth's correspondence, much depended on the audience for whom her letters were intended. Some of her letters to the Ruxtons were addressed to her aunt and Edgeworth knew that many of these would be read aloud to other members of the family and that there was even a possibility that they might be shown to visitors. Indeed, this was not an uncommon eighteenth-century practise, as letters were appreciated not least for the entertainment value they afforded.³⁶

However, there were also letters which Edgeworth wrote and intended only for Sophy, and in these she usually revealed both more of herself as well as the thoughts and anxieties which were uppermost on her mind. Sophy's privileged status as her confidante is confirmed time and again by the intimate tone of Edgeworth's letters to her. As Edgeworth is most adept in expressing the special nature of her relationship with Sophy, I will quote briefly from one of the letters she wrote to her cousin. Although this letter opens with Edgeworth's heartfelt complaint about an indiscretion which Sophy has recently committed it also stands as a testament to the affection and trust which existed between these two women.

You sent my letter to you to Anne Nangle & she read it at Allenstown – She says indeed she connd it over very carefully before she read it, but no part of it as I recollect was fit for any body [sic] but you – and how could you serve me so – you who knows what an utter horror I have of showing letters – you, with whom I thought myself as safe on this score that I could write any nonsense that came into my foolish head or heart! – Very well you will bring me only to write wise show letters to you, and then you will see how you like them – Other people perhaps may not feel this as I do but I absolutely cannot write at my ease when I think my letters are to pass even from one friend's hand to another – for what I say to you is not always what I would say to them ... because the degree of intimacy I have with you & the intimate knowledge I know you have of my character puts it in my power to convey to you by a few words my meaning – which words for want of their intimate knowledge & want of previous conversations & precious sympathies would be totally unintelligible or would convey false ideas to others.³⁷

The above letter-excerpt gives a flavour of the open and direct style which characterises many of Edgeworth's letters to Sophy. I have included it here in order to explain my heavy reliance

³⁶ This being so, Edgeworth, in common with most of her female contemporaries, developed complex methods of underlining and highlighting those parts of her letters which she either wished or wished not to be read out to a wider audience. For a closer analysis of the major features of the eighteenth-century correspondence tradition see, for instance, Bruce Redford's *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

³⁷ See ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, December 1808, Letter 654, Reel 5.

on Edgeworth's domestic letters, without recourse to which, as I have argued, an exploration of her home-life in Edgeworthstown would be impossible.

This study of Edgeworth's sense of place begins with a consideration of her early years (1782-1800) in Edgeworthstown. Chapter One explores why her domestic life there assumed such importance to her self-definition as a person and a woman writer. The chapter looks at a number of key-aspects in relation to Edgeworth's home-life, such as the daily domestic routines which came to characterise her existence in Edgeworthstown, her relationship to, and changing position within, her family and her burgeoning interest in matters pertaining to pedagogy. Edgeworth's 1782 move to Edgeworthstown also signals the beginning of her critical engagement with literature. The chapter places great emphasis on Edgeworth's adolescent correspondence with her English friend Fanny Robinson. In this correspondence Edgeworth registers not only her early literary tastes and preferences but begins regularly to describe her new home-region and, by doing so, to articulate, for the first time, her sense of place. Edgeworth's letters to Fanny also represent the first examples of the method by which she managed — throughout her life — to keep in touch with the wider world. Corresponding became Edgeworth's means of ensuring that she was kept abreast of all the major developments and debates which informed her own period.

Chapter Two opens with the excerpt of a letter in which Edgeworth expresses her opinion of Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778). This letter, which was written in 1783, marks the beginning of Edgeworth's critical engagement with the novel as a genre. The chapter looks at the key-concerns with regard to both the reading and writing of novels which Edgeworth expresses in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) and *Practical Education* (1798). It investigates why the novel, as a genre, posed a number of problems for the late eighteenth-century woman writer. With *Belinda* (1801), described by her as 'a moral tale', Edgeworth famously rejected the novel-label as a description of her work. The chapter considers Edgeworth's reasons for deciding to use a literary model other than that of the novel for her own fiction-writing. This alternative literary model Edgeworth found in the *contes moraux* [i.e. moral tales] of the mid-eighteenth-century French writer Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799). The chapter considers how Edgeworth adopted the literary form of the moral tale to explore the nature of place and cultural difference.

Chapter Three argues that Edgeworth's experience of her life in Edgeworthstown influenced not only her fictional engagement with the figure of the ideal domestic woman but her definition of female domesticity. The chapter begins by exploring Edgeworth's critique of

eighteenth-century constructions of femininity, which she expresses in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) and *Practical Education* (1798), the latter being a work in which Edgeworth takes issue with the eighteenth-century accomplishment-culture which surrounded the debate of femininity. Next, the chapter looks in detail at Edgeworth's fictional representations of her ideal domestic women; in *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806) and *Patronage* (1814).

Edgeworth's representation of her ideal domestic woman changed subtly over the course of time. The chapter charts the changes she implemented and explores Edgeworth's reasons for deciding to make alterations in her representation. Edgeworth conceived of her ideal domestic woman in response to constructions of femininity proposed by other women writers. For this reason, the chapter looks at Hannah Moore's ideal domestic woman in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) and Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). With her innovative novel Staël initiated a construction of femininity which perceived the woman as the repository of national characteristics and qualities. The chapter maintains that Edgeworth's reading of *Corinne* was central to the construction of femininity which she proposed in her later novels.

Chapter Four explores how Edgeworth's changing sense of place is reflected in her Irish tales. It begins by considering the significance of *Castle Rackrent* (1800) and argues that Edgeworth embedded deeply within the narrative of her first Irish tale the long history of her family's past involvement with County Longford. Edgeworth's subsequent Irish tales contain a series of gentleman heroes, each of whom relates to Ireland in a different way. Significantly, Edgeworth measures her protagonist's success by the degree to which he manages to integrate successfully with Irish society. Her fictional engagement with the figure of the gentleman in *Ennui* (1809) coincides with Edgeworth's re-consideration, in *Professional Education* (1809), of the role and definition which the gentleman has within the context of modern Britain. In *Professional Education* Edgeworth also describes the relationship which ideally ought to exist between a gentleman and his place of residence. The chapter considers Edgeworth's changing representation of her gentleman heroes and their respective ways of relating to Ireland and how these register her own gradually evolving relationship with place. Whereas her first gentleman hero Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui* learns to relate to Ireland through the experience of the journey, Lord Colambre, Edgeworth's gentleman hero in *The Absentee* (1812) is also sent travelling through the country but, additionally, provided with a reading list of authoritative books on Ireland. Significantly, Harry Ormond, protagonist of Edgeworth's last Irish tale *Ormond* (1817), is unique in being not only the first home-bred gentleman hero but a

character, who relates to Ireland not through the journey or the reading lists of previous heroes but solely through the bonds of affections which tie him to place.

Chapter Five considers the significance of Edgeworth's later travels in both France and Ireland. The chapter begins by looking at some of the reasons for Edgeworth's notable lack of travel within Ireland up to 1825 and then moves on to discuss her second visit to France with her half-sisters Harriet and Fanny in 1820. Edgeworth's reportage of their joint time there throws important light on the many attractions which French cultural life still held for her and also registers a distinctive change in the manner and pattern of her travelling. Furthermore, the intimate portrait of Edgeworth which her sisters draw in the letters which they send home from Paris allows us a glimpse of her which directly challenges the notion that her latter years were characterised by an increasingly conservative outlook. With regard to Edgeworth's later travels in Ireland, the chapter looks in detail at her 1825 journey to Killarney, which she made in the company of the Scottish novelist Walter Scott. Edgeworth's account of this journey reveals a lot about the relationship in which she stood with her fellow novelist. Her tour to Connemara in 1833 is highly significant in that it records Edgeworth's reactions to a region of Ireland which was entirely new to her. The chapter focuses on Edgeworth's encounter with a local beggar woman called Madgy Burke and the relationship which developed between Edgeworth and Mary Martin, daughter of her hosts at Ballinahinch Castle. It concludes by discussing Edgeworth's 1836 visit to the Moore Family of Moore Hall, in County Mayo. This visit is important as it signals Edgeworth's readiness to engage and maintain social contact with a family whose denominational and cultural background was very different from that of her own.

Chapter 1

EDGEWORTHSTOWN: GENIUS LOCI

In 1813, shortly before returning to Edgeworthstown, Maria Edgeworth wrote to her aunt Margaret Ruxton: ‘and now with the fullness of content I return home loving my own friends and my own mode of life preferably to all others after comparison with all that is fine and gay – and rich and rare’.³⁸ Edgeworth wrote the above letter subsequent to completing a highly successful visit to England at a time when she had already established herself as a well-known and highly successful author. In fact, it was Edgeworth’s reputation as one of the indisputable lions of British literature which opened doors everywhere in England for the middle-aged woman writer from Ireland. As Christina Colvin’s edition of her *Letters from England* demonstrates, Edgeworth enjoyed her repeated visits to England, which enabled her to meet with a wide range of interesting persons and to build up a number of new social contacts, which she would later maintain by way of correspondence from Edgeworthstown. Over the years, Edgeworth stayed in some of England’s most impressive and luxuriously furnished country houses, such as Lady Lansdowne’s³⁹ seat Bowood or Lord Carrington’s Wycombe Abbey, the latter of which she described as her favourite place in all of England.⁴⁰ Edgeworth also had occasion to partake of London’s fast-moving metropolitan life⁴¹ but, despite the many advantages and diversions on offer to her in England, she told her half-sister Fanny in a letter quite unequivocally that she ‘prefer[red] the life we lead at home’.⁴²

Throughout her life, Edgeworth, when absent from Edgeworthstown — and irrespective of whether travelling in Ireland, England or on the Continent — drew comparisons between the places where she stayed and her family home in the Irish midlands, and she repeatedly expressed a decided preference for the quiet domestic life, which characterised her existence at home. Edgeworth’s voluminous correspondence abounds with statements which testify to her long lasting commitment to Edgeworthstown; a place which seems to have continued to exert a strong pull on her until well into old age. Even a superficial

³⁸ ME to Mrs. R., Malvern Links, 25 June 1813. Contained in *Letters from England*, 72.

³⁹ Lord Lansdowne was landlord of extensive estates in Munster, where he owned around 30,000 acres in the vicinity of Kenmare in County Kerry.

⁴⁰ *Letters from England*, 207.

⁴¹ In a letter to her aunt Edgeworth summed up her opinion on London’s town life: ‘All that we saw in London, I am sure I enjoyed while it was passing as much as possible, but I should be very sorry to live in that whirling vortex, and I find my taste and conviction confirmed on my return home to my natural friends and my dear home’. See ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 26 June 1813. Contained in *MME*, 1:291.

⁴² See *Letters from England*, 67.

perusal of Edgeworth's letters allows one to acquire a sense of the immense importance which she attributed to Edgeworthstown. Clearly, Edgeworthstown represented much more to her than just a place where her family managed to make a comfortable home for themselves over the years. However difficult it may be to define wherein — for Edgeworth — the precise significance of Edgeworthstown lay, what her frequent references to her home and home-life show is that she had a heavy personal investment in the existence and continuation of Edgeworthstown as a family home. Edgeworthstown, or rather, the way of life, the daily pursuits and routines, which she associated with living there, certainly occupied a large space in her thinking, and appears to have contributed in no small measure to Edgeworth's self-definition, both as a person and as a writer. For this reason alone it seems important to explore Edgeworth's view of Edgeworthstown and her understanding of her role within the home and the family.

However, surprisingly — and despite Edgeworth's repeated expressions of her deep-rooted attachment to Edgeworthstown, which becomes apparent in so many of her letters — very little research has been done into Edgeworth's day-to-day domestic life.⁴³ This appears a strange oversight in the case of a writer like Edgeworth, who not only spent such a large part of her life in Edgeworthstown⁴⁴, but who avowedly valued (her own) home-life so highly. Surely the least Edgeworth's comments on her life in Edgeworthstown prompt one to do, is to question her perception of her role there. In the posthumously published *Memoir of Maria Edgeworth* Frances Edgeworth appears keen to promote an image of her step-daughter which portrays her more as a conventional domestic woman, rather than the highly successful professional woman writer she became. Frances Edgeworth writes, for instance, that 'the charms of society never altered her [i.e. Edgeworth's] tastes for domestic life' and that, although she enjoyed 'the intercourse of all the great minds she had known, she more enjoyed her domestic life with her nearest relations' (*MME*, 2:268). In the light of the above comments it appears important to question if Frances Edgeworth's depiction of Edgeworth is the result of an accurate observation, or, if it was perhaps partly motivated by a desire to reinvent the recently deceased Edgeworth in order to portray her as conventionally feminine, and hence more acceptable in the increasingly conservative ideological climate of the mid-Victorian

⁴³ Edgeworth's biographer Marilyn Butler represents the only exception in this respect. She devotes a chapter to Edgeworth's early years in Edgeworthstown in her *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

⁴⁴ Leaving her travels and some visits to England and relations aside, Edgeworth lived in Edgeworthstown permanently from moving there in 1782 until her death in 1849.

period, during which the memoir was published. In any case, it seems necessary to question if Edgeworth did indeed see herself primarily as a domestic woman and, if so, to examine her definition of domesticity.

The failure to investigate the domestic dimension of Edgeworth's life becomes even more inexplicable when one considers that all of her works are closely concerned with matters pertaining to the domestic. Both of Edgeworth's main works on education, *Practical Education* (1798) and her *Essays on Professional Education* (1809), accord a determining influence to the twin factors of home and family in the development of the individual, and all of Edgeworth's fictions (including her regional, children's and adult fiction) argue that both the virtues and the character faults which her heroes and heroines exhibit are a direct result of being exposed to a specific domestic atmosphere. Edgeworth insists that all of her characters have evolved out of, and, sometimes, in reaction to, the particular kind of home and family in which they have grown up. For this reason, Edgeworth always sketches and compares a number of different domestic constellations in her fictions. In this respect, she is party to a literary discourse which imagines the home as a powerfully influential space which is responsible for the development of character and identity in the individual. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd describe this notion of home -as a place where behaviour and values are created- as 'domestic environmentalism'.⁴⁵ Both by dint of its subject matter and its general thrust, Edgeworth's fiction can therefore be classed as belonging to the genre of domestic fiction.

Significantly, the person accredited by Edgeworth with the most influence within the domestic sphere is not the gentleman/master of the house but his wife, the 'domestic woman'. In her tripartite role as mistress of the house, as wife and as mother, Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman not only determines the general cultural, moral and educational atmosphere which pervades the family home, she acts as role model to the servants, companion to her husband and teacher to her children. Nearly all of Edgeworth's fictions contain at least one detailed depiction of such an ideal domestic woman and, although subtle differences between her host of ideal domestic women begin to emerge over time, the fact that she returned time and again to the figure of the domestic woman in her fiction-writing indicates that the interest and appeal she held for Edgeworth was enduring.

One of the reasons for her continued fascination and fictional engagement with the figure of the domestic woman may have its origins in her own experience of living in

⁴⁵ Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.

Edgeworthstown, where Edgeworth had the opportunity to compare the different regimes of the three women who successively became her step-mothers, and the impact which the diverging personalities of these women had on her family. As Edgeworth's later reminiscences in the *Memoir* testify, her own relationship with these three women differed considerably. For instance, the relationship in which she stood with her first step-mother, the beautiful and highly educated but distant disciplinarian Honora⁴⁶, could not have been more different to the friendly and close relationship which gradually developed between Edgeworth and Frances, her father's last wife.⁴⁷ Marilyn Butler allows for the possibility that 'real-life women contributed something to this most persistent character [i.e. the domestic woman]' in Edgeworth's fictions.⁴⁸ In the light of Edgeworth's personal experience of the palpably different domestic atmosphere which her respective step-mothers created in Edgeworthstown it appears highly likely that they belonged to the above mentioned group of real-life influences.

I consider it crucial to examine Edgeworth's own domestic life in Edgeworthstown⁴⁹; not only because it can help to establish where some of the character traits of her fictionalised domestic women may have had their origins but, perhaps even more importantly, because it can help to illuminate the historical, cultural and ideological context in which Edgeworth began to consider questions surrounding women's role within the domestic sphere. Subjects like domesticity, domestic life and domestic women preoccupied her throughout her career as a writer. However, what Edgeworth has to say on these subjects has to be judged against the background of a much older inquiry into human nature generally, the appropriate relationship between a people and their government and the desirable balance between the rights of the individual and those of society, which had been on-going for much of the eighteenth-century in Britain, and which had grown out of the Enlightenment itself. It was as an extension of this larger debate that questions about home and the family — as the smallest social institution —

⁴⁶ Honora Edgeworth, née Sneyd (1751-80), was Richard Lovell Edgeworth's second wife. Subsequent to their wedding in 1773, Edgeworth's father moved with his children and new wife to Edgeworthstown. The sometimes unruly behaviour of the young Edgeworth was not approved of by her strict step-mother so that it was decided in 1775 to send her away to boarding school in England. Edgeworth remained at Mrs Latuffiere's school for girls in Derby even after her father and Honora moved back to England in 1777. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 46; 51; 55.

⁴⁷ Frances Anne Edgeworth, née Beaufort (1769-1865), became Richard Lovell Edgeworth's last wife. According to Frances, 'the most intimate friendship for life ... unbroken for 51 years' united her to Edgeworth, who was in age her senior by one year (*MME*, 1:1).

⁴⁸ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 54.

⁴⁹ For the purposes of this chapter I will focus my attention on the the formative years of Edgeworth's life in Edgeworthstown (i.e. from her moving there in 1782 to about 1800).

began to be asked. When Edgeworth works into fiction her ideas about the relationships which — ideally — ought to exist between husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers, she is therefore involving herself in a debate which is split along distinctive ideological and often political lines. This, of course, was especially the case in the aftermath of the French Revolution when a more reactionary cultural climate became manifest in Britain, putting the domestic space of the family home and the domestic woman under a renewed spotlight. Depending on one's political persuasion, the domestic woman could be cast in terms of serving as the effective bastion against socially destabilising revolutionary forces, which were seen to emanate from France or, she could, due to her impressionable feminine nature succumb to dangerous new ideas and morals, and, thus, become the chink in Britain's defensive armour. In either case the domestic space came to be seen as a site which competing ideologies could appropriate.

Both Edgeworth's actual home and those homes portrayed by her in fiction are therefore places, which, although on one level, are clearly understood to be private spaces, on another, are inevitably influenced by the world of public politics. Leaving politics aside, I concur moreover with Bryden and Floyd that a space, even when designated as private, such as a family home, nonetheless still has a relationship to, or with, the public space, and that a strict dichotomy of space into private and public spheres fails to capture the real relationship in which these two spheres stand. Bryden and Floyd argue that 'the domestic space is never just private; it is a sign for public and cultural interaction, a space which 'outsiders' or strangers can enter, a site of encounter'.⁵⁰

Edgeworth's home was no exception in this respect and, although one of its functions was that of a gentleman's private residence, the house was within sight of the entrance to the Edgeworthstown estate, which was itself contiguous to the main street of the village. Visually, it was therefore linked to the public life of the village and the villagers alike. Those of Edgeworth's letters which contain information about her daily life in Edgeworthstown confirm that her family home was not in any uncomplicated sense simply a private retreat. For, apart from social visits of relations and friends, Edgeworthstown saw quite a few callers on an average day. Especially in the family's early years in Edgeworthstown there appears to have been a more or less constant stream of craftsmen and labourers, who came to the house to carry out work and repairs and, in addition to these, there were travelling tradesmen and

⁵⁰ Bryden and Floyd, *Domestic Space*, 12.

workmen, who plied their wares and offered their services. On more than one occasion Edgeworth mentions a blind pedlar, who was asked to transport books between the Edgeworths and their relations, the Ruxtons, who lived over forty miles away, in Navan, County Meath.

Of course, Edgeworthstown was, apart from being a gentleman's residence, also the local 'big house' and the Edgeworths, as the principle family and landlords of the area, naturally occupied a position of privilege and authority. During times of political unrest and agrarian disturbances members of the militia called on the house to gather intelligence on possible local malcontents and, in more peaceful periods, public servants, engineers and surveyors would call on the family as they were passing through Edgeworthstown. In fact, the house's prominent position at the end of the village, and adjacent to the main road from Dublin, may have been one of the reasons why high-ranking government officials, such as the lord lieutenant, and, once, the Irish Primate, later decided to stay overnight with the Edgeworths when en route to the West of Ireland.

However, in order to establish a more chronological sequence to Edgeworth's first impressions and views of Edgeworthstown it is necessary to return to the family's beginnings there. It was in January 1782 that Edgeworth's father decided shortly after his wedding to his third wife, Elizabeth Sneyd⁵¹, that he would move his family back to Edgeworthstown.⁵² He removed his eldest daughter from the school for girls in Derby, which she had been attending since 1775, and placed her in Mrs. Devis's more prestigious school for young ladies located in London's fashionable Upper Wimpole Street, until preparations for the family's move to Ireland could be completed. It was during her few months in this London school that Edgeworth made friends with Fanny Robinson, a gentleman's daughter and a fellow pupil, who was to become her first correspondent once Edgeworth had moved to Ireland.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Edgeworth, née Sneyd (1753-97), was Richard Lovell Edgeworth's third wife. Elizabeth was in fact the younger sister of his second wife Honora, who is said to have suggested the match to him shortly before her own death. Elizabeth's and Richard Lovell Edgeworth's marriage was strongly disapproved of by the Sneyd family, who considered it not only unlawful but in very bad taste. Edgeworth's aunt Ruxton, her father's favourite sister, also objected strongly to the marriage and asked her brother to reconsider. Despite the joint opposition of both families the couple married in London in December 1781. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 68-70.

⁵² In his *Memoirs*, Richard Lovell Edgeworth explains: 'I had always thought, that, if it were in the power of any man to serve the country which gave him bread, he ought to sacrifice every inferior consideration, and to reside where he can be most useful'. He further elaborated on his reasons for moving back to Ireland in 1782; stating that his primary motivation had consisted in 'the sincere hope of contributing to the melioration of the inhabitants of the country, from which I drew my subsistence'. See Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth: Begun by himself and concluded by his daughter Maria Edgeworth* (1820). 2 vols., intro. by Desmond Clarke (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), 1:360; 2:1.

It was June 1782 by the time the Edgeworths crossed over to Ireland. The family party consisted of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, his new wife Elizabeth, Edgeworth herself, Emmeline, Anna, Honora and Lovell.⁵³ After a short stay in Dublin they finally set out on their journey towards Edgeworthstown and the initial scene which presented itself to Edgeworth etched itself deeply into her memory. In the *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, she recalls how 'I accompanied my father to Ireland ... therefore everything was new to me: and though I was then but 12 years old, and though such a length of time has since elapsed, I have retained a clear and strong recollection of our arrival in Edgeworthstown' (*MRLE*, 2:1). In her *Memoir* of Edgeworth, Frances Edgeworth, in turn, remarks on what her step-daughter told her many years later about her memorable arrival in Edgeworthstown:

The tones and looks, the melancholy and gaiety of the people, were so new and extraordinary to her, that the delineations she long afterwards made of Irish character probably owe their life and truth to the impressions made on her arrival at this time as a stranger. Though it was June when they arrived there was snow on the roses she ran out to gather, and she felt altogether in a new and extraordinary country. (*MME*, 1:13)

Although the above, frequently quoted, passage conveys something of the tremendous sense of excitement Edgeworth appears to have felt upon being confronted with a country, a people and a place equally unknown and strange to her, it must not be forgotten that these so-called first impressions of Edgeworthstown were constructed from the vantage point of hindsight, and at a time when Edgeworth was already a highly successful and long established British women writer, best known for her Irish fictions. Edgeworth could not have discussed her initial response to Edgeworthstown with her step-mother before she and Frances began to live under the same roof in 1798, and, in any case, the *Memoir* was not published until 1867. Likewise, what she says in her father's *Memoirs* about Edgeworthstown could not have been written before 1818, when she began to complete and edit the work. The momentous significance which Edgeworth later attributed to her initial arrival in, and her first impressions of, Edgeworthstown may gradually have assumed different proportions in her thinking. It seems

⁵³ Edgeworth's older brother Richard (1764-96) did not move to Ireland with the family. Ever since his childhood, when his father had attempted –unsuccessfully– to bring him up according to Jean-Jacque Rousseau's new-style educational philosophy, Richard's relationship with his father had been difficult. Their temperaments and ideas appear to have been at such variance that they actively avoided being in each other's company once Richard reached adulthood. Richard, Edgeworth herself, Emmeline (1770-1847) and Anna (1773-1824) were the children of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's first marriage to Anna Maria Elers (1743-73), whereas Honora (1774-90) and Lovell (1775-1842) were products of his marriage with his second wife Honora.

beyond doubt that the softening lens of time had an influence on the way Edgeworth depicted her arrival in Edgeworthstown, and the 'time factor' could also account for the almost romantic vein in which she reminisces about the snow-dusted roses in the Edgeworthstown garden, which is so unusual for her and certainly not typical of her normal writing style (autobiographical writing included).

Elsewhere in the *Memoir*, Frances Edgeworth emphasises how 'the differences' (*MME*, 1:13) between the small, one-street Irish village with its ramshackle houses, air of neglect and generally un-inspiring aspect and the neat, pretty and well-tended villages, which the Edgeworths had travelled through in England, had struck Edgeworth forcibly. One can only speculate how Edgeworthstown must have appeared to the adolescent Edgeworth, who had recently departed from the smart urban cityscape of London, where she had resided over the past months, and where she had occasion to mix only with young women of a similarly moneyed and privileged background. The contrast must have been immense and one can imagine the initial sense of social and geographical isolation to have been quite overwhelming. At a time when the road and transport system in many rural districts of Ireland was still rudimentary⁵⁴, and when the very possibility of travel was dependant not just on the availability of coach and horses, but also on prevailing weather conditions, and, on whether it was safe to travel, Edgeworthstown's 65 mile distance from Dublin must have appeared considerable. The flat and comparatively featureless landscape of County Longford, with its vast stretches of bog-land and scattered provincial towns, is likely to have contributed further to a feeling of entering into a terra incognita far removed from the conveniences of modern civilisation. The English agriculturalist Arthur Young, who had travelled through the midland county only a few years previously, in 1776, had been distinctly un-impressed by what he had seen. Having travelled through some of Ireland's most scenic and fertile counties, he had dismissed Longford as 'a cheerless county, over an amazing quantity of bog'.⁵⁵

The Edgeworth residence itself can have been of small compensation to the family as it lacked not only the elegance and regularity, but also the usual comforts associated with the better built eighteenth-century country houses. Edgeworthstown had been built 'to the taste of last century' (*MRLE*, 1:33); it was old-fashioned, impractical and ill-suited to the needs of a large and growing family like that of the Edgeworths. It was in urgent need of repair, parts of

⁵⁴ Although the first regular coach service was introduced in 1815, it was not until 1836 that Charles Bianconi's almost nation-wide coach service began to revolutionise public transport in Ireland.

⁵⁵ Arthur Young, *A Tour of Ireland, 1776-1779*, ed. Constantia Maxwell (London: Faber & Faber, 1955), 68.

it were damp and others in a general state of dilapidation. According to Edgeworth's father it needed 'painting, glazing, roofing, fencing, finishing' (*MRLE*, 2:2). However, due to financial constraints it would take years before the house could be brought into a state more in keeping with the family's personal tastes and their needs for further accommodation. What applied to the house also applied to the grounds. Despite Edgeworth's reference to the snow-covered roses, which leads one to assume that Edgeworthstown possessed a garden as such, the grounds around the house, although originally 'laid out to old Dutch taste' (*MRLE*, 2:2), had been left unkempt for so long that they were overgrown with weeds, and so choked with brambles and wild tree seedlings that the structure of the old garden was barely imaginable. The *Memoirs* mention how Edgeworth's father, soon after his arrival, began to improve the grounds by having them drained and levelled, by planting shrubberies, fruiting and ornamental trees, and laying out foot-paths. In spite of his energetic efforts, it must have been clear to him, as to the rest of the family, that it would take considerable time before the grounds could develop and mature, and that, even at their best, they would be regarded as modest compared to those of more stately and modern Anglo-Irish country houses.

Considering the disadvantage of location and the challenging condition of the house and grounds, it is perhaps surprising to find that Edgeworth, as well as her father, seems to have looked on her new life in Edgeworthstown with the spirit of someone who relished the opportunity to taste of pastures new. She appears to have empathised with her father in his thinking that, whilst 'doomed to a place where nothing sublime or beautiful could be found, he used to comfort himself by considering, that it was better for his family' (*MRLE*, 2:8). The inference which Richard Lovell Edgeworth draws (that the privations to which his family are exposed in Edgeworthstown will actually be to their benefit) sounds perplexing, but is less so when his motives for moving back to Edgeworthstown are considered. Leaving his duties as an enlightened, modern-style landlord aside, his choosing to reside permanently in a rural location, his endorsement of a domestic mode of life, and even his aspirations, expressed in the *Memoirs* as an earnest desire to make himself useful to the country and locality from where he drew his income, can be seen to reflect the period's enthusiasm for a certain philosophy of life; promulgated and hugely popularised by much-read poets such as William Cowper (1731-1800).

Cowper, whose poetry later features also in Edgeworth's fiction, celebrated the country-side and domesticity, and he extolled the virtues of the independent country-gentleman. Such a gentleman, capable, as he was, of contributing meaningfully to the life of a

rural community by his benevolent attitude and strong paternalistic presence, was portrayed by Cowper as — potentially — the most fulfilled of all men. Cowper, by managing to cross political, religious and economic divisions within British society with his poetry, had established himself as one of the most beloved and influential poets of the period. His works held considerable appeal for the gentry and the rising middle class, and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall even argue that Cowper, through his successful marriage of ‘rural retirement’ and ‘real duties’, was instrumental in validating the ideal of a ‘manliness [which] centered on a quiet domestic rural life’.⁵⁶ Cowper’s popular idealisation of the independent and self-sufficient country-gentleman is likely to have appealed to someone like Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Although the *Memoirs* suggest that his strong sense of duty propelled Edgeworth’s father to move back to Edgeworthstown, there were other considerations besides, which made him decide to stay. The sense of moral probity which could arise from feeling useful and from contributing actively to the welfare of a community was perhaps the real motivation for a man of Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s station in life.⁵⁷

However, whilst his reasons for wanting to live in his inherited seat at Edgeworthstown are to a greater or lesser degree apparent from the family’s beginnings there, Edgeworth’s reasons for embracing her new life are at first not so apparent. Butler points out that Edgeworth had tried for years — even whilst still at boarding school — to establish a closer relationship with her father: a man whose love, approval and esteem she was to seek throughout her life.⁵⁸ The chances of achieving a greater closeness between them were certainly better in Edgeworthstown, where she could be in daily contact with him, but the spending of more time in his company did not necessarily mean that she had an immediate and clear idea of her place in his life and the family in general. Like most girls in her situation (i.e. having moved to a new home, in a new country and living with a new step-mother) she looked for someone familiar with whom she could share her thoughts and feelings about her new life in Ireland. Edgeworth turned to her English school friend Fanny Robinson, once she was settled in her new home.

⁵⁶ See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle-class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 166.

⁵⁷ Edgeworth recalls her father reflecting on the contentedness he found in Edgeworthstown: ‘more wealth might add care, but could scarcely make an addition of real enjoyment to our present situation’ (*MRLE*, 2:75).

⁵⁸ Recalling her days in boarding school over forty years later, Edgeworth said: ‘I had not for some years the happiness to be at home with him. ... But even during the years that I was absent from him his influence was the predominating power in my early education’. Quoted in Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 57.

The letter-exchange which developed over the following years between her and Fanny represents some of the earliest material within Edgeworth's correspondence. It is an important source of information as far as Edgeworth's first years in Edgeworthstown are concerned. Significantly, it reflects the full range of Edgeworth's adolescent activities, interest and preoccupations. It charts, for instance, her increasing engagement with literature and alludes, a number of times, to the veritable reading programme through which Edgeworth decided to put herself. Another feature of this correspondence with her English friend is that it articulates, for the first time, Edgeworth's sense of place.

Interestingly, it starts off with Edgeworth's declaration that she regards their correspondence as a real and long-term commitment, and that she is not interested in exchanging letters without any real content, merely for the sake of it:

Time becomes more valuable as we grow older & it requires a greater proportion of it to carry on a constant correspondence than I should wish to bestow on mere acquaintance; I should think one must feel no small degree of friendship for anyone before one can always find something to say to them & what a task it is to be obliged to write when one has nothing to say.⁵⁹

What is interesting here is that Edgeworth, although on the one hand, clearly longing to make Fanny her confidante, is, on the other, determined, from the very outset, to set the parameters of their future correspondence. Having done this, Edgeworth is happy to tell Fanny of some of the visitors the family have already received: 'a brother of Doctor Goldsmith's was here a few days ago. I dare say you have read and admired the Dr [sic] poetical works, we always are desirous to see any friend or relation of an ingenious man'. Edgeworth's above reference to the Goldsmiths gives a first indication of the sort of people with whom the Edgeworths mixed socially during their early years in Edgeworthstown. Whilst living in England, Edgeworth's father had sought the company of prominent industrialists and men of science, especially during his active membership of the progressive Lunar circle, but there were no such contacts available to him or his family in the Irish midlands. In their absence the Edgeworths appear to have welcomed contact with persons who were of a literary bent, or who had at least connections with men and women involved in the field of literature.

Another interesting facet to Edgeworth's letter is her usage of the collective 'we', which creeps in as she describes to Fanny what is happening at Edgeworthstown. Edgeworth's

⁵⁹ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 7 October 1782, Reel 16. *The Papers of Maria Edgeworth*, Microfilm Collection, National Library of Ireland.

ready usage of the collective pronoun indicates that she is beginning to settle into her new family-life and that she is beginning to identify herself, her preferences and even her (dis-)likes with those of the larger family. As the above quote also illustrates, Edgeworth expresses the unspoken assumption that Fanny, if not already familiar with the poetry of Oliver Goldsmith, will make the effort to read his works. She clearly expects Fanny not just to act as the passive recipient of her letters but to take an active interest in those things and objects which occupy her. Later, in the same letter, she up-braids her friend half jestingly, half seriously: 'I must reproach you with having neglected to answer two questions in my last [letter]'.

Edgeworth then proceeds to tell Fanny something of the family's neighbours in Edgeworthstown: 'Mrs Irwin is our nearest neighbour, she has a very pretty sister – she seems generally liked by all the neighbourhood'. As if afraid of having struck too gossipy a tone, Edgeworth immediately adds: 'I have not seen enough of her to form an opinion of her myself, and even if I had I should be very cautious of giving it in writing until I was perfectly convinced it was a just one'. Although Edgeworth comes across as unnecessarily reticent when it comes to giving her opinion of Mrs Irwin to Fanny, her desire to do people justice by allowing them the time and space to reveal themselves before coming to a conclusion on their manners or character is characteristic of Edgeworth in her early years.⁶⁰ Edgeworth likes to observe and consider both people and issues carefully before committing herself to a definite opinion. She tells Fanny that Mr Irwin — the husband of the lady in question — 'is abroad at Bombay where it is probable he will meet with my brother⁶¹ – there are two fine drawings at Mrs Brookes [sic] his Mother in laws [sic], drawn by his directions'.

Edgeworth's mentioning of the likelihood that Mr Irwin and her brother might meet in Bombay serves as a reminder that even a provincial locality like Edgeworthstown — however far removed from life in England — could not fail to be affected by the events and politics being played out on the larger stage of the British empire. Many Anglo-Irish families, such as the Irwins or the Edgeworths, had fathers, husbands or sons active in Britain's numerous overseas imperial projects. Through their letters home, these men would recount their personal experiences of those countries and continents, which were part of the British Empire. Their

⁶⁰ Later in life Edgeworth appears to have made up her mind on people much more quickly. However, she occasionally judged some individuals harshly and then felt compelled to retract her original opinion, which involved her making apologies and giving long-winded explanations in her letters. As I will discuss later, Edgeworth's unfavourable initial opinion of Frances Beaufort (who was to become her step-mother) was one such instance.

⁶¹ Edgeworth's older brother Richard had gone back to sea in 1781. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 71.

take on empire life was likely to have a knock-on effect also on the political outlook of the families they had left behind in Ireland.⁶²

Edgeworth does not speak of politics as such in her first letter to Fanny but some way into the letter she declares rather abruptly: 'If you like political subjects I have a great deal to say to you on them'. Perhaps with the awareness that 'political subjects' do not feature prominently in the lives of most adolescent daughters of gentlemen, Edgeworth adds somewhat defensively: 'but I will by no means force you to hear me'. Despite this semi-apologetic adjunct to her first, strong statement one, nevertheless, gets the impression that Edgeworth not only hopes but really expects her friend to take an interest in politics and to want to trade opinions with her.

Edgeworth then goes on to speak briefly about her health, telling Fanny that her eyes have not as yet recovered and are still quite sore. She adds: 'I shall have a tooth drawn this week ... which will be of more service to me than anything I have hitherto tried'.⁶³ Discussions of health matters later came to feature regularly in most of Edgeworth's intimate letters to close friends and family. She usually made light of her own recurring health problems but would comment at greater length on the health of individual members of the family; especially when her father, step-mother or younger siblings were ill. In her letter to Fanny she even speculates about the possible causes for the health problems Miss Davis is experiencing: 'I do not know whether I who am myself too much inclined to take no exercise can be allowed to observe that maybe one cause of Miss Davis's want of health is her want of exercise'.

Her opinions on authors, books and plays make up much of another letter of Edgeworth's to her English friend. Fanny had just been to see the well-known actress Mrs Siddons perform at a London playhouse and Edgeworth, responding to her friend's enthusiastic praises, declares: 'I am not as you seem to be Siddons mad, having seen a likeness of her in a Review, which fortunately did not infect me'.⁶⁴ Edgeworth's mentioning of the

⁶² Both Edgeworth's oldest brother Richard and, much later, her youngest half-brother Michael Pakenham (1812-81), went to (formerly) British overseas territories. Richard emigrated to North Carolina, in the recently formed United States of America, and Michael Pakenham was to spend many years of his life as a civil servant in India.

⁶³ At school, Edgeworth had suffered from an eye disorder which was at one time considered so severe that she was thought in danger of going blind. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 75. Edgeworth's hope that the tooth extraction would help her is a reference to the severe headaches, from which she suffered throughout her life. For instance, in another letter to Fanny she reported: 'You ask about my eyes -they are brave bravissimo [sic] but "Oh my poor head" - I have such perpetual headakes [sic]! if I may use the word without affectation, that they sometimes absolutely incapacitate me for either pleasure or Business'. See ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 18 September 1783, Reel 16.

⁶⁴ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 15 August 1783, Reel 16.

review she has just read is significant because it is evidence of the great proliferation of — and easier access to — print culture as such, which took place in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. During this time the availability of printed material increased hugely, making it possible for genteel women, such as Edgeworth, who were resident in the remoter regions of Britain, to become part of the larger reading community. The historian Amanda Vickery remarks on how the wide circulation of printed material ensured that ‘even a reader at some distance from a polite resort, could be an engaged member of that general public addressed through print’. The steadily growing appetite for print culture enabled genteel women ‘even from a remote area in the Pennines ... to keep abreast of national and local politics, fashion and cultural debate’.⁶⁵ Although the geographical location of Edgeworthstown prevents Edgeworth from witnessing Mrs Siddons perform in the flesh, her access to a recently written review of the play makes it nonetheless possible for her to enter into a debate with Fanny about the performance of the leading actress. The importance of Edgeworth’s access to printed material at this early stage of her residence cannot be stressed sufficiently, for without the veritable mushrooming of new newspaper titles, new magazines, periodicals and reviews during this period, Edgeworth would have been not only geographically but also intellectually cut off from cultural life of England. Her letters to Fanny show that Edgeworth, by virtue of her reading, was usually well-informed about which authors and books were currently in vogue in London. Having read Frances Burney’s *Evelina* and being aware of the reception the work had met with in England, Edgeworth can tell Fanny what she thinks about it.⁶⁶ In the course of discussing authors and books, Edgeworth reveals to her friend that she has just completed work on an English translation of Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis’s recently published book *Adèle et Théodore: ou lettres sur l’éducation* (1782). Edgeworth makes light of the fact that a ‘rival translation’ which has just come out in print effectively put a stop to her father’s plans to publish his daughter’s translation of Genlis’s book.

As Edgeworth began to settle into her new life in Edgeworthstown and to take on new responsibilities in and around the home, she wrote less often to Fanny. Soon she was very much involved in the day-to-day running of the family estate. Perhaps the absence of her brother Richard, the eldest son — who should have been his father’s first choice to educate in

⁶⁵ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988), 259.

⁶⁶ Frances Burney was one of the few authors who made Edgeworth regret for a moment her isolated location in Edgeworthstown. She was very curious about Burney and really would have liked to meet her. In fact, she was under the mistaken impression that Fanny had made Burney’s acquaintance and asked her if she could not get Miss Burney to write to her.

the running of the estate — was one reason why Richard Lovell Edgeworth began to turn his attention to his eldest daughter. However, whilst Richard's absence may have created an opening for his younger sister, Edgeworth, in the face of being actively encouraged by her father to assist with certain aspects of estate management, began not only to take on some serious responsibilities but appears to have made the position very much her own. The *Memoir* details how, in addition to becoming her father's secretary, Edgeworth learnt how to keep the estate account books in order, she sometimes assisted in the collection of rents and, on occasion, she even acted as pay-master (*MME*, 1:14). Despite remaining all her life a 'timid horsewoman' (*MME*, 1:16), she would regularly accompany her father on his estate rounds, during which he surveyed lands, or went out to visit tenants with whom he wanted to discuss new work arrangements. Sometimes these excursions would take them beyond the environs of Edgeworthstown, into more distant parts of the county. Compared to most of her female contemporaries — who as wives and daughters of gentlemen were to some extent involved in the management of large households — Edgeworth's domestic duties extended beyond Edgeworthstown, into a much wider area.⁶⁷

Given her numerous new responsibilities the amount of time which Edgeworth could devote to her leisure pursuits, such as, for instance, her correspondence with Fanny, must have gradually diminished. In order to keep up the correspondence with Fanny, Edgeworth appears to have resorted to writing her letters either before breakfast-time or late at night. On more than one occasion she told Fanny that she had sat up in order to write to her 'although it is past twelve o'clock'.⁶⁸ A sheer lack of time may have been one reason why Edgeworth, despite Fanny's prompting, was reluctant to start another correspondence; this time with a Miss Hartley, another former Wimpole Street pupil, who had expressed the wish to exchange letters with her. In answer to Fanny's question as to what she made of Miss Hartley's letters to her, Edgeworth wrote: 'there was never any real sympathy between us ... I never could depend much on friends who lavished such hyperbolic protestations of love as I have seen in some of Miss H's letters ... How should I estimate the real sentiments of a friend if they [i.e. the protestations] are all exaggerated?'.⁶⁹ Edgeworth felt free to give Fanny her opinion on the kind of letters, which young ladies of Miss Hartley's ilk customarily produced: 'a pretty letter

⁶⁷ For the remit of domestic duties for women belonging to Edgeworth's class, see Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*.

⁶⁸ See ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 18 September 1783, Reel 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

is a pretty thing, it may make me admire the writer but I am afraid it would never increase in the least my love for the woman’.

Her comments on Miss Hartley’s style of letter-writing reveal the extent to which Edgeworth was prepared to adhere to, as well as, depart from, established eighteenth-century letter-writing conventions. Like most young women of her class and period, Edgeworth would have been encouraged — first in school and, later, in Edgeworthstown — to familiarise herself with some of the indisputable classics in the genre of correspondence literature. In some of her early letters from Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth, for example, makes specific mention of Mme de Sévigné’s famously elegant and witty seventeenth-century correspondence with her daughter, which she greatly admired. Her knowledge of the complex structural, rhetorical and aesthetic devices at work in these letters meant that Edgeworth would have been well aware of the essential requirements of good letter-writing. Although authors of some of the most celebrated eighteenth-century letters appear to have striven to achieve a more natural, flowing style in their correspondence, the resulting letters were nonetheless documents which were (consciously) crafted and artfully constructed.⁷⁰

Edgeworth’s decided rejection of the Miss Hartley-school of letter-writing at this early stage in her development as a letter writer is significant because it shows that even the young Edgeworth sought to re-define the purpose of adolescent girls’ correspondence. She clearly can see no merit in being the recipient of letters which contain nothing but the highly emotional, gushy outpourings one associates with adolescents. Instead, she wants to be part of a correspondence, in which opinions on authors, books, subjects and even politics are traded between the letter-writers.

Edgeworth’s insistence on content (above form) marks her apart not only from Miss Hartley but increasingly from Fanny.⁷¹ Books are one field in which their differing tastes and intellectual requirements become apparent. Fanny urges Edgeworth to read the latest best-selling novel *Julia de Roubigne*⁷² which is all the rage in England. Edgeworth replies

⁷⁰ Edgeworth herself, as she told Fanny, preferred the more natural style of letter-writing. For instance, praising the letters written by the poet Thomas Gray (1716-61), she commented: ‘They [i.e. Gray’s letters] are not the stiff performance of an author written under the rod of Criticism and under the Presentiment that they would be published one day as author’s letters usually are’. Edgeworth remarks further that Alexander Pope’s collected letters always gave her ‘this impression’. See ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 15 August 1783, Reel 16.

⁷¹ In another letter to Fanny, Edgeworth refers directly to their different styles of letter-writing: ‘If it is out of compliment you write to me always on such pretty little sheets of gilt paper, I will readily dispense with them; for my part I like better to converse with you than to compliment you’. See ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, August 1784, Reel 16.

⁷² This novel was first published in London (anonymously) in 1777.

characteristically: 'I wont promise you that I will for though I am as fond of Novels as you can be I am afraid they act on the construction of the mind as Drams do on that of the Body'. She tells Fanny that, for the moment, she has put herself on a self-imposed literary diet consisting of biographical works (Peter the Great and Charles the twelfth), books belonging to the fields of history and philosophy and classic French works (Voltaire, Molière, Marivaux). Edgeworth recommends to her friend to follow suit and to 'read several Books on different subjects at a time'. What strikes one about Edgeworth's choice of reading material is the wide range of her early interests. Her method of reading various authors and studying a number of subjects during a given time-frame reveals an almost scholarly approach and organisation to her reading programme.

When Edgeworth is not busy describing the (de-)merits of the books she is currently reading she tells Fanny about local occurrences in and around Edgeworthstown. For instance, she mentions a meteor she observed one night, on the way home from Lord Granard's. What is noticeable about Edgeworth's letters to Fanny in general is that there are only very occasional references to other resident Anglo-Irish families. Lord and Lady Granard were some of the Edgeworths' nearest neighbours, as they lived at Castle Forbes, in Newtownforbes, which, at about nine miles distance from Edgeworthstown, was within relatively easy reach. The *Memoir* records how Lady Moira, mother of Lady Granard, who sometimes stayed with her daughter at Castle Forbes, took a keen and kindly interest in the young Edgeworth and encouraged her to visit whenever she was in residence. Despite Edgeworth's liking of Lady Moira⁷³ and this open invitation, visits to Castle Forbes appear to have taken place quite rarely. One reason for this was probably that Edgeworth's father did not see eye to eye with the politically much more conservative Lord Granard. It seems that visits between the families were curtailed in order to preserve the status quo between these two land-owning men who would sometimes compete for votes in local elections. Edgeworth would have had few opportunities to visit Newtownforbes on her own as it would not have been feasible for her to travel unaccompanied. Although the Edgeworths possessed a family coach and horses, these are likely to have been used for services regarded as more essential to the immediate needs of the larger family.

⁷³ Butler remarks of Lady Moira: 'This cultivated woman, daughter of the celebrated Methodistical Countess of Huntingdon, had sophisticated English literary tastes which made her a leader of Dublin intellectual life'. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 98. Traits of Lady Moira later find their way into Edgeworth's fiction. For instance, she is thought to have been the real-life inspiration for the character of Lady Oranmore in *The Absentee* (1812) and that of Mrs Hungerford in *Patronage* (1814).

The Pakenhams, another Anglo-Irish family, to whom the Edgeworths were distantly related⁷⁴, lived at Pakenham Hall, near Castlepollard, which was situated about twelve miles away. The problem was that their seat could only be reached by traversing ‘a vast Serbonian Bog ... with so bad a road, an awkward ferry [across the river Inny], and a country so frightful ... that Mrs Greville [an acquaintance of the family] called it the yellow dwarf country’ (*MRLE*, 2:11). Due to this terribly arduous journey visits to the Pakenhams were not attempted by the Edgeworths more than once or twice a year. Apart from her aunt Ruxton in Navan, Edgeworth had another aunt, Mrs. Fox (her father’s sister), who lived at Foxhall, which was not far from Edgeworthstown, but she had married a man whose political sympathies were, once more, at odds with those of Edgeworth’s father, so that it was decided in the interest of family harmony to keep visits to a minimum.

As already becomes apparent the Edgeworth’s lack of regular contact with other landowning Anglo-Irish families appears to have had one of its root causes in Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s liberal-minded politics. However, it would be misleading to attribute the comparative social isolation in which the Edgeworths as a family found themselves during their early years in Edgeworthstown entirely to differences in political outlook. By all accounts, Edgeworth’s father seems to have harboured a deeply imbedded antipathy towards larger social gatherings. He customarily distinguished company that was merely ‘fine’ from company that was ‘good’ and, according to Edgeworth, he ‘could not endure, in favour of any pretensions of birth, fortune, or fashion, the stupidity of a formal circle, or the inanity of commonplace conversation ... He could not bear the system of visiting, merely to increase the visiting list, or to strengthen the league defensive and offensive of persons, who are to bow and curtsy exclusively to each other in public places’ (*MRLE*, 2:142). On this point, even the customarily loyal Edgeworth later conceded that her father’s anti-social attitude ‘went too far’ and that he was ‘too fastidious in his choice of society’ (*MRLE*, 2:143). Her father’s anti-social attitude therefore directly impinged on the life of the Edgeworth family and not least on Edgeworth’s own life.

One of the consequences of his reluctance to mix with other Anglo-Irish families was that the Edgeworths, as a family, were largely thrown back on their own company and turned in upon themselves for almost the first two decades of their residence in Edgeworthstown. The family’s lack of social contact may have been experienced as less of a limitation to Richard

⁷⁴ The half-sister of Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s paternal grandfather Francis Edgeworth had married a Thomas Pakenham (*MRLE*, i:14-15).

Lovell Edgeworth, whose various concerns and interests kept him busy, whether he was at home or away. In Edgeworthstown, his time was taken up with the management and improvement of his estate, as well as matters pertaining to ‘mechanics and agriculture’ (*MRLE*, 2:72) and, in the family home, Edgeworth’s father was preoccupied with ‘devising new means of adding to their [i.e. the family’s] comfort’ with ‘a variety of small inventions ... which added essentially to domestic order, and every day enjoyment’ (*MRLE*, 2:37; 2:38). Additionally, his inventions and his involvement in politics would frequently occasion him to go to Dublin.

However, the family did not usually travel with him and, in some of her earliest letters to Fanny, Edgeworth sometimes sounds as if she lived somewhat vicariously through these stays of her father’s in the capital. Often, upon Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s return from Dublin she reports to Fanny what news her father has brought home with him. Edgeworth attempts her very best to draw her English friend into her own new world, which, being situated in Ireland, necessarily revolves a lot around politics generally. She appeals to Fanny: ‘Pray look sometimes into our Irish papers & see what’s doing here – for my vanity’s sake if not for your amusement & cast your eye over a map of Ireland now and then, that you may not be frightened out of your senses when you come across talk of Drogheda & Dungannon & Tipperary & Carrickfergus & a few of such names which may-hap [sic] will sound a little uncouth or so to a musical ear’.⁷⁵ Although Edgeworth attempts to strike a light-hearted tone in her plea to Fanny, she leaves her, at the same time, in no doubt that she really expects her to take an active interest in Irish affairs. Edgeworth’s logic appears to be that if she makes the efforts to follow the exploits of an actress like Mrs Siddons from her home in the heart of rural Ireland, then the converse ought to apply to Fanny, who could follow developments in Ireland comparatively easily, as her geographical location (in, or close to, London) means that she has ready access to a large number of newspapers and other publications.

Edgeworth persisted in talking of politics although she was already aware that her friend had never expressed the slightest interest in any political subject (she remarks semi-apologetically: ‘indulge me in talking to you of a subject which can be no ways interesting to you but which fills my whole mind’). Her father’s recent return from Dublin meant that Edgeworth very much wanted to dwell upon ‘the present state of politics here’. Full of excitement, she asks Fanny: ‘What should you think of a civil war? Upon my word there is a

⁷⁵ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 18 September 1783, Reel 16.

danger – The people here are in a state of universal fermentation. The Counties, Corps, Provinces, are all sending Delegates and making what they call spirited Resolutions – a free Parliament they will have or none at all’. Edgeworth is referring to the great Dublin gathering of the Volunteers, who were to assemble in the Capital to press for greater parliamentary independence from England and to gain concessions for the politically disenfranchised Catholic land-owning classes. She tells Fanny: ‘There is to be one of the greatest meetings held on Monday next (to decide on some plan to be supported by the united exertions of the Volunteers of Ireland) that ever was in this or perhaps any other Country’. Edgeworth continues: ‘My Father went up to Town this morning as a Delegate from this County to speak at it’. Edgeworth, seemingly carried away by the persuasive Volunteer rhetoric, speculates on their tactics and the likely outcome of the Monday meeting: ‘... it is to be done by a Coup de Main or not at all. To use a vulgar expression They must strike while the Iron is hot - give people time to cool and its all over’.⁷⁶ She goes on to say:

They say your ministry in England mean to oppose it with all their strength & the Catholics here hint that if they are not allowed the right of voting they will join them [i.e. the Volunteers] – But I can’t believe it, the Ministers of England must be too well informed to think the Volunteer army nothing but a name, or to venture to trifle with several 1000 men in arms with a Charlemont an Ogle and a Flood at their head – besides the opposition are ready to step into their places and help us whenever we call upon them.

Although the vehemence of Edgeworth’s passionate embracing of the Volunteer cause is at first sight perhaps surprising, the decided position she takes in this letter to Fanny reveals the extent to which her father must have talked about the movement at home and also, the extent to which Edgeworth was influenced by her father’s comparatively radical politics.⁷⁷ Her phraseology and the ease with which she identifies her own interest with the demands and goals of the Volunteers, is certainly striking (‘the opposition are ready to help *us* whenever we call upon them’). In the context of the Volunteer debate her friend Fanny, merely by virtue of being English, is identified by Edgeworth as being on the side of the government presently in power in England (‘*your* ministry in England’). Although Edgeworth never mentions Ireland or Irish interests as such, her language and imagery leave no doubt that she is taking the stance

⁷⁶ The emphasis is Edgeworth, who underlined these sections in her letter to Fanny.

⁷⁷ Later, in the *Memoirs*, Edgeworth glosses over her father’s involvement in the Volunteer movement and is eager to stress that he acted at all times constitutionally.

of a patriot⁷⁸ during this critical moment in Anglo-Irish relations. Edgeworth goes so far as to point out to Fanny that the English government would be well advised not to attempt to ignore the demands of the Volunteers. Her reference to the significant number of men ('several 1000 men in arms') who have gathered behind the banner of the Volunteers even takes on the tone of a thinly veiled threat.

Irrespective of whether one interprets Edgeworth's support for the Volunteers as the result of serious reflection and conviction on her part, or as the spontaneous and over-enthusiastic outburst of an idealistically-minded adolescent, what emerges from this letter to Fanny is her increasing engagement with questions and problems intimately connected with Ireland and Irish politics. Edgeworth's early interest in these marks her apart not just from Fanny but from most adolescent girls of her own class and background. One can only wonder what Fanny's mother, Lady Robinson, whom Edgeworth thanks in the same letter for furnishing her with (postal) franks, would have thought, had she realised that highly contentious politics were the mainstay of the letters her daughter received from her school friend in Ireland.⁷⁹

Problems and concerns peculiar to Ireland begin to feature regularly in Edgeworth's letters to Fanny. Having completed her reading of a number of key books on Ireland, which included historical works by Edmund Spenser and John Davies but also those of modern authors like Arthur Young, Edgeworth, in August 1784, after two years' residence in Edgeworthstown, felt ready to give Fanny her considered opinion on all things Irish. She ranges over an impressive range of topics, discussing everything, from the living conditions of the peasantry and land-usage in Ireland, to habits characteristic to the Irish. Edgeworth makes observations about Ireland's present state of economic development, comments on wages and reasons for seasonal labour migration, and she describes some of the undesirable side-effects of indiscriminate charity. She also reports the demise of Gaelic as a spoken language in the midlands area, wonders about the supposed ethnic make-up of the Irish and speculates about the geological origins of Irish bogs. She tells Fanny about an ancient coat and bowl which have recently been found in one of the bogs her father is having drained, and concludes that

⁷⁸ When using 'patriot' in the above context I have in mind the usage and definition which the term would have carried in the late eighteenth-century. Then it was primarily used to describe the attitude of a citizen, who campaigned for greater autonomy in his polity, but whose motivation for doing so was non-nationalistic. See Joep Th. Leersen, "Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European Context: Notes Towards a Reassessment", in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, vol. III (Dublin: 1988), 7-24.

⁷⁹ From 1783 onwards a lot of Edgeworth's letters to Fanny are addressed to the Robinson's country seat 'Cranford', which was situated in Kettering, near Peterborough.

Ireland must have been inhabited ‘previous the formation of the bogs’, but openly wonders ‘by what strange fatality it became desolate & how it became again inhabited by the savages the English found here on their first descent upon the island?’.⁸⁰

Although the attitude, which Edgeworth appears to express above seems at first reading to be very much coloured by the colonial outlook and vocabulary of Spenser’s and Davies’s’ era in Ireland (‘the savages the English found here’), she declares elsewhere in the letter her conviction that ‘it is not to be supposed that idleness is inherent in the Irish, no, they only want motives ... if we look back into the history of England we shall find that the English were once as indolent a nation as the Irish are at present’. Contrary to initial appearances, Edgeworth therefore does not make essentialist assumptions about the national Irish character. Rather, she expresses the belief that ‘Every nation has passed through this stage in their progress to civilisation’. This is a crucial qualification, for it indicates that Edgeworth’s attitude is conditioned by one of the central tenets underpinning all Enlightenment thinking: the belief that progress in the fields of knowledge and education will bring about the gradual improvement of all of mankind.

Despite her extensive discussion of Ireland and the Irish, Edgeworth must have realised at some stage in her correspondence with Fanny that she had not managed to awaken her friend’s interest in Irish politics or even in Edgeworthstown. Some question she had asked her in a recent letter had made Edgeworth realise that Fanny had still no idea where exactly in Ireland she now lived. In response, Edgeworth tried once more to put Edgeworthstown on Fanny’s mental map: ‘You ask me what market town Edgeworthstown is near, it is itself a market town & you will find it in the old maps of Ireland under the name of Mastrim – it is near Mullingar Longford Athlone & Granard’.

Edgeworth must have been disappointed in Fanny’s notable lack of interest in her new life in Ireland but she patiently continued her efforts to draw her friend into discussions about authors and recently published books. She probably hoped that books represented one field in which she and Fanny still had interests and tastes in common. However, the sort of books Fanny liked to read were now almost exclusively novels, whereas Edgeworth, despite having expressed her admiration of Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) to Fanny just a year ago⁸¹, is consciously trying to avoid reading novels. To Fanny’s question as to whether she has read Burney’s new novel *Cecilia* (1782) Edgeworth therefore can only reply: ‘No I have not’. By 1784 Edgeworth

⁸⁰ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, August 1784, Reel 16.

⁸¹ See above, ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 15 August 1783, Reel 16.

has immersed herself in the reading of French literature and is full of enthusiasm for modern women writers like Genlis, the author of the work she has recently translated into English, and one whom Fanny read during their boarding school days: 'Have you read a new work of Madame de Genlis the same lady who wrote *Le theatre d'Education* which you used to be so fond of, the title of it is *Lettres sur l'Education*? If you have not I think it very well worth reading - if you should have an opportunity'.⁸²

Edgeworth's adjunct 'if you should have an opportunity' suggests that she realised that her friend seemed to have had little interest and, increasingly, little time to follow up on her reading suggestions. Having arrived at an age when many a gentleman's daughter was brought out into society, Fanny now regularly attended balls. This was a world of which Edgeworth knew next to nothing and, in an effort to understand her friend's new preoccupation, she asked Fanny with the prodding persistence of a modern-day-anthropologist to describe to her precisely which feelings she associated with attending a ball. Edgeworth wanted to know whether Fanny considered herself 'happier at a Ball than any where [sic] else?'. She wanted Fanny to furnish her 'with an exact & clear answer to this question' and to analyse her feelings in great detail. Edgeworth already knew that Fanny's tastes and her own taste with regard to balls were bound to be very different, but she ascribed this difference only in part to their respective temperaments, choosing to believe instead that her lack of conventional female accomplishments coupled with her plain physical features was probably the real cause behind of the intense discomfort she experienced when in the midst of any large social gathering.⁸³

Edgeworth's inability to empathise with Fanny's enjoyment of balls betrays not only her shyness and painful self-consciousness but also the extent to which her life as a gentleman's daughter in Ireland differed substantially from Fanny's and that of her English contemporaries generally. Living in Edgeworthstown meant that Edgeworth, as a young woman, could not easily partake in what Vickery has termed 'the new sites of commercialized leisure', such as the public assemblies, subscription balls, oratorios, promenades and pleasure gardens, which had sprung up all over England during the Georgian period.⁸⁴ Although the larger provincial towns close to Edgeworthstown, such as Longford (8.3 miles distant) and

⁸² ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, probably 1784, Reel 16.

⁸³ Edgeworth maintained throughout her life that she had no talent for drawing, no eye for the fine arts and no ear for music. The definition and usefulness of female accomplishments became a topic of discussion for Caroline and Julia in Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795). At the age of 21 Edgeworth still only measured a diminutive four feet seven inches. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 73.

⁸⁴ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 225.

Mullingar (17.5 miles away) were not out of reach, what they offered could in no way be compared to that on offer to the average country-gentleman's daughter in the remoter provinces of England. English towns, being more populous and considerably more prosperous, took great pride in the new facilities and civic amenities they provided. Especially during the last quarter of the eighteenth-century many a new shopping arcade, assembly room, theatre, library and public park were opened in England, so that even modest-sized towns could boast of possessing 'places where people of fashion, quality and the beau monde' would like to congregate.⁸⁵

The development of English towns meant that even someone like Edgeworth's contemporary Jane Austen, who lived for a considerable part of her life in the small Hampshire village of Steventon, could take advantage of the attractions on offer to her in the surrounding county towns (such as Winchester, Chawton, Salisbury, Kitbury and Newbury), where she regularly went with her family.⁸⁶ A visit to town (whether it included the attendance at a ball or the more mundane activity of shopping) appears to have been experienced as a welcome diversion for Austen, as for many a young genteel woman. This contrasts with Edgeworth's life in Edgeworthstown, in which near-by Irish towns feature in her letters almost exclusively as places where the next magistrate's sittings or political meeting is to be held. Neither Edgeworth nor the rest of the family appear to have looked upon any of the County Longford towns as places for entertainment.

Edgeworth and Fanny continued to write to each other over the next few years but the many differences in temperament, which their correspondence had brought to light, appears to have created an increasing sense of mutual non-comprehension between them. It is certainly the case that the frequency of their letter-exchange as well as the dynamics of the correspondence itself changed significantly as Edgeworth began to find her own role in the Edgeworthstown household. For instance, Edgeworth responds seemingly surprised to Fanny's complaint that she felt hated by her: 'I hate you? And pray now my dear what in the name of fortune put that in your head'.⁸⁷ Having named a number of reasons why this assumption on Fanny's part is unreasonable, Edgeworth then apologises somewhat nonchalantly for not having responded to her friend's last two letters and for not having written at all in the last four months: 'I wrote you an answer to your first letter in which you

⁸⁵ Ibid, 227.

⁸⁶ See Maggie Lane, *Jane Austen's England* (London: Robert Hale, 1986; repr. 1995).

⁸⁷ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 8 December 1784, Reel 16.

complained of my Gravity & seemed to have taken it not a little ill that I hinted something about a womanly style [i.e. of Fanny's letter-writing]'. It becomes quite apparent from Edgeworth's letter that she considers Fanny too much inclined to react in an overly dramatic vein. In a previous letter, Fanny had made much of the slight age difference between them and Edgeworth tries to respond with good humour: 'Lord my dear you talk to me as if I was old enough to be your grandmother & pray how old do you think I am – why I shall be seventeen next New Year day, when I beg you will drink my health ... in a Bumper ... and forget all this – Whenever we meet I flatter myself my dear Fanny that my Gravity will be no damp [sic] to your Gaiety, you will find me full as ready to laugh as you can make me laugh'.⁸⁸ Despite Edgeworth's attempt to strike a friendly tone in her letter, she does not succeed in hiding her growing impatience at Fanny's complaining manner. Ironically, compared to her English friend, Edgeworth really does come across as rather a grandmotherly figure. The direct, often uncompromising tone of Edgeworth's letters certainly contrasts with Fanny's letters, which are more in keeping with the style and content one would expect to find in an adolescent girl's correspondence.

Butler describes Edgeworth's correspondence with Fanny as 'remarkably priggish' and parts of it do indeed strike one as such.⁸⁹ However, there is more to Edgeworth's first correspondence than meets the eyes. At the beginning of her correspondence with Fanny Edgeworth was clearly the needier person in the writing partnership. One can imagine easily how Edgeworth must have felt in those first weeks and months in Edgeworthstown when she had to get used to her new surroundings and, at the same time, get used to being once more a member of a large family.⁹⁰ She is bound to have felt lonely⁹¹, and Fanny represented a familiar constant in an otherwise greatly changed world, but as Edgeworth begins to adjust to her new life in Edgeworthstown her letter-writing voice gains in confidence and authority. Increasingly, it becomes the voice of an adolescent girl who is beginning to create a role for

⁸⁸ Edgeworth and Fanny met again in October 1792, a full ten years after Edgeworth had moved to Ireland. Edgeworth stayed with Fanny in her new marital home at Roehampton. Initially Edgeworth had not been inclined to take Fanny up on her invitation but, urged by her father, she eventually agreed to stay with her. The visit was a resounding failure and Edgeworth felt deeply uncomfortable in the presence of Fanny's highly fashionable metropolitan set of friends. When the next occasion for a stay with Fanny presented itself in 1810 Edgeworth flatly refused. For an account of the 1792 visit, see Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 107-108.

⁸⁹ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 73.

⁹⁰ As mentioned above, Edgeworth had not lived under the same roof with her father and siblings since the tender age of seven when she had been sent away to boarding school.

⁹¹ Of the siblings closest to her in age, Emmeline, shortly after the family's arrival in Edgeworthstown was sent away to school, where she remained until 1785, and Anna, Edgeworth's next sister, was just nine years old at the time of the 1782 move to Ireland.

herself, in relationship to her father, to the estate, and in the neighbourhood, within the house and the family. Additionally, most of the subjects and fields of interest which are to figure in Edgeworth's future life as a writer are already in evidence in her juvenile correspondence with Fanny. For instance, Edgeworth's questioning and her attempt to logically dissect Fanny's reasons for loving balls is very reminiscent of the later letter-exchange between Julia and Caroline in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795). Importantly, politics emerges as a subject from which Edgeworth, by virtue of being resident in Ireland, finds it impossible to escape. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that, beginning with her letters to Fanny, Edgeworth's adult letter-writing persona gradually emerges.

Edgeworth did not manage to find anybody besides Fanny with whom she could correspond until the 1790s when she began to write frequently to her paternal aunt Mrs. Margaret Ruxton, and also to Mrs. Ruxton's daughters, chiefly Sophy Ruxton, who eventually became her main confidante. However, a steadily growing family meant that Edgeworth was always kept busy in the intervening years, as she began to play a large part in the up-bringing of the children, which were born to her father and his third wife Elizabeth. In the decade between 1780 and 1790 alone seven additional children began to swell the numbers of the Edgeworth family. They were Elizabeth (b. 1781), Henry (b. 1782), Charlotte (b. 1783), Sophia (b. and d. 1784), Charles Sneyd (b. 1786), William (b. 1788) and Thomas Day (b. 1789). In the early 1790s two more children followed (they were Honora (b. 1791) and William (b. 1794)).⁹²

As far back as 1784 Edgeworth had told Fanny, in connection with her translation of Genlis's French work on education, that her father 'prefers the thought of an original work upon education – including remarks upon de Genlis and Rousseau'.⁹³ Being surrounded by an ever increasing number of young children occasioned Richard Lovell Edgeworth once more to turn his mind to education.⁹⁴ Although he may well have expected his wife Elizabeth to take on the task of instructing the children, her being almost constantly pregnant and her fragile health meant that this was not a workable option. Increasingly, Richard Lovell Edgeworth turned to this oldest daughter for help and assistance with the teaching of the younger children. In what started out as a search for books which could be used as teaching aids for children of

⁹² See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, Appendix A.

⁹³ See ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 8 December 1784, Reel 16.

⁹⁴ The immense cost associated with having so many children educated at boarding school may have been an additional factor which made him decide not to send his children away for their schooling but instead to teach them at home.

varying ages, Edgeworth and her father gradually began to develop their own ideas on children's education. In the *Memoirs*, Edgeworth recalls how she 'in consequence of his earnest exhortations' began 'in 1791 or 1792, to note down anecdotes of the children, whom he was then educating' (*MRLE*, ii: 185). Together, Edgeworth and her father eventually devised the teaching syllabus for young children and the pedagogic approach to teaching which is detailed in their jointly written educational treatise *Practical Education* (1798).

In order to ensure that each of his young children would always have somebody in the capacity of instructor cum mentor available to them, Edgeworth's father introduced the system of apprenticing them to an older sister or brother. As one of the first-born children, Henry became Edgeworth's particular charge.⁹⁵ Later, in the *Memoirs*, Edgeworth tried to make little of her part in the general up-bringing of the children: 'Only one child, a brother, since dead, was during the earliest years of his life entrusted to my care' (*MRLE*, 2:189). However, it has to be recalled that the opinions expressed by Edgeworth in her part of the *Memoirs* were very much influenced by her desire to do justice to what she regarded as her father's many talents and achievements. Designed to be read as a celebration of his life the *Memoirs* are therefore sometimes more of a public relations-exercise than a fully accurate reflection of actual circumstances at the time. De facto, Edgeworth's role in the household appears to have been that of almost a third parent. Even if nominally she was responsible for looking after only Henry, doing so must have taken up a considerable slice of her day.

In Edgeworthstown there were only two rooms in the downstairs part of the house which were large enough to accommodate all of the family. One of these was turned into a workshop by Edgeworth's father, where the children could observe demonstrations of mechanical devices, acquire basic carpentry skills and be shown small chemical experiments. The other was the library, which, possessing a very long table, was used as the place where the children were taught their lessons. This room, which in effect served as classroom, dining room and family parlour combined, became the space in which the family would communally follow their various tasks and activities. Whereas Edgeworth had written her letters to Fanny mostly from her own bedroom, she now began to do nearly all of her writing, reading, her researching and studying in the library, where she would normally (except in the evenings) be

⁹⁵ There are frequent references to Henry's health and his overall progress in many of Edgeworth's early letters. For instance, she told her aunt Mrs. Ruxton in 1794: 'Sneyd flourishes ... Henry to my heart's content ... Bessy to my mother's ... Charlotte to Emmeline's'. See ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, May or June 1794, Letter 112, Reel 1.

surrounded by her younger siblings and other members of the family.⁹⁶ Despite the hustle and bustle which the comings and goings of so many people must have created, Edgeworth does not appear to have regarded working in the library as a disadvantage. Rather — as she began to work more on her own writings — the ready assembled audience in the library was recruited to give her the appraisal she required in the early stages of most of her works. When these works neared completion it became her established practice to call on the family 'editorial committee' in Edgeworthstown for the purpose of proof-reading and editing her work.

A daily routine, which included time spent teaching the young children, her own reading and writing, as well as the time she spent assisting her father, and conversing with him and the senior members of the family, appears to have suited Edgeworth well. One of the factors which threatened the continuation of this happy domestic routine were the illnesses which beset some of Edgeworth's siblings. First her gifted half-sister Honora died in 1790, and, in the following year, Edgeworth's half-brother Lovell fell dangerously ill with tuberculosis. In search of a cure, Edgeworth's father decided to take Lovell to England with him and his wife Elizabeth. In their absence Edgeworth was put in charge at home, and it was during this time that her friendship with her cousin Sophy Ruxton (b. 1776) began. Sophy had been sent down to Edgeworthstown by Edgeworth's aunt Margaret Ruxton to provide her niece with some friendly company. Edgeworth began to write her aunt Ruxton regular reports of how things were progressing at home, and she continued to do so, and to write to Sophy, after she had received word from her father that she was to travel over to England with the children, to join him and the rest of the family at Clifton, a spa town situated on the outskirts of Bristol, where Lovell had been taken in the hope that he would derive health benefits from the fresh sea air. In the end, the Edgeworths remained in Clifton for almost two years.

For a number of reasons it is important to briefly consider how Edgeworth viewed her extended stay in Clifton. To begin with, it was for the first time in almost ten years that Edgeworth had the opportunity to set foot on English soil. Clifton was a fashionable place, possessing the sort of assembly and pump rooms one associates with affluent late eighteenth-century English spa towns. Although the Edgeworths, in accordance with her father's

⁹⁶ When at home, Edgeworth's father conducted his correspondence and much of his estate business from the library, Edgeworth's step-mother would be present, as well as her two aunts, the elderly Miss Sneyds, who had moved over from England to reside with the Edgeworths in the 1790s.

preferences, appear to have frequented these public venues only rarely⁹⁷, the possibility that his eldest daughter might find a suitable marital partner in Clifton cannot have been far from his mind. Edgeworth had arrived at the perfect age for attracting marriage proposals. For her part, Edgeworth appears to have put this possibility firmly at the back of her head. She coped with this new pressure by pretending both to herself and to the Ruxtons that everything was going on as normal in Clifton. She wrote to her uncle John Ruxton: 'We live just the same kind of life that we used to do at Edgeworths-town and though we move amongst numbers, are not moved by them, but feel independent of them for our daily amusement' (*MME*, 1:27).

Although Edgeworth insists that things are, in Clifton, as they were at home, there was an element of make-believe to her assertion. For, surrounded by so many people and within relatively easy reach of his old friends and contacts in England, her father is bound to have been distracted and to have had less time for his eldest daughter. As the supposedly short visit turned into months, and the months into years, Edgeworth must have wondered if she was ever to return to those contented days in the Edgeworthstown library when she and her father would work together on some joint project. Having just created a definite role for herself (within the family and, specifically, in relationship to her father) she must have been anxious about the possibility that she might have to forfeit it again.

Edgeworth clearly enjoyed some of the civic amenities Clifton could offer. For instance, there was a circulating library in the town and, as she told Sophy, she appreciated having such easy access to an immense number of books and new publications: 'we spend our time very agreeably here, and have in particular a great choice of books'.⁹⁸ Staying in Clifton also enabled Edgeworth to directly experience the deep divisions which the hotly contested anti-slavery debate created in Britain throughout the 1790s. She reported to Sophy that, in an effort to support the abolition of slavery, '5000 families in England have left off eating indian [sic] sugar in anything'.⁹⁹ When her vagabond brother Richard unexpectedly joined the family in Clifton, Edgeworth used the opportunity to be accompanied by him aboard a slave ship which was just then docking at Bristol. Edgeworth wrote to Sophy: 'We went on board a slave ship ... & saw the dreadfully small places in which the poor slaves are stowed together so that they cannot move ... every morning [they are brought up?] to scour the deck. [The deck] we

⁹⁷ Rather than visiting sites of conventional touristic interest, Richard Lovell Edgeworth took his family to see model institutions (schools and hospitals), early places of manufacture and industrial production, as well as modern feats of engineering (bridges, arches etc.) whilst they stayed at Clifton.

⁹⁸ ME to SR, Clifton, 5 March 1792. Letter 88, Reel 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

were told, was daily fumigated with vinegar – But probably you know all this'.¹⁰⁰ Edgeworth's aside to Sophy ('But probably you know all this') is testament to how much the anti-slavery debate was thrashed out even in the Irish newspapers, to which Sophy would have had access from her home in Navan.

In the August of 1792 Richard took leave again of the family to return to his own wife and son in North Carolina. Edgeworth's father toyed for a while with the idea of visiting France but Edgeworth, as she explained to Sophy, clung to the hope that 'Nothing is yet fixed, except that we are to return to Ireland next spring'.¹⁰¹ A recurring topic of Edgeworth's letters to the Ruxtons was, as in case of her previous correspondence with Fanny, the books she was currently reading. For instance, Edgeworth would ask: 'Has my aunt seen *The Romance of the Forest*? ... We were much interested in some parts of it – It is something in the style of *The Castle of Otranto* & all the horrible parts are we thought well worked up. But it is very difficult to keep horror breathless with its mouth open through three volumes'.¹⁰²

In marked contrast to her letters to Fanny, the subject of politics, however, does not feature often. The reasons for this should not be ascribed to disinterest on Edgeworth's part but, rather, be seen as her attempt to avoid possible clashes between her father and her notably more conservative uncle John Ruxton. Touching upon politics in one of her letters, Edgeworth admitted to her aunt: 'My father says that I may vent to you as much as I think proper my "wailings & weak fears". That any circumstance should come to pass in which my uncle & you & my father should be on different sides of the [question?] ... he will explain his sentiments to you. He will give you a full view in a few words so that I will say nothing of politics but proceed to "the book" & articles of domestic occurrences'.¹⁰³ Despite not discussing politics as such, Edgeworth regularly asked her aunt and Sophy to verify or deny reports of unrest in Ireland, which occasionally made their way to Clifton. For instance, when the Granards, who also stayed in Clifton for a while, had just arrived from Ireland, Edgeworth wrote to her aunt: 'We hear very different accounts from Ireland. Lord G[ranard] says everything is quiet in the County of Longford & has just been reading to us an official letter ...

¹⁰⁰ ME to SR, Fleet Street, 17 October 1792, Letter 97, Reel 1. Parts of the paper on which this letter was written have disintegrated so that sections of it are missing.

¹⁰¹ ME to SR, Ashton Bower, 14 August 1792, Letter 94, Reel 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ ME to Mrs. R., Princes Place, Clifton, 18 December 1792, Letter 99, Reel 1.

enquiring whether a militia would be expected & his answer as Governor of the county was ... that it was neither necessary or expedient'.¹⁰⁴

Having grown fond of her aunt and cousin, Edgeworth wanted to avoid saying anything which could create a wedge between the two families. In many respects, Mrs. Ruxton appears to have taken on the mantle of a substitute mother-figure in the estimation of her niece and this being so, Edgeworth could sometimes be over-nervous lest she should unwittingly have said or done anything to offend her. When there was a longer than usual pause between receiving letters from her aunt, Edgeworth wrote: 'Lady Granard who is here, tells me that you have been at Foxhall & that you are well – When will you write to us yourself My dear aunt? It is very long indeed! (August) since I heard from you & I really have been & am, in spite of all the wise ones round about me can say, extremely frightened lest I should have unnotic[eably] done something to displease you'.¹⁰⁵

Butler places great emphasis on Edgeworth's emotional dependence on Mrs. Ruxton's good opinion of her, and claims that the letters she wrote to the Ruxtons in general express her 'a-political' and 'quietist views' on life.¹⁰⁶ Whilst this is undoubtedly true of some of the letters it would be a mistake to disregard them for this reason. For, whilst politics is almost never made the explicit subject of Edgeworth's letters to the Ruxtons (such as was the case in her correspondence with Fanny), politics feature obliquely in many of the letters. This is hardly surprising, as the policies decided upon by the Dublin Castle administration had of course a direct bearing on the life Edgeworth led in Edgeworthstown. This was especially the case in the 1790s, when — in the wake of the French Revolution — many of the reactionary directives, which were issued from Dublin, tended to further embitter and deepen the already existing and highly sectarian conflict between Ascendancy and Catholic interests in Ireland. Irrespective of how one interprets the lack of political discussions in Edgeworth's letters to the Ruxton it seems an oversimplification to conclude that this should be taken as evidence of Edgeworth's disinterest and total detachment from the world of Irish politics.

Leaving politics aside, the real relevance of the Edgeworth-Ruxton correspondence consists perhaps in the unique insights the letters afford into Edgeworth's domestic life in Edgeworthstown, and the wealth of detail about her day-to-day routines which they provide.

¹⁰⁴ ME to Mrs. R., Princes Place, Clifton, 9 January 1792, Letter 101, Reel 1. 'The book' Edgeworth is referring to could be *The Parent's Assistant*, which was published as late as 1796, but for which she had begun to collect children's stories during her stay at Clifton.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 124; 126; 128.

Evidence of the importance which Edgeworth attributed to her regular letter- contact with the Ruxtons is the fact that she continued to write letters to them with even greater frequency from Edgeworthstown, to where the family returned in 1793, by which stage Lovell's health had markedly improved. The letters to the Ruxtons contain more conventionally feminine topics than the letter she wrote to Fanny, and they convey a real picture of the kind of woman Edgeworth was, and which interests and activities she liked to pursue in her leisure time.

Edgeworth, for example, passed on to Sophy her own method of safely travelling face powder: 'When you travel please do put the powder in a leather powder bag & tie it tight – otherwise some grains of powder (to the disgrace of my father) might fall out'.¹⁰⁷ In another letter she thanks Sophy for the shoes she has sent down, saying to her: 'I have two pairs of shoes which are the delight of my life – and in these I go my rounds upon the gravel walk three or four times a day, wind and weather permitting'.¹⁰⁸ Although Edgeworth was not usually interested in fine needle-work as such, she would get involved on odd winter evenings in the more practical aspects of gentlewomen's handy-work, such as the mending of shirts, the knitting of stockings and the making of every-day garments for charity, but when she was thinking of making her father a surprise present of an embroidered waistcoat, she turned to the Ruxton girls, whom she asked for a pattern: 'I am going to work my Father a Castle waistcoat – white silk – with black silk – spangles & white foil I am instructed is the thing for morning – I beg Letty will send me a pattern'.¹⁰⁹

Edgeworth would tell the Ruxtons about how the little garden she had created for herself at Edgeworthstown was progressing. Although Edgeworth's gardening ambitions were decidedly modest at a time when Lancelot Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton were fêted by the British gentry, and William Gilpin's discourse on the picturesque the verbal currency of the day, she appears to have derived immense enjoyment from it.¹¹⁰ Instead of considering the dramatic changes which could be brought about by the re-modelling of vast sections of the family estate, Edgeworth contented herself with growing a variety of pretty bedding plants and scented shrubs in part of a disused quarry, not far away from the house, which she had made into her own (*MME*, 1:203). She would tell the Ruxtons about her

¹⁰⁷ ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 22 August 1794, Letter 115, Reel 1.

¹⁰⁸ ME to LR, Edgeworthstown, not.dated, 1794, Letter 120, Reel 1.

¹⁰⁹ ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, Sat. night, not dated, 1795, Letter 136, Reel 1. The emphasis is Edgeworth's.

¹¹⁰ Even Edgeworth's sober-minded contemporary Jane Austen was well versed in the ins and outs of landscape gardening. The felling down of an avenue of old trees is used by Austen to illustrate the extent to which Mr Rushbrook in *Mansfield Park* is subject to the latest arbitrary fashions in late eighteenth-century English landscape gardening.

growing successes and failures and sometimes ask if Sophy had heard about new varieties which were advertised in the papers. When the opportunity presented itself, Edgeworth exchanged plants with her cousins. Thanking Sophy's sister Letty (b. 1773) for a rose she had sent down from Navan, Edgeworth wrote: 'It is in good preservation & is along with the quicking [sic] grafts blooming in my bureau'.¹¹¹ Edgeworth managed to put even this favourite leisure pursuit to pedagogic purposes by encouraging her younger siblings to work alongside her and to learn about the cultivation of plants. The *Memoir* details how a veritable army of young Edgeworth children, who were given individual mini-plots in Edgeworth's garden, would spend time there, digging and planting out flowers under their older sister's guidance.

Discussions of books, of course, continued to make up a significant section in almost all of Edgeworth's letters to the Ruxtons.¹¹² Edgeworth would customarily inform her aunt what she and the family read at any one time and how the book in question was thought of. For instance, whilst Richard Lovell Edgeworth is recovering from a cold and therefore marooned in the house, the family have 'been reading Gray's Trivia to our great entertainment ... Pray tell me if you like it'.¹¹³ Books were regularly exchanged between the two households and Edgeworth would thank her aunt for sending books down to Edgeworthstown. She remarks, for instance, that her father 'brought home certain books with him from Black Castle ... among them I was very glad to see the Fairy Tales'.¹¹⁴ At the time the Edgeworths are just reading Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Evenings at Home* (1795)¹¹⁵ to the children at night: 'We admire Mrs Barbauld extremely ... The candles were all but out in the library & a wonderful bustle made before I rightly comprehended what was going forward'.¹¹⁶

When there are changes taking place in the Edgeworthstown household the Ruxtons are usually the first to be told about them. In 1794, a full twelve years after the family's move to Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth joyfully reported to her aunt: 'The snail of the new banisters of the new stairs has just crawled into the Hall'. Edgeworth was waxing lyrical also about the new 'beauteous pillars' downstairs.¹¹⁷ A few months later she wrote: 'The arts of peace were

¹¹¹ ME to LR, Edgeworthstown, 22 January 1794, Letter 107, Reel 1. Edgeworth's 'quicking grafts' are probably hawthorn plants, which are commonly known as 'quick-thorns'.

¹¹² I will discuss Edgeworth's literary tastes and the role the Ruxtons played in collecting and contributing literary materials to her in Chapter 2.

¹¹³ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 18 November 1793, Letter 106, Reel 1.

¹¹⁴ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 3 May 1794, Letter 111, Reel 1.

¹¹⁵ Although the Edgeworths appear to have read a 1795 edition of *Evenings at Home* this work originated earlier (1792-6), and in collaboration with Mrs Barbauld's brother John Aikin.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

going on most prosperously with us – the new room is almost built & the staircase is completed. Long may we live to run up and down it. The house is at present rather in an open state but I am told by the Engineer that it will hold a siege manfully'.¹¹⁸

Edgeworth's light-hearted tone almost invites one to skip over the fact that she is actually considering Edgeworthstown's ability to withstand a hostile attack. It reminds one forcibly that Edgeworthstown, although portrayed by Edgeworth in her letters as a much loved island of domestic contentment, cannot escape its location in a highly volatile Irish countryside, where agrarian unrest became gradually more wide-spread during the 1790s. In the same letter, Edgeworth mentions hearing 'several flying reports of Defenders, near us' and admits that she 'never thought of danger till ... last night', when 'a party of men, amounting to a sober 40 met at Mr Jackson's on the Road'. Things calmed down again soon after Edgeworth wrote the above letter. She felt that, for the moment, with 'a watch constantly ... 15 Horse and as many in foot in the Town we have nothing to fear'.¹¹⁹ The truce remained an uneasy one and Edgeworth mentions reports of disturbances in other parts of the midlands a number of times in her letters to the Ruxtons. By 1795 the feeling of general unrest was so palpable that Edgeworth reported: 'my Father is just returned with troops ... It is reported that military law is proclaimed in Connaught'.¹²⁰ According to Edgeworth, 'Defenderism' was spreading rapidly, even in Edgeworthstown, and she and the family did not feel safe until sixty men from the Limerick militia were stationed in the village, allowing the family at last 'to sleep & wake in peace in this place now'.¹²¹ The relatively minor disturbances of 1795 in Edgeworthstown were of course a mere flash in the pan compared to the upheavals which followed during the rising of 1798, when the Edgeworths — in the face of an advancing French army — were forced by to leave their home and seek refuge in the protestant stronghold of Longford Town. Whilst the dramatic escape from Edgeworthstown and Edgeworth's momentous relief at finding the house untouched upon the family's return from Longford has often been commented upon, there is perhaps a danger of forgetting that the tensions, which eventually manifested themselves in the violent confrontation of 1798, were an underlying element of Edgeworth's life throughout the 1790s.

There were other factors which threatened the status quo of the Edgeworthstown household. The health of individual family members often gave Edgeworth great cause for

¹¹⁸ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 4 August 1794, Letter 114, Reel 1.

¹¹⁹ ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 22 August 1794, Letter 115, Reel 1.

¹²⁰ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 11 May 1795, Letter 127, Reel 1.

¹²¹ ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1795, Letter 136, Reel 1.

concern. In 1792, whilst the rest of the family were at Clifton, Edgeworth's infant half-brother Thomas Day, who had been placed with the Ruxtons during their absence, died. The death of Edgeworth's brother Richard, who had emigrated to North Carolina was announced by the arrival of a letter in Edgeworthstown in 1796. The death of a sibling, however sad, was something Edgeworth had learnt to come to terms with over the years (as mentioned above, Honora and William died in 1790), but the failing health of her step-mother was another matter. Instinctively, Edgeworth must have wondered what would happen if her third step-mother died as well. If the worst came to pass, what might her father decide to do? Leaving the possibility of another marriage aside, would he want to continue living in Edgeworthstown without a wife by his side? Would he be inclined to move back to England, where he had still many friends and other social contacts?

Elizabeth, Edgeworth's third step-mother, was by all accounts a mild-mannered woman, equally popular with her step-children as with her own children but her health was not robust and deteriorated visibly in the 1790s. Typically, Edgeworth would report to her aunt: 'Mrs. E. is better but still coughing'.¹²² Some time later, she writes: 'she continues to be very indifferent ... has stayed in bed ... is very weak and feverish'.¹²³ Then again, there are periods where Elizabeth Edgeworth appears to rally around: 'Mrs. E. is weak but cheerful'.¹²⁴ The familiar symptoms of tuberculosis, which had previously caused the death of Honora and William, began to show themselves in Edgeworth's step-mother. Edgeworth's father appears to have tried his utmost to alleviate his wife's worsening condition, consulting a number of physicians and taking her away for a change of scenery and rest, to the home of his sister in Navan.

Whilst the parents stayed at Black Castle, Edgeworth held the fort at home. Trying to reassure her step-mother she wrote: 'All's well at home, the chickens are all good and thriving and there is plenty of Provender and all of everything that we want or wish for – therefore we all hope that you will fully enjoy the pleasures of Black Castle without being anxious about your Bairnes'.¹²⁵ Edgeworth did her best to sound cheerful, saying: 'we do not wish for you at all at present because you would catch cold, I will not say your death of cold – because my

¹²² ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1794, Letter 108, Reel 1.

¹²³ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 3 May 1794, Letter 111, Reel 1.

¹²⁴ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 4 August 1794, Letter 114, Reel 1.

¹²⁵ ME to EE, Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1794, Letter 117, Reel 1. The easy and affectionate tone of Edgeworth's letter to her step-mother would have been unthinkable in the much more formal and distant relationship she had had as a child with her second step-mother Honora.

father would be shocked at the expression'.¹²⁶ She passes on snippets of news to her step-mother and anything which might make her laugh: 'Davey goes to Dublin tomorrow – I send again for candles lest there should be no light in the Hall or in my Lady's Bower – They did not come last time ... I have told Kitty that no fruit alias Raisins are to be had in Dublin & she says "Very well Ma'am"'.¹²⁷ 'The last stormy night ... the weather cock, which had been already visibly shaken upon its perch was fairly blown down – John Langan took it for an affront that we asked him whether it was a sign of ill luck, saying "are we going to the time of the Fairies again Ma'am" and the shoulder rose two Inches good measure'.¹²⁸

Edgeworth was keen to impress her step-mother and her father that she had everything under control in Edgeworthstown during their absence, even telling them that she did not allow the workers, which were presently employed with repairs and alterations around the house, as much slack as they were used to: 'you and my father pay such extravagant wages to your workmen that you will entirely spoil them, and they will not be able to wag a finger for anybody else'.¹²⁹ At the same time Edgeworth says: 'My father has reason to be provoked at the "never fear folly" of the irish [sic] workmen – somebody, or nobody, fixed up a scaffold inside the new Buildings so ill and the wood was so rotten, that whilst Mr. Wilkinson [i.e. the plasterer] was standing upon it – it gave way'.¹³⁰ Telling her step-mother about some account details, Edgeworth reported: 'I send notes continually! continually! [sic] to Town – Balance in [illegible] hands is now clear ... Mr Gosrank will not come when I do call – perhaps because they know I have no right to call – as my father expressly desired to have all money sent to Town I have not paid Mr Slater or Mr Jones'.¹³¹

Despite a brief respite, Edgeworth's step-mother fell progressively more ill. In 1796 Edgeworth told Sophie: 'the cough will not go away, and she is far from well'.¹³² In her next

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Davey was a servant of the Edgeworths and Kitty (Billamore) was their English housekeeper. As the above excerpt illustrates the Edgeworth women were inclined to look towards Dublin for civilised amenities. Even for the purchase of relatively common household articles, such as candles and raisons, they send directly to the Capital, rather than trying to source these items in adjacent towns, where their availability may have been uncertain.

¹²⁸ Ibid. John Langan was employed as estate steward by Edgeworth's father. He was the real-life character from whom Edgeworth took inspiration for her depiction of Thady, the old family retainer in *Castle Rackrent*. References to Langan's idiosyncratic way of expressing himself and his body-language become a regular feature of Edgeworth's correspondence

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1796, Letter 157, Reel 1.

letter she says: 'Laudanum (120 drops) has been tried but without doing any good'.¹³³ By October 1797, Elizabeth was spitting blood and growing delirious. Edgeworth tells Mrs. Powys, an old family friend living in Wales, that her 'poor father suffers exceedingly' as he is forced to witness his wife's great suffering.¹³⁴ Edgeworth reports how 'people at twenty, thirty miles distance have poured in upon us for her, grapes & peaches & melons & pine apples & every delicacy which they thought she could taste – She scarcely eats anything'.¹³⁵ Finally, in November, Elizabeth died and Edgeworth's father, after seventeen years of marriage to her, became a widower for the third time in his life.

To Edgeworth's evident horror he announced in the spring of 1798 that he wished to marry again. The woman he had in mind was Frances Beaufort, daughter of Dr. Daniel Augustus Beaufort, an Anglican clergyman and an acquaintance of Edgeworth's father from his involvement with the Royal Irish Academy. Upon a recommendation by the Ruxtons, who lived not far away from the Beauforts' home in Collon, County Meath, Richard Lovell Edgeworth had already met Frances in 1796, when she had produced drawings which were to become the three elegant frontispieces for Edgeworth's first edition of *Parent's Assistant* (1796).¹³⁶ Edgeworth herself had met Frances during a brief visit of the Beauforts to Edgeworthstown. No letters survive which record her first impressions of Frances.

For her part, Frances decided there and then that she really liked the Edgeworths as a family, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth in particular. His reputation as an eccentric and a political maverick had made her at first cautious but after the visit was concluded she told her brother William: 'How enormous are the lies, how unfounded the reports that have been told concerning them – How very malicious all the histories I have heard from people who said they knew, but only envied the Edgeworths'.¹³⁷ She gave William detailed descriptions of individual members of the family, saying of Edgeworth: 'Miss E – the Maria is a little being the same size as myself, her face is not pretty but very agreeable. She looks unhealthy lively & has a sweet voice in speaking: her dress is neatness itself & her manner pleasing to a degree

¹³³ ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, April 1797, Letter 158, Reel 1.

¹³⁴ ME to Mrs. Powys, Edgeworthstown, 10 October 1797, Letter 163, Reel 1.

¹³⁵ ME to Mrs. Powys, Edgeworthstown, 30 October 1797, Letter 164, Reel 1. Edgeworth's reference to the exotic fruits which were brought as gifts to her step-mother reveals the high social status of Mrs. Edgeworth's visitors. In Georgian Ireland, melons, pineapples, peaches etc. were luxury articles of food and only home-grown by persons wealthy enough to possess a number of specially designed heated glass-houses.

¹³⁶ Edgeworth told Sophy in April 1797: 'My father is so good as to write for me to Miss Beaufort; I really feel much obliged to her not only for the excellent frontispieces she has given me but for the very obliging manners in which she has written to me'. See ME to SR, not dated, April 1797, Letter 158, Reel 1.

¹³⁷ FB to WB, Allenstown, 2 July 1797, Reel 16.

that is equally distant from the affectation or the vanity of displaying her talents'. Talking specifically of Edgeworth's father, Frances said to her brother in a joking manner that he had been 'so flatteringly kind' that if she had 'not long since come to years of discretion' there 'would be no small danger de me tourner la tête'. Trying to explain his charm she comments: 'I think it is Madame de Genlis who says that to compliment a woman for her understanding who is past 25, is a surer method de lui offeursquer la raison [sic] than the most extravagant praise of beauty at 15'.¹³⁸

In February 1798 Edgeworth's father proposed to Frances. Her sense of surprise at this unexpected development shows in a letter she wrote some time after his proposal to William: 'It was Mr E. after many days conversation upon the subjects of literature and topics of that sort, in a very open manner proposed to my consideration the possibility of giving & receiving happiness by uniting our affections and interests'.¹³⁹ Frances tells William quite openly that she had had serious doubts and remained for some time undecided as to what she should do. She lists all the things which count against the marriage: 'more than 20 years difference' in their respective ages, his 'immense family by three different mothers', his 'proposal so soon after the death of the last wife, which shocked and hurt my feelings'.¹⁴⁰

Whilst she was still trying to make up her mind in the matter, Richard Lovell Edgeworth informed his eldest daughter of his plans to marry Frances. As some of the letters which Edgeworth wrote to her aunt Ruxton indicate, this turned out to be one of the times when she was not only strongly opposed to her father's decision but when she spared no argument in trying to make her opposition to the proposed marriage abundantly clear to him.¹⁴¹ Frances had made some awkward, slightly ambiguous comment in Edgeworth's presence when they meet again in 1798, and Edgeworth was quick to declare her dislike of Frances to the Ruxtons. However, it would be misleading to suggest that Edgeworth objected

¹³⁸ Ibid. In her letter Frances also describes the landscape she is travelling through upon her home-wards journey from Edgeworthstown. Her vivid description is evidence of the governmental policy of scorched earth which was already wreaking destruction in the midlands counties in 1797. Near Delvin, the Beauforts were 'passing through a flat boggy country, in some parts wild & hilly in others & thickly interspersed everywhere with the ruins of antient [sic] Churches & Castles & the more melancholy smoking remains of houses & villages which the justice or the temerity (which you please) of Government & the Militia has delivered to the flames'.

¹³⁹ FB to WB, Collon, 28 February 1798, Reel 16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ For instance, writing from the Beaufort's home at Collon, Edgeworth told her aunt: 'I have told my father in much stronger terms than ever I used in speaking to you the exact state of my mind in the whole progress of this business'. Edgeworth did not go into further details because, as she told her aunt: 'It is suspected here that some of my fathers & Miss Beaufort's letters have been opened at the Collon post office – perhaps this letter may be opened and read, therefore I cannot here use any but general expression'. See ME to Mrs. R., Collon, 23 April 1798, Letter 178, Reel 2.

to the marriage on grounds of her personal dislike of Frances. Rather, she appears to have perceived in Frances a threat to the special position she had created for herself in Edgeworthstown. She could not know, after all, how her father's new marriage might affect things at home. Most importantly, Edgeworth must have worried how a new woman at the head of the household would affect the writing partnership with her father, which she had forged over so many years and of which she was so proud.

What followed in the months between her father's proposal and the wedding, which eventually took place in July 1798, was a veritable flurry of letters between Edgeworth and Frances, in which each of them is trying to clarify their respective positions. Edgeworth started off in a conciliatory tone: 'The belief that your affection is necessary to my father's happiness, and the prospect of your passing our future lives together must ... make me desirable to obtain a place in your heart'.¹⁴² However, continuing, she told Frances, as much as herself: 'That heart [i.e. her father's] is so large, that, occupy as much of it as you will, Dear Miss Beaufort, I need not fear, that there should not be ample room enough left for me'.¹⁴³ Edgeworth was slowly getting used to the idea that her father was going to marry Frances. Later, she reminisced in the *Memoirs*: 'Those who knew him intimately ... were aware that he would not be happy unless he married again' (*MRLE*, 2:191). In the meantime, Frances, who was still trying to come to terms with the prospect of her imminent wedding to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, tried her utmost to win over his eldest daughter. She wrote:

... after what has passed between you and me it would be uncandid [sic] to conceal, and unkind to delay the telling you that my doubts & fears are now converted into hopes and expectations; and that the very circumstances which made me feel unhappy when we parted will in all probability be the cause of the happiness of my future life – Say dear Miss E that your happiness will not be diminished by it – Say that the kindness you have shown me will ripen with affection ... Say, that ... instead of lessening your dear father's love for you by taking a part of it myself I have only awakened in his heart another equal portion of affection, only made myself the third side of an equilateral triangle.¹⁴⁴

The above excerpt shows the extent to which Frances was prepared to go in order to win the approval of her eldest step-daughter. Frances's language and her emotional appeals to

¹⁴² ME to FB, Edgeworthstown, 11 March 1798, Letter 176, Reel 2.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ FB to ME, Collon, not dated, May 1798, Letter 183, Reel 2.

Edgeworth make the letter sound almost as if it were part of a longer courtship correspondence. The imagery at work in Frances's anticipation of their future relationship, the concept of the 'equilateral triangle', in which Edgeworth's father, Edgeworth herself and Frances are to lead the Edgeworthstown household together, must finally have convinced Edgeworth that she had nothing to fear from her new step-mother. Following this auspicious conclusion to the uneasy start between these two women things went from strength to strength between them. They seem to have got on well. In fact, they actively began to like each other. After the death of Edgeworth's father in 1817, Edgeworth and her step-mother Frances presided jointly in what was eventually to become an all female household in Edgeworthstown.

Edgeworthstown, then, was for Edgeworth a home in which she had managed to create a distinctive position for herself, both in relationship to her father and within the family. As a domestic environment it was a place which was conducive to the development of her intellectual interests. Moreover, it offered Edgeworth a mode of existence which she experienced as highly congenial to the pursuit of her numerous literary projects.

Chapter 2

MARIA EDGEWORTH, THE NOVEL AND THE MORAL TALE

Maria Edgeworth was in the habit of telling her friends and relations about the books she was reading at Edgeworthstown. It was therefore nothing unusual when the fifteen year old Edgeworth, upon reading Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* (1778), wrote to Fanny Robinson in the August of 1783 to voice her opinion of it. However, what was unusual in this letter of Edgeworth's to her friend in England was that she devoted the better part of it to a detailed discussion of Burney's novel. She wrote:

I read *Evelina* over twice – once with a malicious view of discovering its faults but alas before I had read half through I forgot my intentions. Lord Orville is a man after my own heart – his character did not want a [title?] to give it dignity, it is saying a great deal for the Hero, but when I say that the Heroine thought so too perhaps I say still more for her. It was the character of the man and not the Lord she loved – Why then did Miss Burney give him a title? – was it to recommend him to titled Readers? If so she did either their tastes or her book great injustice. And, if I may be so bold as to say it, her young Plebeian admirers some injury – for I cannot help thinking that raising their hopes & Expectations above, what in the ordinary course of things they are likely to attain, is doing them an injury – It is perhaps preparing for them Disappointment and Ennui at least – *Evelina* had no title & but a small Fortune but she married an Earl – Will no conclusions be drawn from this? Will no hopes be raised? Can an improbable event be brought about by probable means without lessening our opinion of the probability? Even connecting the idea of everything that is amiable in a Husband with the idea of a Lord and a Coronet is I should think hurtful.¹⁴⁵

Whilst Edgeworth mentions other writers (notably Thomas Gray and Louis-Sebastien Mercier) in her letter to Fanny, and also reports the completion of her own work on Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore* (1782), which she had just translated into English, it becomes clear that she is preoccupied with thinking about *Evelina*, which had burst onto the English literary scene to great popular and critical acclaim some years earlier. Edgeworth, in fact, returns to the subject at the very end of her letter, charging Fanny, whom she erroneously believes to be personally acquainted with Burney, not to forget to mention her to the author of *Evelina*, and to procure her, if at all possible 'the honour of her correspondence'.

¹⁴⁵ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 15 August 1783, Reel 16.

Although Edgeworth was very young when she wrote the above letter, her response to *Evelina* is significant for a number of reasons. To begin with, she explains to Fanny that *Evelina* took such a hold over her that she soon forgot her reason for re-reading it. Edgeworth's complete absorption with the novel says as much about Burney's innovative style of writing as it does about Edgeworth as a reader. Her frank admission of simply having forgotten her original intention of 'discovering its [the novel's] faults' as she read her way further into Burney's work shows Edgeworth in a very human light. It can also be taken as an explanation as to why the novel as a genre enjoyed such a meteoric rise to popularity in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. If a novel like *Evelina* had the power to make even a serious-minded and unusually well-read young woman like Edgeworth forget her initial reason for re-reading it then it must have held considerable appeal also for a wider readership.

Edgeworth's subsequent appraisal of *Evelina* might be seen as the beginning of her career-long engagement with the novel genre as such. What is remarkable is that Edgeworth, at this early stage in her development as a writer and future novelist, asks some very pertinent questions with regard to the primary function of the novel. Edgeworth raises the question which readership Burney may have had in mind when she decided to make Lord Orville, hero of her novel, into an aristocrat. As the thrust of Edgeworth's comments shows she believes that the plot and the characters within a novel need to be adjusted, depending on the social readership group for whom the work is intended. Although some of Edgeworth's own assumptions on class show through in her unflattering description of certain readers of the work as the 'young female Plebeian admirers' of *Evelina*, her concern for the potentially misleading message the novel may send out is genuine. When Edgeworth asks 'Will no hopes be raised?' she clearly fears that some young readers of Burney's novel may be naïve and impressionable enough to believe that they are likely, in their own lives, to meet with a fairy-tale ending similar to *Evelina*'s unexpected marriage to a man of Lord Orville's elevated social position and immense fortune.

Above all, what one can glimpse behind Edgeworth's thorough questioning of Burney's possible intentions with regard to *Evelina* is her emerging sense that a novelist has a number of definite responsibilities with regard to the reading public.¹⁴⁶ First of all, Edgeworth

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, by drawing attention to the social responsibilities of the novelist Edgeworth aligns herself with the position taken by Samuel Johnson some thirty years previously. Johnson had remarked that 'works of fiction' were books 'chiefly written for the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life'. See Samuel Johnson's Essay No. 4, in *The Rambler* (1750-52), ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 21.

expresses the idea that a novelist should have a specific target readership in mind for his or her work and that the content and message of the novel should be tailored accordingly. Secondly, her criticism that Evelina's story may raise 'hopes & Expectations above, what in the ordinary course of things' most young women 'are likely to attain' indicates that Edgeworth, even at the tender age of sixteen, believed that the novel should — ideally — reflect existing social conditions and real life. What her extensive commentary on *Evelina* demonstrates is that Edgeworth began to ask questions about the function of the novel (genre) as such many years before her own debut as a novelist.

Almost eighteen years later, in the advertisement to *Belinda* (1801) — a work which Edgeworth had written and prepared for publication without the knowledge of her family — she goes to great lengths to assure her readers that what lies in front of them is, despite appearances to the contrary, not actually a novel. Edgeworth introduces *Belinda* in the following manner:

Every author has a right to give what appellation he may think proper to his works. The public have also a right to accept or refuse the classification that is presented. The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel.¹⁴⁷

Edgeworth's insistence, at this juncture in her literary career, on not wishing to be classed as a novelist, is indeed striking.¹⁴⁸ It is the very first piece of information the reader is given about the work and is offered by Edgeworth even before she gives any indication what the actual subject matter of *Belinda* might be. Edgeworth's determination to eschew the description of 'novel' with regard to *Belinda* only makes sense when it is viewed against the overall cultural and ideological context in which she conceived of the work. Edgeworth wrote and published *Belinda* during a time when the novel as a form began to be closely scrutinised by the highly influential critics who worked for the major Reviews of the period. The unprecedented critical spotlight which had been turned on the novel is perhaps best accounted for by the immense popularity the genre enjoyed with the reading public.

In recent years a handful of bibliographical surveys of the British novel have been undertaken which have helped to considerably refine our understanding of this crucial period

¹⁴⁷ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801), Volume 2 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Siobhán Kilfeather (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), advertisement. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the main body of the text and abbreviated as *B*.

¹⁴⁸ Edgeworth had already published *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), was joint author with her father's treatise *Practical Education* (1798), and had made her first foray into adult fiction with *Castle Rackrent, an Hibernian Tale* in the year preceding the publication of *Belinda*.

in the novel's history and development. *The English Novel*, for instance, identifies the last three decades of the eighteenth century as the period during which the form itself came to be 'acknowledged as a category of fiction' which was 'as distinctive' in its own right 'as the theatre or newspapers'.¹⁴⁹ These decades before the turn of the century, which were of such crucial importance to the overall development and growing acceptance of the novel, coincide with the period during which Edgeworth's own attitude towards the novel was shaped, and it is for this reason that her refusal to be grouped alongside other, often highly successful, contemporary women writers is so significant. At that time the consensus view among the most influential and widely circulated Reviews, such as *The Critical Review*, *The Quarterly Review* and *The Edinburgh Review*, was that the novel was predominantly the literary domain of women writers. In the last three decades before the beginning of the nineteenth century a staggering 1,421 works qualifying as novels were published, but whereas of the 40 new titles in 1770, 15 could be identified as being written by male authors — a significant 21 having been published anonymously — only 3 could be identified positively as the work of female authors. By 1810 women writers outnumbered their male colleagues by an astonishing 205 to 85 (*TEN*, 1:46; 1:73).

Considering the growing critical interest in 'the female novel' as a literary form in its own right the question arises as to why it was nonetheless so important to Edgeworth to set her own work apart from those of her fellow women novelists.¹⁵⁰ The form's popularity with the general reading public was certainly such that the Reviews, in order to keep up with this new literary trend, were forced to take notice of new novels. However, critics regularly disparaged the value of many of these new works by questioning repeatedly what, if any, real literary merit the novel as a genre could be said to possess. What becomes very evident from a perusal of period reviews of newly published novels is an increasingly antagonistic interrogation on the part of the critics of the novel's inherent qualities and potential weaknesses. Reviews of distinctly different ideological orientations began to argue that the novel, if it wanted to be

¹⁴⁹ *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:16.

¹⁵⁰ Hitherto considerable critical attention has been devoted to reading Edgeworth's refusal to rank *Belinda* alongside other novels solely in terms of her deep-seated distrust of the novel-genre. In this reading Edgeworth becomes another case-study among a larger group of conservative-minded women novelists who expressed ambivalence and anxiety about a genre which, although regularly featured in the Reviews, still posed a number of significant problems for the woman writer of Edgeworth's period.

regarded as an accepted form of 'good' literature, had to offer either 'truth or utility', and that the novel's 'entertainment' value could not in itself suffice as its *raison d'être* (*TEN*, 1:16).

Concomitantly, questions about the relative cultural value and the literary qualities of the novel become more and more tied to questions about the propriety and the inherent dangers of female authorship itself. In a cultural climate of a steadily intensifying debate about the novel's (de-)merits, some women writers — understandably — looked for means of setting their own works apart from the common or garden-type of novel. For this reason the prefaces to many a novel in the period, especially those written by conservative-minded women writers, such as Elizabeth Hamilton or Hannah More, contain introductions to the effect that the work should not be considered as a novel in the ordinary sense.

Most modern critics have tended to regard Edgeworth's declaration in *Belinda* in this light and therefore seen it as yet another example of a defensive response engendered by the Reviews' highly critical attitude towards novels in general. At first sight Edgeworth's own attitude, which is frequently critical of the novel, and which is evident in both her fictional as well as her non-fictional works, appears to give support to this interpretation. In her fictional works Edgeworth often comments through different kinds of intradiegetic readers¹⁵¹ on the negative effects indiscriminate novel-reading could have on adolescents, and especially on young women. Some of her non-fictional texts, such as *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) and *Practical Education* (1798), express a scathing indictment of the standard novelistic content.

However, whilst her negative attitudes to the novel are significant, what is often neglected in debates about Edgeworth's attitude towards the genre, is the extent to which her decision to reject a categorisation of *Belinda* as a novel was only partly conditioned by the negative critical debate surrounding the novel. I posit that Edgeworth's refusal to be classed as a woman novelist was, on her part, a step which she took deliberately, with the specific needs of her own literary project in mind. For — by describing *Belinda* as a moral tale — Edgeworth adopts a literary category which had more positive connotations in the minds of both the critics and the reading public and one which opened up new possibilities, both for Edgeworth's approach to fiction writing and for her self-portrayal as a woman writer. How one reads Edgeworth's declaration in *Belinda* matters, because, as I argue, her view of herself

¹⁵¹ Jacqueline Pearson employs the descriptions 'intradiegetic reader' to indicate a character within in a novel whose thinking, attitude or behaviour is influenced either positively or negatively by the books he or she is reading. See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain: 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

as a writer of moral tales had important ramifications for the creation and reception of (especially) her regional fiction.

In the endnote to *Castle Rackrent* (1800), also described by its author in the full title of the work as an ‘Hibernian Tale’, which came out in the year preceding the publication of *Belinda*, Edgeworth had elaborated on her self-declared object with regard to her first in a series of ‘Irish tales’. Having credited Arthur Young¹⁵², who had toured Ireland in the late 1770s, with having presented the first ‘faithful portrait’ of Ireland and ‘its inhabitants’ to the British reading public, Edgeworth conceives of her own role as someone who is going to build on, but also going to complete and up-date Young’s literary depiction of Ireland.¹⁵³

I argue that Edgeworth’s eschewal of the common novelist classification allowed her to create a unique niche for her Irish fictions in a literary market place, which was highly competitive when it came to capturing the readership’s attention for a newly published work, but which, at the same time, was increasingly influenced by the negative view of the novel as a genre. In this respect Edgeworth’s self-portrayal as a writer of ‘Irish/moral tales’, rather than as a writer of common novels, helped her to gain access to an early nineteenth-century literary market which was difficult to enter for a woman writer who wished to publish fiction, whilst maintaining her reputation as a writer who was also committed to the production of non-fictional and educational works, such as *Letters for Literary Ladies*, *Practical Education* and *Early Lessons* (1801-2).

What is surprising is that many critics have persisted in dismissing Edgeworth’s declaration in *Belinda* as amounting to little more than the — for the period — almost standard novel disclaimer, and that they have done so despite the ready availability of evidence in Edgeworth’s works, as well as her correspondence, which testifies to the importance she attributed to the classification of her works as ‘moral tales’. Marilyn Butler, for instance, touches upon the moral tale in her discussion of possible origins for Edgeworth’s didacticism and comes to the following conclusion:

¹⁵² Arthur Young (1741-1820) was an Englishman who is nowadays probably best remembered for being the founding father of modern agriculture. He travelled through Ireland a number of times and recorded his detailed observations on the state of Irish agriculture and society in his *Tour of Ireland* (1780). For some time Young became land-agent to Lord Kingsborough, who possessed a vast estate in Michelstown, County Cork. Young was in his service at the same time when Mary Wollstonecraft worked there as governess to the children. For a view of Wollstonecraft’s time and attitude to Ireland, see Janet Todd’s *Rebel Daughters: Ireland in Conflict 1798* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹⁵³ Edgeworth wrote: ‘Mr Young’s picture of Ireland, in his tour through that country, was the first faithful portrait of its inhabitants!’. See Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Volume 1 in The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Marilyn Butler, Jane Desmarais and Tim McLoughlin (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999/2000), 54.

Where does her didacticism come from? A purely literary answer would be 'from the moral tale', and it is certainly more reasonable to put it down to Maria's upbringing on Voltaire and Marmontel than to blame any of her relatives. On the other hand, purely literary explanations are not in keeping with the atmosphere at Edgeworthstown. *There is no evidence that the advantages of the moral tale over the novel, or vice versa, ever came under discussion at the time when Maria was a practising writer.* She wrote very spontaneously – influenced of course unconsciously by literary precedent, but also moved by private considerations nearer home. The didactic passages are peculiarly Maria's, in a sense that nothing else is.¹⁵⁴

Read from Butler's viewpoint then, Edgeworth's classification of her works as 'moral tales' does not seem to have any real consequences for the execution of her literary project. What is curious is that Butler, whilst acknowledging the influence of the French writer Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799) on Edgeworth, fails to draw attention to the circumstance that it was from her initial reading of Marmontel that she would have become familiar with the generic concept of the moral tale. Butler's assertion that 'the advantages of the moral tale over the novel, or vice versa, [n]ever came under discussion at the time when Maria was a practising writer' almost gives the impression that Edgeworth thought little about the novel genre as such, and might even mislead one to think that she embarked on her fiction-writing unfettered by her period's intensely politicised debate surrounding the novel. I argue that Edgeworth was not only uniquely conscious of the particular set of problems facing the woman novelist of her period but, also, that her decision to reject the novel label for her own works came about as the result of a strategy she formulated over many years' of thinking about the novel as such. In fact, Edgeworth's continuous critical engagement with the novel as a literary form constitutes one of the mainstays of all her works. Not only are novels constantly debated in Edgeworth's works but critical discussions of novels, as we have already seen in her 1783 letter to Fanny, become one of the main subject matters of her (adult) correspondence.

Edgeworth's interest in Burney's *Evelina* could be said to have reflected the tastes of many an adolescent of her own class and period. Like most of her contemporaries Edgeworth must have been eager to read the most popular novels of her day, especially as many of these would have been discussed and advertised in the review titles to which she had access in Edgeworthstown. Despite her criticism of certain aspects of *Evelina* Edgeworth continued to

¹⁵⁴ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 303. The emphasis is mine.

admire Burney's work and later, in her advertisement to *Belinda*, credits her with being one of the finest and most exceptional novelists of her era.¹⁵⁵ This is why it is all the more remarkable that Edgeworth declined to read Burney's next novel, *Cecilia*, which came out to very positive reviews in 1782.¹⁵⁶ Butler observes about Edgeworth's early attitude to novel-reading:

It was originally her father's view, and not Maria's own, that she should leave novels alone for the time being. ... Apart from forbidden novels, her tastes were catholic and her appetite tremendous. After an impressive reading programme of political economy and constitutional law which she undertook during her first summer in Ireland, she was, by September 1783, deep in European History (*ME*, 150).

Butler's suggestion that the novel-reading-ban in Edgeworthstown was imposed by Richard Lovell Edgeworth and not originally his daughter's idea makes it sound as though Edgeworth simply stopped reading novels in order to comply with her father's wishes. Such a depiction of the situation fits in neatly with a certain school of thought which sees Edgeworth as a writer whose entire oeuvre is compromised by her alleged allegiance to the eighteenth-century patriarchal system.¹⁵⁷ However, whilst Richard Lovell Edgeworth may well have counselled his daughter on the dangers of indiscriminate novel-reading, it was Edgeworth's own reading which led her to the conclusion that she should read less rather than more novels. Her correspondence with Fanny shows not only that Edgeworth continued to be aware of the publication of new novels¹⁵⁸ (as an avid reader of the Reviews how indeed could she fail to be aware of these?) but, more importantly, it illustrates how her own ideas on what constituted good literature developed throughout her adolescence.

¹⁵⁵ Burney belongs to the handful of writers explicitly endorsed by Edgeworth as good literary models. The others are the French writer Madame de Crousaz, the dramatist and novelist Elizabeth Inchbald, and the poet Dr Moore (*B*, advertisement).

¹⁵⁶ One reviewer said of *Cecilia* that it had 'the Pathos of Richardson', 'the acuteness and ingenuity of Fielding' and that it 'appears to have been formed on the best literary models of Dr. Johnson'. Interestingly, later, in the same article, the reviewer defends himself against the 'publicly insinuated' suggestion that he 'depreciated the writings of [a] Miss Blower, in order to advance those of the writer of *Evelina*'. He states categorically that he is 'totally unconnected with the Author' and says, moreover, that 'The Author of *Cecilia* asks no undue lenity [sic]: she does not plead any privilege of her sex: she stands on firmer ground; and with a spirit superior to solicitation or fear, may meet the decision of impartial criticism'. See *Monthly Review, Volume LXVII* (1782), 453; 456. What the above review illustrates is that even a well-received novelist like Frances Burney was not immune to being accused of being treated differently by the critics, merely by virtue of her being a woman writer.

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallaces's *Their father's daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and patriarchal complicity* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁸ See Edgeworth's reaction to being asked by Fanny about *Julia de Roubigne* and, also, her response to Fanny's question whether she had read *Cecilia*. My Chapter 1, 16; 22.

Crucially, it was during her early years in Edgeworthstown that Edgeworth first came across the works of Genlis and Marmontel; two French writers who, as I will discuss later, were to have a profound and lasting effect on her approach to, and conception of, the writing of fiction. Edgeworth familiarised herself with the works of Genlis and Marmontel as part of a deliberate reading programme she had devised for herself. As Butler herself remarks on Edgeworth's home-education in Edgeworthstown, what made her unusual and set her apart for her contemporaries was the sheer range of her reading material. The nature of Edgeworth's early reading gives a first inkling of the kind of literary education for young women she had in mind when she alludes, in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, to books furthering a 'taste for truth and utility'.¹⁵⁹

Edgeworth's up-bringing in the enlightened ethos of Edgeworthstown appears to have biased her in favour of an education which, based on an older eighteenth-century model of encyclopaedic learning, addressed a wide range of subjects, including modern disciplines, such as chemistry, mechanics and the emerging science of political economy. What is significant is that Edgeworth adheres to this educational ideal — which, in turn, influences her view of the novel — at a time when the Reviews, in order to keep up with literary developments and to maintain their position of authority among a steadily expanding reading public, are themselves changing to 'a model of selective evaluation' as they review more and more of the 'celebrity novels', as Ina Ferris has termed them.¹⁶⁰

In Edgeworth's case, even before she embarked on her extensive reading programme in Edgeworthstown, exposure to her father's unconventional acquaintances and friends may be said to have provided the impetus which lead her to write *Letters for Literary Ladies*. The powerful presence of her father's close friend, the eccentric English writer Thomas Day¹⁶¹, is invoked by Edgeworth in her portrayal of the gentleman who inaugurates the exchange of letters on the subject of female education in the work. He is the gentleman who depicts learned women as aberrations from their own sex; as women who are trying to escape from their natural sphere of occupation in life. In fact, later in *Letters for Literary Ladies* he reinforces

¹⁵⁹ Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies, to which is added an Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification* (1795), ed. Claire Connolly (London: Everyman, 1993), 25. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the main body of the text and abbreviated as *LLL*.

¹⁶⁰ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverly Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 25.

¹⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of Day's influence on the young Edgeworth, see Marilyn Butler's "Edgeworth's Stern Father: Escaping Thomas Day, 1795-1801", in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro S. J. Ribeiro and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

this analogy between educated women and monsters by forecasting the reception such unconventionally educated women are likely to meet with once they go out and mix in society. Like the 'fair Pauca of Thoulouse' their very unusualness is going to turn them into freak-shows and, he claims, they will be exhibited on the marriage 'market-place' as grotesque curiosities among conventionally educated women (*LLL*, 13).¹⁶²

Whilst *Letters for Literary Ladies* is a work ostensibly concerned with the subject of female education and women's better access to educational opportunities, Edgeworth, nonetheless, could not avoid being drawn into a debate about the dangers the figure of the woman writer poses for society at large. For, as she knew from personal experience, many educated women developed a taste for literature and a few, such as herself, had ambitions to become writers in their own right. Again, with the help of the gentleman hostile to female education, Edgeworth articulates some of common prejudices women writers of her own period are likely to encounter. He holds that the act of writing itself has a deeply destructive, and ultimately corrupting influence, not just on the women writers themselves but on all those who come within their ambit. Women who write will necessarily become distracted from their ordinary domestic and familial duties and — by neglecting these — they will shed all the defining characteristics of their sex. Not only will women who write make inattentive wives, inept mothers and unfeeling friends, they will want to show off with 'miserable ostentation ... their learning' (*LLL*, 8). By engaging in this very uncharacteristic, and consequently unnatural, behaviour, they will inevitably become estranged from their own sex and alienate the other (*LLL*, 10). In a sense, so the argument runs, they can no longer be expected to be regarded or treated as women.

What becomes clear from Edgeworth's carefully argued but — at the same time — quite guarded defence of educated women and women writers, is that there was still a whole cluster of interrelated question-marks surrounding the propriety of female authorship in the 1790s, when *Letters for Literary Ladies* was published. Gary Kelly has shown how women writers who chose to write and publish novels were under special suspicion. Kelly remarks on the degree to which the novel was criticised and as a form directly linked to the emergence of

¹⁶² The gentleman opposed to female education argues that a woman's value is directly proportionate to the level and type of her education. His discourse is saturated with terms borrowed from the new science of political economy. Edgeworth is eager to demonstrate how his attitude to women denies them any agency as independent and thinking human beings and turns them into mere commodities.

a number of high-profile women writers, whose entrance onto the literary scene was regarded as undesirable in certain conservative quarters. He even argues that 'the association of women and novels was paradigmatic for the 'problem' of the woman writer in the late eighteenth-century cultural revolution'.¹⁶³

Fully in line with the period's deep-seated suspicion of women writers, Edgeworth's misogynist gentleman in *Letters for Literary Ladies* reserves his special criticism for those women writers who practise fiction-writing. According to him, women writers who dabble with writing 'poetry, plays and romances' produce no 'useful literature' (*LLL*, 3). One of Edgeworth's main intentions in *Letters for Literary Ladies* is, of course, to bring about a rehabilitation of the much maligned 'literary ladies' (by which I take Edgeworth to refer to the select number of women writers whom she later defends in *Belinda*, as well as the literary-minded, anti-sentimental, capable heroines of her own fictions). However, what also becomes clear from her comments in *Letters for Literary Ladies* is that Edgeworth must have felt the potential force of the gentleman's charge that most women writers have contributed nothing really worthwhile to the body of literature. In order to respond to this charge, Edgeworth goes on to discuss bad and sentimental novels, female reading practices and their possible effects during the course of putting forward her arguments in favour of female education. It soon becomes apparent that Edgeworth herself apprehends great dangers from too much novel-reading, and that she even attributes female errors of judgement, into which certain prominent women authors have fallen, to their over-consumption of the wrong sort of novels. Edgeworth remarks:

I apprehend that many of the dangers into which women of literature have fallen, may have arisen from an improper choice of books. Those who chiefly read works of the imagination, receive from them false ideas of life and of the human heart. Many of these productions I should keep as I would deadly poison from my child; I should rather endeavour to turn her attention to science than to romance, and to give her a taste for truth and utility. (*LLL*, 25)

What is interesting here is that Edgeworth makes a causal link between novel-reading and the overdevelopment of the female imagination and, also, that she figures the misreading of books as a peculiarly female tendency. Writing from the viewpoint of a mother on the education of

¹⁶³ Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution: 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 13.

her daughter, Edgeworth adds: 'I dread that she should acquire preposterous notions of love, of happiness, from the furtive perusal of vulgar novels' (*LLL*, 34).

Of course, on one level, Edgeworth's at times highly critical attitude towards the novel is simply an indication that she did not grow up in isolation from the prevailing opinions, and — as we have seen — some of the prejudices, of her period. In this sense hers' is just one voice among a wider range of critics who condemned the habit of indiscriminate novel-reading. Modern literary critics, such as Ina Ferris and Janet Todd, have contributed a great deal to our understanding of the early nineteenth-century hostility towards the novel, and, when taking the very negative associations of the novel, its supposedly morally corruptive influence on the female mind and even body into account, one begins to see why Edgeworth may have chosen not to align either herself or her fictional writing with the novel-form, but decided to look instead for a positive means by which to set her fictional works apart from the common novel.

Edgeworth's suspicions of the novel as a literary form remain deep-seated throughout her life as a practising writer and in *Practical Education*, her next work on education, she elaborates on her fears in relation to fiction generally. This time in unison with her father, who was co-author, Edgeworth warns: 'We know, from common experience, the effects which are produced upon the female mind by immoderate novel-reading'.¹⁶⁴ 'Romances', so the Edgeworths argue, diminish rather than increase 'the sensibility of the heart'. They insinuate themselves into the mind of the female reader, where they create a dangerous and 'false delicacy', with the result that she, subsequent to her novel-reading, will 'revolt from the disgusting circumstances which attend real poverty, disease and misery' in life (*PE*, 1:334). At its worst, so the Edgeworths argue, novel-reading can totally estrange a person (usually figured female) from the demands and concerns, which are part and parcel of real life.

However, Edgeworth, whilst remaining alert to the dangers of too much novel-reading begins to stress the vital role reading can play in a person's mental and moral development in *Practical Education*. Her view on reading, and the numerous benefits associated with reading the right sort of books, is altogether more positive than that expressed previously in *Letters for Literary Ladies*. The main concern of *Practical Education* is with the appropriate education and correct socialisation of children and the work was designed by the Edgeworths to be used

¹⁶⁴ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education, 2 Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1798), 1:333. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the main body of the text and abbreviated as *PE*.

as a sort of handbook, which would provide parents with ideas, teaching techniques and information on a range of topics, from suitable educational subjects for young children to strategies for dealing with difficult, disruptive or inattentive students.¹⁶⁵ *Practical Education* is a particularly useful work in relation to Edgeworth's view of the novel and novel-reading as she mentions which books children and adolescents may safely read and, also, which ones are best avoided.

She names Barbauld's *Lessons*, Marmontel's *Fables*, and Day's *Sandford and Merton* as books especially suitable for children. However, whilst praising these authors, Edgeworth warns about the dangers of common fiction. She counsels that 'sentimental stories' and 'books of mere entertainment' are to be used, if at all, only sparingly in children's education (*PE*, 1:332). Edgeworth suggests, for instance, that boys are only to be allowed to read *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* if their parents intend a career in seafaring for them. For boys, so Edgeworth argues, the attractions and temptations contained in such adventure stories are potentially even more harmful than for girls, as girls will understand quickly that they will not be able 'to ramble about the world' in adult life (*PE*, 1:336). As her comments on *Robinson Crusoe* illustrates, even in the case of children's literature the reading material as well as the reading process itself is influenced by assumptions on gender.

In her chapter 'On Trust' Edgeworth argues that certain books, among them '*Gil Blas*, *Tom Jones*, *Lovelace* and *Count Fathom*' should only be introduced to the adolescent reader when he or she is old enough 'to analyse their own feelings' (*PE*, 1:216). Interestingly, Edgeworth believes that lies in works of fiction are 'not so terrible', as long as they at least 'afford us entertainment' (*PE*, 1:216). She does not object to these fictions on moral grounds then, but claims that the time at which a reader is introduced to such works is crucial. She observes:

When young people can make all these reflections for themselves, they may read *Gil Blas* with as much safety as *The Life of Franklin*, or any other most moral performance. (*PE*, 1:217)

¹⁶⁵ Although Edgeworth was characteristically modest about the extent of her own contribution to the work she, de facto, wrote most of it. The Preface clarifies that her father wrote the chapters headed 'Tasks', 'Grammar', 'Classic Literature', 'Geography', 'Chronology', 'Arithmetic', 'Geometry' and 'Mechanics', and that the chapter 'On Obedience' was written with the help of notes originally compiled by Honora, Richard Lovell Edgeworth's by now deceased second wife, but that all the remaining chapters were written by Edgeworth herself (Preface: x).

Although Edgeworth's highly critical attitude towards the novel has clearly altered since the publication of *Letters for Literary Ladies*, some of her reservations still surface in *Practical Education*. She insists, for instance, that 'the history of realities' is always to be preferred and privileged above the reading of mere 'improbable fictions' (*PE*, 1:338). Some disciplines excepted (she commends the study of chemistry, mechanics and political economy to girls), Edgeworth, by and large, recommends the study of all those subjects which were conventionally regarded as indispensable for any eighteenth-century, well-educated upper class individual, male or female. Often, the authors she lists are considered to be established authorities in their fields. For instance, for the study of natural history she recommends Dr Smellie's *Natural History*. As useful points of reference and good teaching aids Edgeworth recommends such publications as *The Rambler*, *The Guardian* and *The World*. For the teaching of History she advises parents to allow their children to use Hume, Robertson, Gibbon and Voltaire as well as Dr Priestley's 'Biographical Chart'. For the study of poetry she suggests Gray and the more savoury parts of Ovid. In the field of *belles lettres* she praises the Abbé Condillac's *Treatise* on writing and Madame de Sévigné's *Letters*. And whilst Edgeworth warns against the premature introduction of 'works of criticism' (as these might make the pupil too self-conscious about his own style or lack thereof) she names Locke, Hume, Blackstone, Smith and Gibbon as among 'the best authors in the English language' (*PE*, 1: 382; 1:383).

Specifically commenting on novels and the significance of novel-reading in women's lives Edgeworth states flatly that women 'with reasoning powers ... who acquire tastes for science and literature, find sufficient variety in life, and do not require the stimulus of dissipation, or of romance' (*PE*, 1:298). Women brought up in accordance with Edgeworth's educational model, have 'proper objects' in mind and possess 'habits of useful exertion' (*PE*, 1:298). The uncompromising stance Edgeworth takes in the above statement seems to sound the death-knell of the novel, as she appears to leave no room for novel-reading in the lives of women. Yet, somewhat later in *Practical Education*, Edgeworth makes the important point that the consumption of 'romance', whilst in itself never as forceful as 'real-life lessons, may convey useful moral lessons' (*PE*, 1:314). It is therefore in the larger context of education that Edgeworth first begins to envisage fiction as a potentially powerful tool which could be usefully employed for didactic purposes. Edgeworth, it would seem, begins to see the novel in terms of being a suitable conduit for the conveyance of 'moral lessons'. With regard to Edgeworth's own preferences and tastes in novels *Practical Education* does not reveal a lot.

Nonetheless the central role of reading is continually stressed by Edgeworth and she closes her chapter 'On Books' by observing: 'Tell me what company a man has kept, and what books he has read, and I will tell you what he is' (*PE*, 1:385).¹⁶⁶

In her private correspondence Edgeworth is more forthcoming as to her favourite novels during the period in which both *Castle Rackrent* and *Belinda* were written and published. In the letters she wrote to Ireland during her first visit to Paris, where she stayed with her father, step-mother Frances and her half-sister Charlotte during the winter of 1802, Edgeworth frequently mentions what she and the family are reading. Her letters show that reading — whether abroad or at home in Edgeworthstown — was often a collective activity for the Edgeworths. A novel might be read out aloud by a member of the family on an evening when the family stayed at home and had time to join together around the fire-place. As one might expect, the works which were selected for such occasions must have had at least the reputation of being safe reading, especially when some of Edgeworth's adolescent siblings were present. The novels Edgeworth talks about in her letter are therefore — not surprisingly — mainly works which were quite commonly read in the period. Edgeworth was even prepared to excuse some glaring faults in these, as long as the novels were consistent with good taste and written with the right intention. For instance, she told her Aunt Ruxton about a novel called *Plain Sense*¹⁶⁷:

I do not think *Plain Sense* is by any means in the first class of novels; it wants dialogue, humour, and good writing: but it seems to be written with good intentions, and is far superior to the generality of romances.¹⁶⁸

Other books alluded to by Edgeworth in her correspondence are William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Taken as a group, the novels mentioned by Edgeworth are in keeping with the more conventional tastes of her period. The same could be said for the novelists (Crousaz, Inchbald, Burney and Dr Moore) Edgeworth especially mentions in her advertisement to *Belinda*. The appeal of these writers was such that their most popular pieces of work had gone into at least five editions (and some substantially more) by around 1829. Burney's *Camilla*, for instance, had produced 26 editions by that date,

¹⁶⁶ Edgeworth's belief in the truth of this observation is later confirmed by her portrayal of Harry's journey to maturity in *Ormond* (1817). Throughout the novel Edgeworth charts Harry's personal growth by the books he chooses to read.

¹⁶⁷ Novel by Frances Jacson, published in London in 1796.

¹⁶⁸ *MME*, 1:76.

Inchbald's *Nature and Art*, over 57, and Radcliffe, likewise, had many editions to her novels.¹⁶⁹

The attractions of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796) are quite obvious in Edgeworth's case as this is a novel which deals with the long-lasting effects of education in two brothers and their respective sons. This was of course a subject close to Edgeworth's own heart. By any standards and, importantly, by those of her own period, the women novelists Edgeworth is partial to (such as Inchbald) belong to that narrow category of women writers whose literary productions were acceptable even to conservative critics. Pearson explains that during the time when Edgeworth is discussing the characteristics of the novel as a form in *Letters for Literary Ladies* and in *Practical Education*, only 'an exceptional few [novels] ... are [considered] instructive as well as entertaining' by the reviewers. These select few, however, are endorsed even by conservative quarters, like *The Lady's Magazine*. This periodical, so Pearson shows, prided itself in its ability to 'carefully discriminate between common novels — *the powerful engine with which the seducer attacks the female heart* — and the exceptional few which can be recommended: this latter category includes Burney's *Camilla*, Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, Scott's *Millenium Hall*, Brooke's *Julia Mandeville*, Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Inchbald's *A Simple Story* and the novels of Richardson'.¹⁷⁰

We have seen how Edgeworth, despite her admiration for many of the above mentioned novelists decisively rejected the term 'novel' as a correct description of her fictional writing in *Belinda*. Subsequent to the publication of *Belinda* Edgeworth consistently employed the term 'tale' as the title and description of her fictional works. There are her *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801), her *Popular Tales* (1804), and the fictional works set in England come out as her *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809 and 1812). Although works set in Ireland, such as *Ennui* (1809) and *The Absentee* (1812), are included in the last mentioned set of tales, Edgeworth refers to them throughout her correspondence as her 'Irish Tales'.¹⁷¹

In her advertisement to the work Edgeworth explains some of her reasons for describing *Belinda* as a 'moral tale', rather than a novel. She says that 'so much folly, error [sic], and vice are disseminated in books classed under this denomination [i.e. novel], that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable, and not

¹⁶⁹ See *The English Novel*, 1:40.

¹⁷⁰ See Pearson, *Women's Reading In Britain*, 197. The emphasis is Pearson's and denotes her direct quote from *The Lady's Magazine*. The melodramatic turn of phrase illustrates the profound effects which were being ascribed to the act of novel-reading.

¹⁷¹ See, for instance, ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 1 January 1814, *MME*, 1:296.

fastidious'. Edgeworth's insistent tone indicates that more is at stake here than a simple rejection of the novel-label for her work. It is obvious that she attaches great significance to the correct classification of *Belinda*, and her description of the work as a moral tale inevitably prompts one to ask if Edgeworth's fictions really do have any literary hallmarks in common with the moral tales for which Marmontel had become famous. Before taking a closer look at some of his *Moral Tales* it is necessary to place Marmontel in the context of Edgeworth's early reading.

Her correspondence shows that Edgeworth concentrated in her first few years in Edgeworthstown on furthering the conventional education she had received whilst being placed at the boarding school she had attended in Upper Wimpole Street, London. In the eighteenth-century French was of course *the* pan-European language of culture so that the study of *Belles Lettres* and the French language itself were as much part of Edgeworth's education as it was integral to the lives of the daughters of most educated British gentleman. Edgeworth had been taught French in school but it was not until she moved to Ireland and had access to her father's well-stocked library that Edgeworth began to read and acquire her broad knowledge of French Literature.¹⁷² Encouraged by her father, who possessed many works in their original French versions, Edgeworth read extensively, starting with the playwrights of French Classicism, such as Molière, Racine and Corneille, and going on to other works of the grand siècle and beyond. She studied literary greats, such as La Fontaine, Montesquieu and Voltaire, and also began to read more mid-eighteenth-century French writers. As the daughter of a man as interested in science and mechanics as Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Edgeworth would have delved into volumes of the quintessential work of the French Enlightenment, the famous *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des metier*, which had come out from 1751 to 1772, and had had Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert as its chief editors. Back in 1772, whilst staying in France, Edgeworth's father had met not only d'Alembert but also Marmontel and Morellet in person, and Edgeworth must have been eager to read their works.¹⁷³ Of the three, Marmontel was Edgeworth's declared favourite.

Marmontel, so Edgeworth later explained in *Practical Education*, came high on her list of

¹⁷² Edgeworth's father had spent a year in France (1771-1772) during which he met, among others, the writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was subsequent to his work as a civil engineer in Lyon, where he built a bridge over the river Rhône, that he was made a member of the *Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale*. Richard Lovell Edgeworth remained in letter-writing-contact with many of the persons he met at that time so that he still had a number of acquaintances in France when he brought his family over to Paris with him in the winter of 1802.

¹⁷³ Many years later, in 1817, this same trio of writers are treated to a complimentary appearance by Edgeworth in *Ormond*.

literary preferences because his works belong to the select number of books which 'present the best models of virtue' (*PE*, 1:323). However, Marmontel was not the only French writer Edgeworth came across in her reading who wrote tales.

With her excellent grounding in Classic and Enlightenment French literature Edgeworth turned her attention to more contemporary, philosophical and educational works in French. It was now that she began to read works of modern French women writers, such those by Genlis. Edgeworth initially came across Genlis in her guise as educator.¹⁷⁴ She had been impressed by her *Theatre of Education* [*Le theatre d'education* (1781)], as she told Fanny.¹⁷⁵ This work was designed as a book to be read by parents to their children and it had received excellent reviews not just in France but also in England. *The Monthly Review*, for instance, wrote about it:

The Countess de Genlis has no inconsiderable share of merit, in inventing, and judiciously executing a kind of writing, which is admirably adapted to impress the minds of children and youths with the sentiments of morality. Didactic essays may be of great use ... but it is by repeated impressions on the imagination and feelings, more than by the most assiduous repetition of perceptive instructions, that habits of virtue are formed.¹⁷⁶

As the critic's comments show Genlis was seen as somebody who filled an as yet unoccupied niche in the market of children's literature. Not only was her writing thought to be especially tailored to appeal to children but she was seen to present her material in a completely new fashion. This is what the critic means when he praises Genlis, in the same article, for succeeding in 'giving an air of reality to [her] fiction'.¹⁷⁷

Perhaps it was Genlis's fresh approach to fiction-writing which Edgeworth found so attractive. In any case, she does not appear to have needed much persuasion when her father suggested to her that she should try to translate Genlis's next, immensely popular three volume work on education, *Adèle et Théodore*, which had come out in France in 1782. Edgeworth appears to have set to the task with relish as she began and finished her translation work in only a few months. Although Edgeworth's English translation of Genlis's work was

¹⁷⁴ In the 1770s Genlis had been employed by the Duke of Orleans as a governess to his children. Her placement in the Duke's family was to create many problems for Genlis after the Revolution, when rumours began to circulate that she had conducted an affair with the Duke and that she had inculcated revolutionary ideas in his son, the Duke of Chartres, who came to be dubbed 'the Democrat Prince'. See Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1985).

¹⁷⁵ See my Chapter 1, 22.

¹⁷⁶ *The Monthly Review*, Volume LXIV (1781), 260.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 260.

never published (as a rival translation by Thomas Holcroft beat her to the door of the publisher), which must have been a disappointment to her, she continued to have a penchant for her works. An article in *The Monthly Review* sheds light on why Genlis may have continued to appeal to both Edgeworth and her father. The reviewer starts off by referring to ‘Rousseau’s Emilius’ and remarks that ‘plans of education which appear brilliant in description, are not always the most eligible in practice’.¹⁷⁸ Whilst he finds much to admire in Genlis’s work, he argues that the educational plan proposed by her will be difficult if not impossible to implement for most parents:

... the plan laid down by Genlis ... supposes that parents devote themselves entirely to their children, and to submit to a kind of seclusion from the world which is seldom either eligible or practicable; and, at the same time, requires [of the parents], that they be possessed of intellectual and moral endowments, in a degree which falls to the lot of few individuals.¹⁷⁹

Ironically, the very aspect of Genlis’s educational plan which the critic objects to as being unrealistic — the seclusion from society — may very well have been what the Edgeworths liked best about it. After all, the ideal educational set-up for the children, which Genlis proposes in *Adèle et Théodore*, could be said to describe very closely the actual circumstances in which the Edgeworths found themselves for almost the first two decades upon their removal to Edgeworthstown. Genlis’s educational plan would have chimed in with the Edgeworths’ view of themselves as an Anglo-Irish family largely dependant on their own mental resources, where the education of the younger children of the family and the further development of individuals (such as Edgeworth herself) was concerned.

Commenting on Genlis’s technique of expounding on her educational principles, the critic commends her for the ‘lively fictitious manner’ in which she relates all she has to say on the subject: ‘Several instructive and pathetic tales are introduced in a way of episode, and entertaining descriptions of domestic manners in the French nation, are interwoven with the work’.¹⁸⁰ The episodic nature of her writing was something which obviously found favour with Genlis’s readers. It provided a format which could easily be adapted by parents for the teaching of short and self-contained lessons on particular subjects. Additionally, like

¹⁷⁸ *The Monthly Review*, Volume LXX (1784), 338. If he read this edition of the review, this observation would have resonated especially with Edgeworth’s father as his attempts to bring up his eldest son Richard according to the educational principles of Jean-Jacques Rousseau had failed spectacularly.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

Edgeworth was to do later, in her own fictions for children, Genlis was someone who did not confine herself to the standard range of traditional school subjects but included ‘lessons in oeconomy [sic] and humanity’ in her works.¹⁸¹ Reading Genlis one feels that she was a writer who strove to inculcate much more than factual knowledge in her child reader. To her mind, the teaching of principles and values were high on the agenda in children’s education and individual tales could easily be employed to convey certain moral lessons.

Edgeworth continued to read works by Genlis throughout the 1780s and 1790s. A catalogue listing the contents of the Edgeworthstown Library, which was compiled in 1830, shows that the Edgeworths had twelve book titles by Genlis alone.¹⁸² Genlis was of course an enormously popular writer, both abroad and at home, in France. By 1785, for instance, a staggering 29 editions of her *Tales of the Castle* [*Les Veillées du Chateau; ou, Cours de Moral, à l’Usage des Enfants* (1785)] had been published in English translations.¹⁸³ Genlis gradually branched out into other fields of writing. However, it has to be said that Edgeworth liked Genlis’s educational and fictional works better than of those which bordered on autobiographical writing. For instance, in 1784, she asked Fanny if she had read this latest work by Genlis: ‘Have you read Mme de Genlis *Veillées du Chateau*? I have not. We have her *Annals of Virtue* in the house this twelvemonth – not one of us has had the courage to read them’.¹⁸⁴ As her above comment indicates, even at the tender age of sixteen Edgeworth considered it unwise of Genlis to venture into print with her *Annals of Virtue*, a work which revealed so much of the private person behind the public persona of the woman writer. Of course, on Genlis’s side the work was intended to serve as an explanation and justification of her conduct as a governess and a woman, but Edgeworth appears to have felt that to undertake such a public attempt to defend her reputation was tantamount to committing literary suicide.

From the 1790s onwards Genlis began to write and publish a lot of fictional pieces, many of which Edgeworth read and enjoyed. In the preface to a 1797 Irish edition¹⁸⁵ of her

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 343.

¹⁸² See Máire Kennedy, *French books in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001), 134.

¹⁸³ *The English Novel*, 1:40

¹⁸⁴ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 8 December 1784, Reel 16.

¹⁸⁵ There was no copyright law in Ireland until 1800. Kennedy remarks on the great number of French language titles which were reprinted in Ireland; especially from the 1790s onwards. The demand for these was such that a lot of material was printed in Dublin soon after its first publication in France. Books could be bought either directly through a Dublin bookseller or be sent out to those among the country estate owners who were account-holders. See Kennedy, *French books in eighteenth-century Ireland*, 3;11;14. About Mme de Genlis’s works, Kennedy observes: ‘Several of her books were printed in Dublin very shortly after their first publication: their prompt publication in Dublin editions indicates a demand among the reading public ... they were cheap, small-format editions aimed at women and adolescents’. See Ibid, 135.

Knight of the Swan; an Historic and Moral Tale she elaborates on her approach to fiction-writing. Here Genlis claims that although ‘several pleasant Historical Romances, almost all written by Females’ do exist, most of these are ‘devoid of historical researches’, ‘have no unfolding of character’ and ‘no moral tendency’.¹⁸⁶ Describing her contrasting approach to writing, Genlis stresses that she endeavours to ‘avoid these defects’ and has spared no ‘labour or industry’ in studying the history of the times in which she sets her tales. Genlis includes ‘Historical Notes’ in her fictions, which she hopes, will be of ‘instructive utility’ to her readers. About the character depiction in her tale Genlis says that she has worked towards presenting her protagonist Caliph Aaron ‘not as historians ... have presented him; but as, from reading his story we may have supposed him to have been’ (*KS*, 1: xiii).

Genlis’s above attitude towards the writing of her tales and her emphasis on the great effort involved in the process of preparing for the actual writing (i.e. her historical researches) is strikingly reminiscent of Edgeworth’s own approach to fiction-writing some years later. Especially in the case of her *Irish Tales*, Edgeworth aimed towards providing her readership with accurate factual information about the Irish and Ireland. Like Genlis, Edgeworth included footnotes into her fictions. These contained historical dates or references as well as explanations about certain aspects of Irish culture, folklore or language-usage, which Edgeworth deemed worthy of her readers’ special attention. And again, like Genlis, who criticises an author for attempting ‘to make his heroine interesting by her weakness’ — a technique she condemns because she considers it ‘pernicious to morality’ — Edgeworth strove to make all her own heroines into decidedly sensible and unaffected model women rather than trying to make them interesting by giving them character flaws or vices. Genlis’s aspiration that her tales may prove to ‘corrupt no one’ but ‘be interesting to feeling minds’ and prove to be of ‘instructive utility’ (*KS*, 1: xvi; 1: xvi) could be said to be echoed by Edgeworth’s own aims and sentiments with regard to her fictions.

Both Genlis and, later, Edgeworth make the point that their works are the results of their diligent application to a particular subject rather than the result of spontaneous inspiration or daring flights of the imagination. As Genlis puts it when describing the way she writes: ‘there was less need of genius than labour and industry’ (*KS*, 1: xi). Good writing, so both women writers seem to agree, is a slow and labour-intensive process.

¹⁸⁶ Madame de Genlis, *The Knights of the Swan; an Historic and Moral Tale*, 2 vols. (Dublin: P. Wogan, 1797), preface, 1: xi-xii. Hereafter quoted parenthetically within the main body of the text and abbreviated as *KS*.

In Edgeworth's case, it was her father who later liked to emphasise the great care and trouble his daughter took prior to the publication of her works. In the preface to the *Tales of Fashionable Life* series he writes:

I may be permitted to add a word on the respect with which Miss Edgeworth treats the public – their former indulgence has not made her careless or presuming. The dates subjoined to these stories show that they have not been hastily intruded upon the reader.¹⁸⁷

Although Richard Lovell Edgeworth's remarks on the amount of time his daughter dedicated to the writing of her fictions sound unnecessarily defensive it must be kept in mind that it was partly Edgeworth's reputation as someone who took great pains to ensure 'accuracy' and 'truth' in her works which contributed to her being set apart by the reviewers from the larger group of women novelists.

To return briefly to Genlis, Edgeworth continued to read and enjoy many of her works. As late as 1802, whilst on her way from Brussels to Paris, Edgeworth remarked to her cousin Sophy about 'the charming story of *Mademoiselle Clermont*', a piece contained in Genlis's *Petit Romans* (1802): 'I never read a more pathetic and finely written tale'.¹⁸⁸ According to Denise Yim, the particular edition Edgeworth refers to was a pirated London edition of Genlis's work, which in its original French publication had been entitled *Nouveaux Contes moraux* [New Moral Tales].¹⁸⁹ The fact that the London publishers of Genlis's work changed the description and title of the work so readily from *Nouveaux Contes moraux* to *Petit Romans* illustrates that the boundaries between these two literary genres (i.e. the moral tale and novel) were as yet quite blurred.

Through the wide dissemination of her *Contes*, many of which were published individually in the *Monthly Review* — the most popular English magazine of the period — Genlis had 'entered the very zenith of her magazine reputation'¹⁹⁰ by the time Edgeworth and her father went to visit her during their 1802 stay in Paris. This vis-à-vis meeting between Genlis and Edgeworth should have been an interesting and stimulating one. After all, Genlis was an established and highly successful woman writer of international repute and Edgeworth was

¹⁸⁷ See Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui, Volume 1* in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), Preface, 160.

¹⁸⁸ ME to SR, Brussels, 15 October 1802. Contained in *MME*, 1:118.

¹⁸⁹ See *The Unpublished correspondence of Mme de Genlis and Margaret Chinnery and related documents in the Chinnery family papers*, ed. Denise Yim (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003), 42.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

just at the beginning of her career as a novelist. Unfortunately it was precisely Genlis's raised public profile which had created so many difficulties for her in the post-revolutionary period, and which had occasioned her to publish *A Short Account of the Conduct of Mme de Genlis since the Revolution* (1796), another work intended as a detailed defence of her actions and behaviour since 1789. In the uniquely charged cultural sphere of 1790s France, where most ideological groupings were still reeling from the profound political and social upheaval which had accompanied the Revolution, Genlis's decision to go public backfired spectacularly. Instead of smoothing the waves Genlis's book provided her detractors with new ammunition. As a result she was exposed to criticism and censure as never before and her life in Parisian society was increasingly fraught. Given that she was under such intense pressure it is perhaps not surprising that the meeting between Genlis and Edgeworth turned out to be a resounding failure.¹⁹¹ Edgeworth reported back to Ireland that she found Genlis a discontented, quarrelsome and cranky woman, who felt the need to defend herself even when nobody was criticising her. Edgeworth observed: 'Mme de Genlis seems to have been so much attacked that she has defences and apologies ready prepared as some have books of prayer *suited to all possible occasions*'.¹⁹²

Although Edgeworth found it impossible to warm to her she could not help but reflect on the difficult situation in which Genlis now found herself. 'To see a woman of the first talent in Europe ... living in wretched lodgings, with some of the pictures and finery, the wreck of her fortune before her eyes, without society, without a single friend! She is at war with half the literary world, admired and despised, she lives literally in spite and not in pity!'.¹⁹³ Edgeworth was clearly shocked by her meeting with Genlis, and Clíona Ó Gallchoir goes so far as to say that 'The spectacle of Genlis's life and writing must have seemed to Edgeworth a profound cautionary tale'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ For a full account of their meeting see Clíona Ó Gallchoir's "Gender, nation and revolution: Maria Edgeworth and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis", in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Denise Yim suggests that Genlis was feeling especially vulnerable in the period during which the Edgeworths visited her. Ironically, it may have been Edgeworth's status as a fellow woman writer which could have put Genlis on her guard. Margaret Chinnery, another English woman who visited Genlis at about the same time found her to be friendly and generously agreeing to correspond with her. See *The Unpublished correspondence of Mme de Genlis*, 40.

¹⁹² This letter is contained in *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth family letters*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 100. The emphasis is Edgeworth's.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁹⁴ See Ó Gallchoir's "Gender, nation and revolution", 212.

Edgeworth's meeting with Genlis took place in 1802 and therefore after the publication of *Belinda*. However, what their encounter shows is that Edgeworth's early doubts with regards to the efficacy of Genlis's move to defend her actions in print had turned out to be right. As Edgeworth must have seen it, here was the case of a highly prominent figure-head for the female novel whose personal affairs had begun to overshadow her work as a writer so entirely that the private woman and not her works had increasingly become the focus of public attention. Posterity would seem to have proven Edgeworth correct in her estimation, for, although Genlis continued to write and publish for decades to come, evidence shows that the reviews she received began to be very mixed.¹⁹⁵

By the time Genlis, now in her seventies, brought out her *Mémoires* (1825) the tide of her literary fortune had changed dramatically. Most of the reviews had little positive to say about the work, and the remarks of some critics were cutting, if not downright insulting. *The Quarterly*, for instance, complained of Genlis's immense 'vanity' and claimed that in reading her memoirs it was 'difficult to find any trace of the life or writings of a literary character; or to suspect that the author cited is the most voluminous female novelist of this, or perhaps any age'.¹⁹⁶ Despite recalling the reader's attention to some of Genlis's indisputable literary successes, such as her *Theatre of Education* and her *Chevalier du Cigne* [*Knight of the Swan*], the critic comes to the unflattering conclusion that 'Madame de Genlis has a very large portion of a very small mind, and that portion is particularly active. Her intellectual arsenal is boundlessly stored with sparrow-shot'.¹⁹⁷

Throughout her own career as a writer Edgeworth continued to pay tribute to Genlis, as to the many other French women writers (from Mme de Sévigné, the seventeenth-century aristocrat famous for her witty and elegant turns of phrase, to Germaine de Staël, one of the

¹⁹⁵ See *The Unpublished Correspondence of Mme de Genlis*, 43.

¹⁹⁶ *The Quarterly Review*, Volume XXXIV (1826), 423; 428.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 428-429. In 1830, on the publication of her latest work, *Soupers de la Marechale de Luxembourg*, *Blackwood's Magazine* used the occasion to reflect on the works Genlis, at this stage an octogenarian, had produced over the decades. The reviewer begins by saying that Genlis has been overtaken by others in the 'useful department of [children's] literature' in which she had started out. Going on to Genlis's novels he laments that her 'novels grew proportionately more didactic, more historical, more anti-Erotic, more anti-Encyclopedique [sic], and duller; till, by little and little, they lost even the pseudo-Roman form, and were metamorphosed into Souvenirs; autobiography, and finally into such anomalous productions as, *Les Dictionnaire des Etiquettes* ... and many others ... with their multifarious and multitudinous titles'. Criticising some other of Genlis's works the reviewer concludes his article by 'wishing her a long life' but suggests it would be to her own advantage to refrain from further 'literary labours'. He closes with the words: 'May she taste the proper otium cum dignitate of advanced age, and at 82 give up the notion of playing School-Mistress General to mankind'. See *Blackwood's Magazine*, Volume XXVII (1830), 481; 482; 486. As this review shows, one reason for Genlis's lessening popularity was that literary tastes had changed since the turn of the century. Works, which were overtly didactic had fallen out of favour with critics and readers alike.

indisputable writing superstars in early nineteenth-century France), who had contributed so many works to the body of literature, and to European culture generally.¹⁹⁸ The problem was that Edgeworth had witnessed how many prominent women writers, whether French or English, struggled to maintain their foothold in the literary scene of a Britain which had become noticeably more reactionary since the French Revolution. In these circumstances it made sense for her to search for a literary role-model which was, above all, respectable. Marmontel was of the French literary tradition Edgeworth admired but had the advantage that neither he — as a male author — nor the literary form for which he had become famous (i.e. the moral tale) were embroiled in the conservative backlash against prominent women writers, from which Genlis and others had suffered. It might be objected that many writers, not only in France but also in Britain, wrote tales, and we have already seen how Genlis also described some of her works as such, but when it came to ‘the moral tale’ the case was slightly different. Most educated and cultured late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century readers and critics would have been able to identify this literary form immediately with Marmontel. His *contes moraux* enjoyed immense popularity not only in his native country but also in Britain, where they continued to be published in numerous, revised or newly translated editions¹⁹⁹ until well into the Victorian period. As Katherine Astbury observes, it is still debatable among literary scholars if Marmontel can actually be said to have invented the *conte moral* but what matters is that he was seen to be ‘the leading exponent of the form’ during his life-time.²⁰⁰

Of course, as with any form, which becomes established in its own right, quite a number of cultural currents and literary trends had fed into the *conte moral* itself. Astbury, for instance, links the development of the *conte moral* to developments in the early to mid-eighteenth-century French theatre and stresses the form’s close relationship to Voltaire’s

¹⁹⁸ See, for instance, Maria Edgeworth, *Helen*, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 9*, ed. Susan Manly and Cliona Ó Gallchoir (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 59.

¹⁹⁹ *The Monthly Review* praised one such revised edition of Marmontel’s tales in an article which said about his *Moral Tales*: ‘We have already given an account of the genius and manner of this Writer ... of these tales, we shall only observe that, in the volume now before us, there is the same merit of sentiment, vivacity, and imagination’. See *The Monthly Review, Volume XXXIV* (1766), 234. *Tales of an Evening*, a revised edition of Marmontel’s *contes* came out as late as 1792, when it was the subject of an article in *The Monthly Review*. Although it is probably far to say that Marmontel had passed the hey-day of his literary fame at this stage, the reviewer still sees considerable merit in his work and praised the tales as ‘interesting and pathetic, and adapted to impress the mind with good moral sentiments’. See *The Monthly Review, Volume VIII* (1792), 339.

²⁰⁰ Astbury writes: ‘Marmontel claimed to have invented the *conte moral*. Although neither contemporary critics nor modern scholars agree entirely with this claim, he is seen as the leading exponent of the form and thus someone who played a crucial part in what René Godenne has termed ‘le renouvellement’ of short fiction in France in the 1750s’. See Katherine Astbury, *The Moral tale in France and Germany, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 17.

contes philosophique.²⁰¹ She states that Marmontel, in the 1750s when he began to write his first *conte moral*, was still ‘profoundly influenced by the vogue for *contes libertines*, *contes orientaux*, and *contes de fée*’.²⁰² In addition, the *conte moral* was originally designed to be read aloud in the setting of a French salon.²⁰³

Commenting on Edgeworth’s substitution of the novel-label with that of the moral tale in *Belinda*, Butler remarks on the difficulties modern readers have with the term. She writes: ‘Her preference for the term [i.e. moral tale] has become an obstacle to many modern readers, and it has given rise to all sorts of misunderstandings, exemplified by one modern critic’s odd belief that Edgeworth in her day was received as essentially the writer of conduct books’.²⁰⁴ Butler’s assessment that Edgeworth’s adoption of the moral tale label has in many instances helped to obscure rather than clarify her intentions appears correct. This is why it is all the more important to look at some of Marmontel’s moral tales in detail; in an effort to establish which of their features Edgeworth may have found attractive and if there are any which she may have incorporated into her own fictions.

A collected edition of Marmontel’s *Contes moraux* first appeared in its original French version in 1761. A few years later, another collection of tales under the title *Nouveaux contes moraux* (1765) appeared. That Edgeworth read most of Marmontel’s works in their original French versions becomes evident from her complaint in *Practical Education* of the ‘vulgar language’ which some of his English translators have introduced into his books (*PE*, 1:328). She may have read Marmontel in the above mentioned edition but she could have come across his *contes* in a number of ways. Not only was Marmontel a writer (and, for some time editor) of the widely read journal *Mercure de France*²⁰⁵ but he was a contributor to famous *Encyclopédie*. Marmontel was among those writers Edgeworth had begun to read in her earliest years in Edgeworthstown. Describing her new home she wrote to Fanny in 1783:

... you would be infinitely diverted with the stories of characters and Irish Bulls as they are called which I laugh at almost every day and all

²⁰¹ See Astbury, *The Moral tale*, 18; 21.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 25.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁰⁴ See Butler’s introduction to Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 7.

²⁰⁵ Kennedy has drawn attention to the impressive range and number of literary and scientific periodicals, critical journals and French-language newspapers which were imported into Dublin during the late eighteenth-century. See Kennedy, *French books in eighteenth-century Ireland*, 7. Spending time regularly in Dublin, Edgeworth’s father could have brought some of these with him to Edgeworthstown. In addition, as a member of the Royal Irish Academy he would also have had access to a wealth of the latest publications.

day long – a labourer came with a complaint to my father and concluded with these words “He bed me go to the Devil & I came straight to your Honour”. Lubin in Marmontel’s tales makes exactly the same Blunders and I believe in exactly the same words – authors do not always exaggerate.²⁰⁶

What is significant in Edgeworth’s above comment about one of Marmontel’s tales is that she can see a link between traits of the characters he draws in *Annetta and Lubin*²⁰⁷ and the Irish people, who live around her, locally, in Edgeworthstown. The tale Edgeworth refers to was one of Marmontel’s later tales and had appeared in his *Contes moraux* (1761). The story revolves around a pair of first cousins who fall in love with one another. Annetta and Lubin are simple peasants who ‘pass their time free from pride, envy, and ambition ... without care and without trouble’.²⁰⁸ They have no idea that their love for each other could contravene existing social and legal conventions and live blissfully unaware of any potential difficulties until Annetta discovers that she is pregnant. Even then they cannot understand why their love is censured by the world. As Lubin, in answer to the question whether he understands the concept of a crime, explains in his innocence: ‘Yes, ‘tis [a crime] a vile thing; for example, ‘tis a crime to take away one’s life; but [referring to Annetta’s pregnancy] I never heard that it was a crime to give life to anything’ (*MT*, 2:73). Marmontel exploits the great contrast between Lubin and Annetta’s naïve manner of looking at the world and the attitude of authority figures, such as the judge, who attempts to lecture them on the crime they have committed, to the full. After near-disaster and many complications, Lubin and Annetta’s union is eventually sanctioned through a special dispensation granted by the Pope.

Butler says about Marmontel that he ‘write[s] about naïve worlds with conscious elegance’ and concludes that, whilst Edgeworth’s ‘openings and her dialogue conjure up this polished French style’ she departs from Marmontel’s style substantially.²⁰⁹ It is certainly true

²⁰⁶ ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, 18 September 1783, Reel 16.

²⁰⁷ As almost all of Marmontel’s tales started out as individual, self-contained pieces, which were published at intervals in the *Mercur*, I treat them as works in their own right and have therefore italicised their titles.

²⁰⁸ Jean-François Marmontel, *The Moral Tales of M. Marmontel*, trans. C. Denis and R. Lloyd (Dublin: Printed for A. Leathley, P. Wilson, J. Exshaw, S. Price, H. Saunders, and J. Potts, 1764), 2: 69-70. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the main body of the text and abbreviated as *MT*. The edition I use is a Dublin edition and a translation from the original French. I am including the French titles of the tales in brackets. This edition was the subject of an article in *The Monthly Review* where the reviewer said about Marmontel: ‘With the finest sensibility, and the most creative fancy he riots on the descriptions of passion, and is always animated in the display of his characters’. See *The Monthly Review, Volume XXX* (1764), 59. Although Edgeworth read Marmontel in French, she recommends his tales as being particularly suitable for children in *Practical Education*. It is therefore very likely that the Edgeworths would have possessed some of his tales in English, especially as there were young children in the house, and reading was often a collective family activity. In addition, Marmontel’s tales, as mentioned before, were designed to be read aloud.

²⁰⁹ See Butler’s “Edgeworth’s Stern Father”, 84.

that Marmontel's *conte* has all the appearances of being a light piece of short fiction. About eighty percent of the *conte* is made up of dialogue so that it is fast-paced and in places very funny. And yet, whilst Marmontel misses few opportunities to exploit to its fullest potential the cousins' total ignorance of the ways of the world, there is a serious issue at the heart of his tale. Astbury sums it up as Marmontel posing the question 'whether natural instincts or society's laws should take precedence'. She concludes that *Lubin and Annetta* represents an example of a tale where 'Marmontel shows himself to be at the forefront of a movement to use short fiction to criticise a lord's minions, whilst seeing the lord himself as the answer to all the problems'.²¹⁰ One can see easily why *Annetta and Lubin* may have stuck in Edgeworth's mind. She must have seen how the format and subject of Marmontel's *conte* could easily be adapted to represent some of the Irish characters she had met with in her early days in Edgeworthstown.

Common hallmarks of all of Marmontel's *contes* are that they have quite a short format; generally extending to no more than about thirty pages. They are all organised around an episode involving two persons of, usually, the opposite sex, often having backgrounds differing in class or culture. A situation or problem occurs which tests the protagonists' set of principles and which proves to be revelatory of his and her true character. One of Marmontel's recurring themes is that of two young lovers, who are, by virtue of class, cultural or social conventions, initially denied the possibility of marriage. The lovers, by enduring numerous difficulties, including personal hardship, uncertainty as to the true affections of their beloved etc., eventually surmount all of the obstacles, which family and society place in their path, and are happily united in matrimony. *Lauretta* [*Laurette*]²¹¹, *The Shepherdess of the Alps* [*La Bergère des Alpes*] and *The Connoisseur* [*Le Connoisseur*] are all constructed along such lines.

Soliman the Second [*Soliman II (Mercure, 1756)*] was one of Marmontel's first *conte moral*. In it Roxalana, a European gentlewoman, who is held prisoner in the harem of a Turkish sultan, sets out to teach Soliman some 'lessons' with regard to his rights over her person. From her position of initial weakness and vulnerability in a very unequal power-relationship, Roxalana gains ground by her discourse on true love and the concept of sexual fidelity. Soliman is gradually brought to understand that what he takes to be the exercise of his

²¹⁰ See Astbury, *The Moral tale*, 32.

²¹¹ From *Lauretta* Edgeworth may have borrowed the name of the village of 'Coulanges' for the heroine, *Emilie de Coulanges* (1809), of her later novelette.

natural rights, such as a 'master' has over his 'slave', are really just the rights 'of violence and rapine', which can amount to nothing more than 'the rights of a thief'. Roxalana cleverly appeals to the sultan's self-esteem when she declares that he is surely 'a man of too much honour to take advantage' of a defenceless woman like herself. When Soliman has come to see some of the error of his (culture's) ways and has, in the true (European) sense, never loved a woman until he met Roxalana. She teasingly compliments Soliman: 'you have something of the Frenchman in you, and without flattery, I have loved such as are not to be put in competition with you' (*MT*, 1:41). Soliman, in the event, is of course shocked to hear a woman, living in his seraglio, refer to a sexual past with a man other than himself, but he has already fallen in love with Roxalana and, in order to please her, he endeavours to learn to understand her culture. Even Roxalana is, at times, taken aback with the speed and growing ease with which Soliman seems to accept her culture's different outlook on life. She muses to herself 'I am really surprised at his progress. I have given him but two lessons, and you see how he is improved! I don't despair of making him quite a Frenchman' (*MT*, 1:43). In the end Roxalana wins ascendancy over Soliman's heart and he is left to contemplate how it has come about that 'a little cock-up-nose can subvert the laws and constitution of a powerful empire?' (*MT*, 1:49).

What is interesting in relation to *Soliman the Second* is that it is nothing as moralising as one might be lead to expect when first encountering it in Marmontel's *Moral Tales*. In fact, Marmontel seems to strike a noticeably gay and light-hearted tone in this tale and it is not immediately clear which direction the narrative might take and certainly not how it might end. His narrative style is full of light touches and, if anything, seems slightly mocking. Astbury states that Marmontel's own contemporaries were not entirely sure to what degree he set out 'to moralise' in his tales and that even among modern critics opinions on the subject are divided.²¹² However, Astbury also observes that once Marmontel became editor of the *Mercure* he toned down the ironic narrative perspective of his tales so that his moralising, in turn, became more explicit. It was at the beginning of his post as an editor that Marmontel first

²¹² Astbury writes: 'Michelle Buchanan doubts Marmontel's moralising intentions whereas John Renwick sees them as obvious 'from even the most superficial reading'. Marmontel's contemporaries were equally divided on the issue: the *Année littéraire* at first complaining of their 'ton préceptorial', only to complain later of their lack of morals. See Astbury, *The Moral tale*, 24. Interestingly, the reviewer of the Dublin edition of Marmontel's *Contes moraux* was of the opinion that the translators had not been true to the spirit of Marmontel's pieces by translating them into English as *Moral Tales*. See *The Monthly Review*, Volume XXX (1764), 59.

described one of his short pieces, *Les Deux Infortunées* (1758) as a *conte moral* in the *Mercure*.²¹³

From now on one of Marmontel's great themes in the *Moral Tales*, and one which would have been of great interest to Edgeworth, is education.²¹⁴ For Edgeworth - whose own career as a writer began by sharing in her father's interest in research and his writing of books, which either proposed new educational theories, or investigated established pedagogic principles, this was of course a subject close to her own home and heart. A number of Marmontel's *contes* deal with the consequences a faulty or negligent education can have for an individual's development, and there are some interesting parallels between Marmontel's and Edgeworth's treatment of the subject. Edgeworth's sentiments on the importance of a correct education are very reminiscent of those of Marmontel and there is even a noted similarity in the general tone and the language which they employ.

However, long before Marmontel had turned his attention to education as such, he had already begun to write about how education informed the choice of a marital partner and about marriage generally. With the assured and large feminine readership he possessed²¹⁵ this was a subject which was one which was sure to find interest. In *All or Nothing* [*Tout ou rien* (*Mercure*, 1757)] Marmontel had sought to illustrate how, when it came to picking a suitable husband, a woman's best policy is to wait and observe the man of her initial choice in a number of different situations before finally committing herself.

In *The good Mother* [*La Bonne Mère* (*Contes moraux*, 1761)], Emily, at the opening of the tale, is introduced to two men, both of whom are potential husbands. Verglan, titled, wealthy, attractive and — already sure of his success — openly pays court to Emily, who is easily dazzled by his dashing looks and superficial polish. Young Belzors, on the other hand, whilst very much in love with Emily, is discreet in his attentions to her; he has modesty, sensibility and a strong sense of honour but does not possess either Verglan's physical attributes or his easy charm. Predictably, Emily falls for Verglan but her mother, who notices this worrying development, cleverly contrives to create a number of situations, designed to reveal the true characters of Emily's two suitors. Crucially, Emily's mother does not openly try to influence her daughter's choice by giving her the benefit of her personal opinion. Instead, the mother reasons: 'No, let her own inclination decide it, yet I may endeavour to

²¹³ Ibid, 23; 27.

²¹⁴ Indeed, one could say that the overall leitmotiv, around which all of Edgeworth's works revolve, is education, or, rather, the effects different sorts of education can produce upon individuals and society.

²¹⁵ Astbury, *The Moral tale*, 26.

enlighten and direct that inclination, and that is the only lawful authority that I am impowered [sic] to exert. I am very sure of the goodness of her heart, and of the solidity of her judgement” (MT, 2:25).

Over the following weeks Emily has opportunity to scrutinise Verglan’s and Belzors’ behaviour and to draw conclusions from their conversations as to their respective views on life. One day Emily is present at a discussion on marriage and the obligations it confers on the two marital parties. Verglan shows himself in favour of divorce and expresses the opinion that he does not regard the promise of fidelity, given at the beginning of a marriage, as forever binding. Belzors argues that such thinking will ultimately result in the destruction of society itself. ‘Decided or not decided, reply’d [sic] Belzors, all society must then be divorced’ (MT, 2:28). Emily learns from this episode that Verglan’s concept of marriage is very different to hers. Additionally, Emily observes Verglan and Belzors at the theatre, where she discovers their differing taste with regard to the play being performed there. During a game of cards, when Verglan plays irresponsibly and incurs heavy losses, Belzors shows himself to be both cool-headed and generous-hearted. In the end Emily, of course, chooses the sincere and even-tempered Belzors for a husband. What has enabled her to make the right choice is her upbringing, which has encouraged her to reason for herself and to trust in the ability of her own judgement.

Similar to Marmontel’s Emily, the Edgeworthian heroine learns to judge the suitability of prospective marriage partners by the opinions they reveal in conversation, by observing their reactions towards drama, and games of cards. Additionally, Edgeworth’s model heroine places great importance on a man’s education and especially on his preferences and tastes in literature.²¹⁶ Despite this slightly different emphasis in Edgeworth’s novels, Marmontel had demonstrated with great skill in his *Moral Tales* how a writer could allow both good and bad characters to unfold themselves slowly and naturally within the framework of a fictional text, so that long and flat descriptions and explanations of characters by an author could be avoided altogether.

Marriage and its complications are the theme of three tales Marmontel published in 1761. In *The good Husband* [*Le Bon Mari (Contes moraux)*] the young, beautiful and recently widowed mother of two children, Hortensia, is presented at the beginning of the tale with a choice between two different kinds of suitors who vie for her hand in marriage. Hortensia

²¹⁶ In *Ormond*, for example, Florence Annaly accepts Harry’s marriage proposal only after he has completed reading a set of books specially selected for his attention by her literary minded mother.

comes down in favour of the man whose life-style she deems most likely to coincide with her personal habits and tastes. However, it transpires that the new husband's ideas as to how a married couple should live together are rather different to those of his gregarious wife, who spends most of her time rushing from one social engagement to the next. Lusane, early on tries to bring Hortensia around to his point of view when he expostulates 'tis not, in the midst of the world, that a woman of honour finds happiness; 'tis in the ordering of her family, in domestic oeconomy [*sic*]; 'is in the love of her duty, in the care of her children, and in the intimate commerce of her society consisting of good people' (*MT*, 2: 193). Hortensia is at first unwilling to relinquish her old ways and she continues, despite Lusane's objections to the company she keeps, to mix with her large circle of well-connected, high-society acquaintances. Lusane objects to certain of Hortensia's acquaintances on moral grounds and he fears that their dissipated life-style will have a detrimental effect on his wife. Lusane attempts to make Hortensia realise that an individual's high social standing is not necessarily a measure of his or her good character, and as such desirable company. 'Don't let us confound, my dearest, your honourable people with your good' (*MT*, 2:193). Subsequent to this conversation, Lusane introduces a strict rule of only admitting to his house visitors of a certain kind (i.e. those he judges will have a beneficial influence on his wife's mental and moral development). Hortensia is incensed about this development but Lusane retorts to her bitter complaints 'tis neither my wife nor I who am to govern, 'tis reason, and in all probability she would not chuse [*sic*] you for her judge' (*MT*, 2:199).

An argument very similar to Lusane's is later employed by Edgeworth in *Letters for Literary Ladies*.²¹⁷ Here Edgeworth, when calling for women's greater access to education, argues that only women who have received a good education, can be expected to develop the capacity and habitual usage of reason(ing). Edgeworth's progressively thinking gentleman of the second letter, who is in favour of women's greater access to education, writes:

... it seems absurd to manage any argument so as to set the two sexes at variance by vain contention for superiority. It ought not to be our object to make an invidious division of privileges, or an ostentatious declaration of rights, but to determine what is most for our general advantage. (*LLL*, 30)

²¹⁷ Lusane argues that men and women should not get embroiled in a power struggle for dominance and authority within a marital relationship but, rather, that they should join mental forces and decide on issues and actions according to what 'reason' dictates to them.

Lusane, in Marmontel's tale, eventually manages to bring his wife around to his own viewpoint by exposing the shallowness, vanity and affectation in Hortensia's acquaintances. Towards the end of the tale, Hortensia declares to Lusane 'this is the dearest and most affecting of all your lessons to me. I had forgot that I was a mother, I had almost forgot I was a wife; you recall me to my duties, and these bands re-united, shall confirm me to you in the most affectionate attachment all the days of my life' (*MT*, 2:216).

This last sentence especially could have come straight out of the mouth of Lady Delacour, who undergoes a character reformation reminiscent of Hortensia's in *Belinda*. And *Belinda* is not an exception in this respect as all of Edgeworth's novels echo this privileging of domestic life above a life of high society tastes and pleasures, which can be found in many of Marmontel's *contes*. Like Edgeworth later, Marmontel repeatedly emphasises in his tales that education alone enables people to make informed choices in life. This is especially important for young women when on the point of choosing a husband. In Marmontel's *conte* *The Sham Philosopher* [*Le Philosophe soi-disant* (*Mercure*, 1759)] it is once more a young but educated and well-read woman, who manages through her patient and persistent questioning to expose the sophistry and pretentiousness of one of her house guests, who styles himself a philosopher.

Another of Marmontel's *contes*, entitled *Friendship put to the Test* [*L'Amitié à l'épreuve* (*Nouveaux contes moraux*, 1765)], the problem for the protagonist Nelson arises out of a conflict between his personal interest and desire, and his difficulty in keeping to the terms and the spirit of a promise made by him to his most valued friend Blanford. Nelson, despite his best intentions to the contrary, has fallen head over heels in love with Coraly, a young Indian beauty, who has been entrusted into his care by Blanford, who is away on business overseas but intends to make Coraly his future wife. Blanford, who would trust nobody with Coraly's guardianship but Nelson, has absolute faith in the integrity of his best friend. However, the problems which arise from Nelson and Coraly's mutual love are not confined to the issue of trust between the two male friends but also exemplify the clash which must inevitably occur between two cultures as different in their history, traditions and values as England and India. At the opening of the tale, Solinzeb, Coraly's dying Brahmin father, wonders aloud about some of the contradictory sets of principles which are combined in the character of Blanford.

For, when confronted with the father's terrible anxiety about the future welfare of his inexperienced young daughter, Blanford acts convincingly in his role as the feeling,

considerate and humane English gentleman, who is more than willing to lend his assistance and protection to Coraly and yet, as Solinzeb ponderously remarks ‘how can it be that thou art at the head of those robbers who ravage India, and who bathe themselves in blood?’²¹⁸ And later in the tale, when Nelson endeavours to explain to Coraly that she cannot be his wife because of Blanford’s prior claim to her hand, Coraly retorts angrily that in her culture no man can simply decide to make a woman his property: ‘I alone could give myself away, and I have given myself to you’ (*CT*, 118).

Thus, here, as in Marmontel’s *Soliman the Second*, the values and codes of behaviour of two very different cultures (England and India; Europe and the Orient respectively) are directly compared and discussed, as difficulties arise for the protagonists during the course of the tales. Both of these tales are variants of Marmontel’s standard tale. His ‘cultural tale’, for want of a better generic description, revolves around an encounter with the exotic and it moves from a position of initial surprise or even revulsion about aspects of *the other*, foreign culture, to a point where the cultures are compared in quite a morally relativist way. In fact, occasionally Marmontel goes even further than taking this position of cultural relativism by suggesting the concept of a universal human nature.

For instance, in *Friendship put to the Test*, his English character, Blanford, having witnessed the tender relationship between the Brahmin Solinzeb and his daughter Coraly, observes wistfully that whilst ‘the dreams of the imagination [may] differ according to the climate ... the mind is everywhere the same, and the light, which is its source, is as widely diffused as that of the sun’ (*CT*, 89). But even when the differing parties, in the end, do not always see eye to eye in Marmontel’s cultural tale, there is, nonetheless, always a distinct sense of a growing tolerance and a greater willingness to accommodate cultural differences. Whilst there is never a complete endorsement of the traditions and values of the foreign culture there is nonetheless a standard denouement to the cultural tale which demonstrates that more respect has been gained for, what, at the initial encounter, had appeared to be a very foreign, or even uncivilised, way of thinking or living.

For Edgeworth, Marmontel’s basic literary formula in the cultural tale must have held numerous attractions. To begin with, Marmontel’s technique of taking his reader to foreign climes on a voyage of the imagination, where he experiences customs and cultures at once

²¹⁸ The tale *Friendship put to the Test* is contained in: Jean-François Marmontel, *Classic Tales, Serious and Lively*, comp. and ed. Leigh Hunt (London: William Patterson, 1890), 88. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the main body of the text and abbreviated as *CT*.

unfamiliar and exotic to him, was one which Edgeworth was also to use when introducing her English readership to Ireland. What the reader, and also the protagonist (Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui* and Lord Colambre in *The Absentee*), is often confronted with at the beginning of Edgeworth's Irish tales is a country and a people only barely familiar to him. After an initial experience of cultural alienation, a period of travel ensues, during which his first-hand experiences and observations lead him to a more discriminating evaluation of the differences between England and Ireland, and this, in turn, allows the reader to come to a more balanced judgement of the country and the culture he is visiting.

Like Marmontel's Blanford, Edgeworth, in her Irish tales, repeatedly expresses the Enlightenment assumption that individuals of a similar class and education, despite some differences — which in themselves can be attributed to slightly differing national customs — are essentially the same everywhere, and can be found in every civilised country by the observant traveller. As Lady Oranmore, a character warmly commended by Edgeworth in *The Absentee*, observes to the, as yet, inexperienced and un-travelled Lord Colambre: 'The higher classes, in most countries ... were generally similar; but, in the lower classes, he would find many characteristic differences'.²¹⁹

Of course, on the one hand, those upper-class Irish characters Edgeworth (by and large) approves of in her Irish tales are made interesting to the reader initially by virtue of their different cultural outlook and traits.²²⁰ On the other hand, it was equally in Edgeworth's interest to show that the Irish, although different to the English in some respects, were, in those social circles, where it mattered (i.e. Irish upper class society) as civilised as their English counterparts. For, as Ina Ferris argues, Edgeworth's portrayal of Ireland, (even at its most satirical, as in *Castle Rackrent*, or at its most critical, as when commenting on Dublin's post-Union society in *The Absentee*,) is quintessentially driven by her desire to politically and culturally complete the still very incomplete Union of Great Britain with Ireland.²²¹ In order to further this end Edgeworth is eager to demonstrate that the enlightened sections of the upper classes in England's 'sister country', Ireland, are in every respect as educated and well-bred as their English cousins.

²¹⁹ Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, Volume 5 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Heidi Van de Veire, Kim Walker and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 100.

²²⁰ I have in mind here, for instance, Lady Geraldine in *Ennui*, Count O'Halloran in *The Absentee* and King Corny in *Ormond*.

²²¹ See Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12. Ferris quotes Walter Scott, who said about Edgeworth's novels that they had done more 'towards completing the Union, than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up.'

Taken as a set then, Marmontel's *Moral Tales* span all those major themes which interest Edgeworth from an early age onwards and which she is going to make her own later in life. Marmontel writes about love which has to overcome great social obstacles (the general theme of *Belinda*, *Patronage* (1813) and *Helen* (1934)), protagonists who come to a more refined understanding about themselves and a different culture (here Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui*, Lord Colambre in *The Absentee* immediately spring to mind) and about the effects of upbringing, education and socialisation on the individual (the basic theme of all of Edgeworth's texts).

Furthermore, the overall format and the brevity of Marmontel's *contes*, all of which pivot around one particular concern or question of choice, must have appealed to Edgeworth, who started out by writing short, instructive stories, intended to illustrate the consequences of certain choices or moral attitudes to her first readership, which consisted of the young children who read her *Early Lessons*. The episodic structure of the moral tale could be adopted to a number of different purposes. According to Astbury, two distinct types of the *conte moral* existed side by side in France around the period when Marmontel wrote his tales; one was the 'embroidered moral tale' intended for the entertainment of an adult readership and the other was the 'pedagogic moral tale designed for children'.²²²

The moral lessons Edgeworth was trying to impart to her young readership had to be simple, unambiguous, and to the point, if they were to capture the attention and interest of the children. With this target-readership in mind, Edgeworth, when recommending Marmontel's *Fables* in *Practical Education*, argues that not only voluminous and elaborately constructed literary productions but short pieces of writing, such as those belonging to the fable or tale-category, have the power to demonstrate truths effectively. Edgeworth writes: 'Reason has equal force from the lips of the giant and of the dwarf' (*PE*, 1:332). There are no compelling reasons to assume that Edgeworth fundamentally changed the literary formula, which had worked so well for her in her children's fiction, when it came to writing her adult fictions. Edgeworth's general outlook and plan with regard to those fictional works she wrote for her adult readership, such as the pieces in the *Tales of Fashionable Life* series, to which *Ennui* and *The Absentee* belong, was — as was the case with her children's literature — conditioned by her desire to illustrate to her readers the consequences of a variety of educational upbringings and the moral choices resulting therefrom. As its title suggests, *The Absentee*, for example,

²²² See Astbury, *The Moral tale*, 95.

was quite obviously intended by Edgeworth as an object lesson to some of the existing land-owners of her own era on what mistakes to avoid with regard to managing their Irish estates.

Perhaps partly as a consequence of the persistent critical habit of dividing Edgeworth's oeuvre artificially into entirely separate parts (i.e. fiction and non-fiction, children's literature and adult fiction etc.), the extent to which most of the fictional texts may be said to share a similar style of writing (i.e. broadly speaking imitative of Marmontel's species of tale) has been insufficiently examined. Of course, on one level, Edgeworth's decision to reject the novel classification as a description of *Belinda* reveals a deep-seated suspicion and profound ambivalence about the novel-form and her own literary placement within it. Most of Edgeworth's critics would probably concede this point but I would argue that it is perhaps time to shift the critical spotlight away from what Edgeworth had in common with a substantial number of fellow women writers (i.e. a widely shared distrust of the novel as a form) to what set her (i.e. the reasons behind her declaration in *Belinda*) apart from them.

As I have argued, there were important considerations, other than her highly critical attitude towards the novel, which motivated Edgeworth's decision to portray herself as a writer of moral tales, rather than of novels. Edgeworth, as we have seen, acknowledged Marmontel's moral tale as her literary model. From our modern perspective, the moral tale and the novel appear to be very different literary formats and to have rather little in common. We are, perhaps sometimes in danger of forgetting that during Edgeworth's period (and especially at the beginning of her career as a writer, around the time when *Belinda* was written) the boundaries between the various literary genres had not, as yet, been so sharply drawn. Thus, *The English Novel*, for instance, lists the tale as one form among many others, such as 'romances, biographies, autobiographies, histories, satirical tales and narratives in letters', which feed into the novel-genre. The sheer variety of forms which are absorbed into the genre is seen to make precise 'boundaries problematic' (*TEN*, 1:15). The novel has origins in many forms and some of Edgeworth's contemporaries, such as Thomas Holcroft, for example, even believed that the tale or fable was the true forerunner of the novel.

Lastly, Edgeworth's development as a writer was necessarily bound up with her ongoing search for a literary format capable of fulfilling those requirements which needed to be met in order to enable her to write about Ireland. Beginning with *Castle Rackrent*, Edgeworth sets out to incorporate into a fictional framework the material which, quite naturally, is closest to her own heart and mind during the 1790s; that is the description and part-explanation of the region in which her family had decided to make their permanent home

(i.e. the area in and around Edgeworthstown). Edgeworth's aim, with regard to her Irish tales, was to provide her readership with a 'faithful portrait' of Ireland and 'its inhabitants' (CR, 54). Edgeworth's usage of faithful is significant, for the word, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, can have at least three definitions, all of which are related but nonetheless subtly different in their emphasis. 'Faithful' can mean, in the first sense, 'showing faith', secondly, it can signify an attitude which is 'loyal', trustworthy' or 'constant' and thirdly, it can mean 'accurate' or 'true to fact.'

Edgeworth's usage of the word does not preclude any of the above usages or meanings but it appears most likely that uppermost on her list of priorities was her goal of delivering an 'accurate' description of Ireland (i.e. what most modern readers would probably term an 'authentic' description). As Edgeworth had wisely remarked in *Practical Education*:

The differences between reality and fiction is so great, that those who copy from anything but mere nature are continually disposed to make mistakes in their conduct, which appear ludicrous to the impartial spectator. (PE, 1:333)

And, as Edgeworth must have seen it, no other literary format was as well suited to this purpose as the moral tale. Marmontel had already pointed the way as to how the moral tale could be employed successfully to depict and compare different countries and cultures to a readership little acquainted with these. And this was precisely what Edgeworth had to accomplish if she wanted her Irish tales to be rendered comprehensible to readers who were, for the most part, not familiar with the region she made it her object to describe. What is more, Marmontel had demonstrated that it was possible to elicit a sympathetic response when confronting the readership with the portrayal of fictional characters belonging to nations whose culture and customs were initially experienced as foreign, if not alienating. Edgeworth's own success, with regard to her Irish tales, was in a large measure due to her ability to introduce some of those characteristics which she perceived as belonging to the Irish onto the page without estranging her readership from the concept of a shared and universal human nature.

Chapter 3

BELINDA, LEONORA AND PATRONAGE: IDEAL DOMESTIC WOMEN IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S FICTIONS

Her domestic life, as I have argued in Chapter One, was important to Maria Edgeworth. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to find that Edgeworth — from the very outset of her long career as a writer — came to devote much attention to the domestic life of her fictional characters also. Indeed, Edgeworth, like her contemporary Jane Austen, may be said to have specialised in her fictional works on the mimetic representation of early nineteenth-century domestic life; such as it was led by the upper classes throughout Great Britain and Ireland. However, within the particular domestic constellation which Edgeworth usually selects for the purpose of closer analysis in her works, the figure of the domestic woman invariably occupies a place of special importance. From her first short stories, such as those written for children, which are contained in *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), to *Helen* (1834), her last full-length adult fiction, Edgeworth continued to introduce her readers to an entire series of well-educated, intelligent and highly capable domestic women. With *Belinda* (1801), Edgeworth began to offer her readership fiction which concerned itself even more specifically with issues surrounding domesticity and gender. *Leonora* (1806) and *Patronage* (1814) are examples of other works in which Edgeworth chose to shine the literary spotlight on the figure of the domestic woman.²²³ In fact, the kind of domestic and female-centred fiction which Edgeworth had begun to produce in *Belinda* had proven so popular that the advertisement on the original 1814 title page of *Patronage* set out to remind potential readers that the new work in front of them was by the same writer who was already known to them as 'the author of Tales of Fashionable Life ... of Belinda ... and of Leonora'.

²²³ Beginning with the character of Cecilia Delamere in *Ennui* (1809) to Grace Nugent in *The Absentee* (1812) and Florence Annaly in *Ormond* (1817), Edgeworth's Irish fictions (with the notable exception of *Castle Rackrent* (1800)) also contain a number of ideal domestic women. However, all the above works have men as their protagonists. The hero of Edgeworth's Irish works is confronted with experiences and adventures during his stay in Ireland which help him onto his path towards intellectual and psychological maturity. As a result of Edgeworth's decision to organise her Irish fictions generically around the *Bildungsroman* motif, the perspective of these works is skewed in favour of the male point-of view. Whilst exemplary women do make an appearance in the above-mentioned fictions their characters are drawn more sketchily and, hence, do not lend themselves as readily to a detailed study of Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman. Recently, it has been argued persuasively that Edgeworth, who tackles negative images of nationality in her Irish fictions, may have made a strategic decision not to challenge more than one stereotype at a time in any of her works. Joanne Cordon maintains that Edgeworth reserved her revision of gender clichés for works such as *Belinda*, which are set in England. See Joanne Cordon's "Revising Stereotypes of Nationality and Gender: Why Maria Edgeworth Did Not Write *Castle Belinda*", in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 132.

As is to be expected all of Edgeworth's ideal domestic women have certain behavioural hallmarks in common and all of them share some important characteristics.²²⁴ For this reason it is perhaps all too easy to assume that Edgeworth did not change her concept of the ideal domestic woman significantly over the course of time. However, whilst many of Edgeworth's domestic model women could be said to be of a similar cast it would be wrong to conclude that they are all the same. I argue in this chapter that Edgeworth changed not only some of her conceptual ideas with regard to the domestic model women she portrayed in her fiction but, also, that her technique of literary representation evolved alongside these changes. For a number of reasons it is important to consider the changes (both in terms of conception and representation) which Edgeworth implemented. To begin with, they afford us an insight into the different strategies employed by Edgeworth to elicit sympathy from her reader for her ideal domestic women.

For instance, Edgeworth — famously — developed a growing antipathy to one of her own fictional creations, when she described the seventeen-year old model woman of her first domestic fiction *Belinda* as 'that cold stick' in a letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton.²²⁵ Partly in response to criticism levelled at her somewhat insipid and often silent heroine in *Belinda*, Edgeworth seems to have made a conscious decision to allow her reader more direct access to the mental state of her ideal domestic woman. In *Leonora*, her next work in which a domestic woman is placed centre-stage, Edgeworth's long-suffering heroine literally spells out some of the anxieties she harbours in the letters she sends to her mother, the Duchess. And in *Patronage*, written some years later, Edgeworth experiments with yet another representational technique by directly comparing the two Percy girls, Caroline and Rosamond, who effectively act as foils for one another.

Additionally, a closer examination of Edgeworth's ideal domestic women should help to reveal some of the characteristics and traits which set them apart from other fictional

²²⁴ The kind of domestic woman explicitly endorsed by Edgeworth throughout all her fictions is distinguished by her calm and rational approach to every situation and problem which life presents to her. In possession of an unusually broad education, which always includes some knowledge of the modern sciences (such as chemistry, physics and mechanics), she is an exceptionally well read and informed individual. Her psychological make-up is such that she has a decided preference for a private life and therefore is ideally equipped for a domestic existence. Within the home Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman has a number of important roles to play. Apart from setting the tone and atmosphere for the (often quite extended early nineteenth-century) household, she acts as her children's prime educator and moral mentor, as well as her husband's stimulating conversation partner. Although Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman has to fulfil a number of definite functions within the family and the home there is -as I will argue at length later- within the scenario envisaged by her creator nonetheless considerable room left for the woman's further personal and intellectual development.

²²⁵ See *Life and Letters*, 1:168.

'model' women of the period. Indeed, the way in which Edgeworth subtly altered and adapted her ideal domestic woman over the course of time can be seen as a direct result of her critical engagement with versions of the domestic woman as she had been drawn by some of the most prominent women writers contemporaneous to her. Women writers as diverse in outlook and temperament as Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Catharine Macaulay and Hannah More debated in their works which function and place in society women ought to occupy. Not all of the above mentioned writers created fictional portraits of exemplary women but all of them had very definite ideas about the sort of education women should possess and the kind of behaviour which behove them, especially in their roles as wives and mothers.

It must be recalled that Edgeworth conceived of her ideal domestic woman during a historical period when a much larger debate about the division of gender(-roles) was taking place within British society. In the context of a Europe still visibly shaken from the far-reaching social and cultural reverberations wrought by the Revolution in France, questions as to what was natural or, rather, unnatural for the female sex had begun to be discussed again with renewed interest and intensity. The important and related question as to which sphere in life was considered most appropriate for the early nineteenth-century woman exercised the minds of writers, critics and reviewers who spanned the full range of the ideological spectrum. For the woman writer of Edgeworth's period the subject of the domestic woman was therefore a highly sensitive one; bringing together as it did issues which by their very nature muddled the boundaries between the private experience, personal beliefs and the public (i.e. published) endorsement of a certain mode of femininity. Virtually all of the prominent women writers of the period (whether in Britain or on the Continent) seem to have felt that the figure of the domestic woman was a subject so fraught with personal relevance that they simply had to contribute to it; even though such a step into the very public world of publishing could bring with it a host of unintended and, often, unwelcome consequences.²²⁶

Germaine de Staël, for instance, whose novel *Corinne* (1807) — which Edgeworth greatly admired — had shot her to fame is perhaps the most high-profile example of a woman writer whose reputation as a (private) woman came under increasing attack almost in direct proportion to her steadily growing success as a writer. Although *Corinne* was published in

²²⁶ The title of Mary Poovey's influential study *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) aptly describes the tendency -prevalent in late eighteenth-century British society- to view one culturally acceptable model of femininity (i.e. 'the proper lady') as diametrically opposed to those women who were involved in the production and publication of literature.

more than forty editions between its date of publication and 1872²²⁷, and had made de Staël into one of the indisputable superstars of European literature even its immense success could not protect its author from the persistent suggestion that she could not be regarded as a *normal* woman. In an effort to destroy de Staël's reputation for once and all Napoleon Bonaparte even went so far as to suggest that she was a man in drag.²²⁸

Conceptually, what women writers like de Staël and Edgeworth had to contend with in their fictional representations of women were not only ideals of womanhood as drawn by generations of male writers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had popularised his ideas on the female sex in his two enormously influential works *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile* (1762)²²⁹ but, in addition, the larger eighteenth-century tradition of conduct book literature as such. As a genre, conduct book literature had sought to define femininity itself and had aimed to set out parameters for socially acceptable female behaviour. Kathryn Sutherland remarks about works belonging to the above mentioned school of writing that 'In confounding assumptions of *natural* gender difference with definitions of *proper* or *suitable* behaviour, the conduct book sought to conceptualise and interpret female behaviour as a predictor of social behaviour more generally. It constructs female identity in imagined contention with anti-social, deviant or extreme forms which its powerful example then exorcises: the irresponsible, the overrefined, the undergoverned, the under- or overeducated'.²³⁰

When Edgeworth set out to realise her ideal domestic woman in fiction she therefore responded not just to the socio-political developments of her own period but also to long-held ideals of womanhood, as proposed by writers of a different age and different schools of writing. Perhaps this circumstance has contributed to the tendency of some literary critics to — mistakenly — classify Edgeworth's own fictions as belonging to the conduct book genre of

²²⁷ See Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 285.

²²⁸ See Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël*, 287. Gutwirth further remarks that even men like Byron, Goethe, Humboldt and Schiller, all of who professed admiration for de Staël, tempered their praises by stressing the extent of her supposed deviation from the generality of women. See *Ibid*, 288-289.

²²⁹ Through these works Rousseau had promulgated the idea that the role most "natural" to a woman — in terms of her physical and psychological make-up — was that of being man's subordinate and pleasing companion. According to Máire Kennedy the above mentioned two works by Rousseau were contained in 67 collections (equivalent to 39%) of the representative eighteenth-century private libraries in Ireland selected for the purpose of her study. See Máire Kennedy, *French books in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001), 184.

²³⁰ See Kathryn Sutherland's "Writings on education and conduct: arguments for female improvement", in *Women and Literature in Britain: 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26, Sutherland's emphasis.

writing.²³¹ There are, however, vital differences between Edgeworth's fictions and the works one generally associates with the genre of conduct books. The issue here is not just that Edgeworth's works never contain practical advice on aspects of household management, on women's dress, their religious duties or suggestions on the regulation of their marital sex life but, rather, that Edgeworth's entire approach to the subject of female domesticity differs fundamentally from that which one finds in traditional conduct books. Of course, Edgeworth's sometimes quite pronounced didacticism has not helped her case. It is undoubtedly true to say that Edgeworth had a strong inclination to produce fiction which was unashamedly didactic but this was something she openly acknowledged. Indeed, the potentially character- and life-transforming power of the fictional example was one aspect of writing which Edgeworth strongly subscribed to, and this conviction, in turn, could be said to have provided much of the motivation which initially decided her branching out (from her already successful non-fictional and educationalist works) into fiction-writing.

However, conceding that Edgeworth's fictions are openly didactic in conception and aim is quite a different matter to classifying them as straightforward conduct books. As Harriet Guest reminds us, the entirely proper and stiff model women portrayed in the canon of conduct book literature are cultural constructions of femininity, which usually serve more to obscure than to draw attention to the day-to-day realities, difficulties and prejudices which actual eighteenth-century women had to negotiate.²³² Edgeworth's domestic women, by contrast, are no mere angels in the house. They are far too independent in thought and action to fit in with the acquiescent, meek and silenced women who inhabit the world of the conduct book. Through the decisions they take Edgeworth's ideal domestic women continually bring to the fore issues which modern and educated women like themselves, and throughout Britain, are inevitably faced with during adolescence, in the courtship period and within marriage.

Edgeworth, as I will argue, looked upon the domestic sphere, to which women of the British upper- and middle-classes had (by social convention) become increasingly confined during the course of the eighteenth-century, as a place of female opportunity. At the very beginning of her career as a writer, in *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), Edgeworth had observed that men, who were bound by the laws of custom to concentrate their mental powers on the advancement of their public careers, did not have the advantage of women, who, within

²³¹ Nancy Armstrong, for instance, does this in her study *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 65.

²³² See Harriet Guest's "Eighteenth-century femininity: 'a supposed sexual character'", in *Women and Literature in Britain*, 46.

the domestic setting, had the time to reflect on a range of topics, could read widely and pursue their own interests. As Edgeworth put it, of the two sexes, only women had the ‘leisure to be wise’.²³³ Edgeworth then, rather than seeing the domestic space in terms of its inherent limitations, stresses the immense potential for further personal and intellectual development which it can (under favourable circumstances) offer to the intelligent and well-educated woman.

One can already see how Edgeworth’s own unusual upbringing in a household which subscribed to the enlightened motto that ‘a sound education and, not gender, was the ultimate measure of ability’²³⁴ is likely to have conditioned many of her ideas on female domesticity. As already mentioned in Chapter One, Edgeworth had benefited from being given a broad and thoroughly modern education during her adolescence in Edgeworthstown. Realising the crucial importance — especially for women — of a good education, Edgeworth comes to the subject of female domesticity initially from the perspective of an educationalist. All of her ideal domestic women are portrayed as the products of a particular educational philosophy.²³⁵ Education provides Edgeworth’s ideal domestic woman with the mental tools which enable her to make informed and well-considered decisions in life. In her fictions domestic women who lack a sound education inevitably fall victim to their own ignorance for, being incapable of making decisions for themselves, they are entirely reliant on the (usually flawed) judgement of others.

Apart from her educational agenda, which notably influenced Edgeworth’s fictional depiction of domestic women, the experience of her own domestic life in Edgeworthstown²³⁶ clearly had an enormous impact, not only on her treatment of the domestic space in fiction but on the definition of female domesticity which Edgeworth promulgates in her works. As already mentioned in Chapter One, despite the circumstance that many of Edgeworth’s daily routines necessarily revolved around the organisation of family and estate-life, she had

²³³ Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, ed. Claire Connolly (1795; London: Everyman, 1993), 27.

²³⁴ See *Letters for Literary Ladies*, introduction, xvi.

²³⁵ Belinda is atypical among Edgeworth’s ideal domestic women in that she has not had the benefit of having been educated by an enlightened, well-informed and principled mother. However, what Belinda may lack in terms of a formal education she compensates for by her common-sense approach to life, which is stressed throughout the novel. She also receives a fast-track version of an enlightenment-style education by being placed for some months in the household of the Percival family, where she comes under the particular influence of Lady Anne Percival, who is herself an ideal domestic woman.

²³⁶ For instance, in *Belinda*, Edgeworth claimed that her portrayal of the Percival family — a model example of domestic harmony and happiness — was ‘drawn from truth and real life’. See Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801), *Volume 2 in The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Siobhán Kilfeather (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 170. Henceforth abbreviated as *B* and cited parenthetically within the main body of the text.

nonetheless managed to create a special space for herself within the Edgeworth household; one which allowed her to pursue her own literary projects whilst at the same time functioning as an integral and ‘domestic’ senior member of the family.

What is very noticeable in Edgeworth’s fictional treatment of the domestic space — be it the household of the exemplary Percival family in *Belinda* or that of the Percy family in *Patronage* — is that she invariably includes daily routines, pursuits and activities which characterised her own existence as a domestic woman in Edgeworthstown. Moreover, Edgeworth’s ideal domestic space is an environment, in which the tone and general atmosphere in the home are set by the women of the house. In fact, in *Patronage* the home created by the three Percy women (i.e. Mrs Percy, her daughters Caroline and Rosamond) exerts such a strong pull on Godfrey and Alfred, the two sons of the family who, despite having left home in pursuit of their professional careers, return, whenever possible, in order to spend time in their old family home with their mother and sisters. This fictional scenario mirrors the situation in Edgeworthstown, where all but the youngest male members of the family (i.e. Francis and Michael Pakenham) had, by 1810, left home to commence training for their respective professions. Likewise, the strong familial bonds and attitude of solidarity, which characterises the relationship between Mrs Percy and her two daughters was also present among the women who shared Edgeworthstown House. As touched upon in Chapter One, Edgeworth developed a particularly friendly relationship with Frances, her third step-mother.²³⁷ Her letters convey the impression of a broadly shared attitude towards life and domestic harmony among the Edgeworth women.

Her domestic life was certainly very precious to Edgeworth. Towards the end of her life, when looking over some of her correspondence, she was pleased to be able to write back to her half-sister Fanny that her own attitudes and tastes had changed but insubstantially over the course of the years. She is reported to have reflected: ‘the same in my friendships and in my views of what I did then and what has always made me happy – the love of those I love

²³⁷ After 1802, when her younger sister Emmeline (1770-1847) married the Swiss surgeon John König and moved to Clifton in England, Edgeworth was the only daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s first marriage who still remained living in Edgeworthstown. One of the factors which may have brought Edgeworth closer to her step-mother Frances could have been that they were the only two women in the household who were of a similar age at that time (i.e. both were in their early thirties). Of the older generation there were two aunts, Mary (1750-1814) and Charlotte Sneyd (1754-1822), who continued to reside in Edgeworthstown after their sister Elizabeth Edgeworth (née Sneyd), Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s third wife, died. Of the younger generation, the female child next in age to Edgeworth would have been Honora (1791-1858), who was her junior by more than twenty years.

and *domestic life*'.²³⁸ Especially against the backdrop of her highly successful literary career it is perhaps all too tempting to disregard Edgeworth's above endorsement of a domestic mode of life as a (sub-)conscious attempt to portray herself as a conventional nineteenth-century woman. However, what must be taken into consideration is that the sentiment which Edgeworth expressed does not stand in isolation. Edgeworth, as mentioned in Chapter One, repeatedly expressed a decided preference for the measured pace and quiet pleasures of domestic life. Given Edgeworth's insistence on the inherent desirability of domestic life her attitude to it certainly warrants investigation. I argue in this Chapter that much depends on how female domesticity itself is defined. What does the term itself comprise for Edgeworth, and what implication has its definition for Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman?

In *Belinda*, the difficulty for Edgeworth's eponymous heroine is certainly not that she has no taste for a domestic existence. Being 'educated in the country', Belinda is fond of 'domestic pleasures' and has a love of 'reading' (*B*, 9). All these are personality traits which strongly suggest that Belinda already exhibits some of the characteristics which predestine her for becoming an ideal domestic woman. Belinda's problem is that she is a young woman of genteel but impoverished background who lacks the means to lead the sort of domestic life she is used to without making a financially advantageous marriage.²³⁹ As Mrs. Stanhope, her match-making aunt, warns Belinda, a girl in her circumstances, who fails to secure a husband, will find 'herself at five or six and thirty a burden to her friends ... obliged to hang upon all her acquaintances' (*B*, 10).

Beginning with *Belinda*, Edgeworth highlights a number of issues which directly affect women in Belinda's vulnerable situation. The late eighteenth-century obsession with female accomplishments is identified by Edgeworth as one area in which things have been allowed to go too far. Mrs Stanhope, the only person vaguely approaching a mother-figure in Belinda's life to date, lives and acts under the misconception that female education is to be equated with

²³⁸ ME to FW, Edgeworthstown, Christmas 1841. Quoted in *Letters from England*, introduction: xxvi. My emphasis.

²³⁹ Throughout the novel Edgeworth draws attention to the precise amount of money each of her characters has at his or her disposal. For instance, Edgeworth mentions that Belinda, in addition to her yearly allowance of £100, has a loan of two hundred guineas from her aunt Mrs Stanhope whilst staying with Lady Delacour. Edgeworth contrasts Belinda's circumspect spending habits and scrupulous account-keeping with Lady Delacour's aristocratic, negligent and irresponsible attitude towards money. Belinda, and the reader alike, are left in no doubt as to the assets of each of Belinda's suitors (Sir Philip Baddely is worth £15,000 whereas Clarence Hervey only has £10,000). Although Belinda does of course not want to marry for mere convenience but for love Edgeworth portrays her as practical enough to realise that one cannot live on the fruits of love alone. As the astute Belinda observes to Mr Vincent: 'I am not so romantic as to imagine that I could be happy with you, or you with me, if we were in absolute want of the common comforts of life' (*B*, 339).

the accumulation of as many fashionable ‘accomplishments’ (*B*, 10) as possible. As a consequence, Belinda is being hauled around in Bath by her calculating aunt, who hopes that her niece’s very conventional accomplishments will quickly attract the attentions of a wealthy suitor. Belinda quickly tires of being ‘shown off’ (*B*, 11) and finds the exhibitionist component which is part and parcel of parading for long hours in assembly and pump rooms deeply humiliating.

The full force of Edgeworth’s trenchant critique of the “accomplishment culture”, in which women are valued in direct proportion to the number of accomplishments they can readily display, can be best appreciated by going back to *Practical Education*. Here, in the context of discussing the education best suited for turning girls into mature and intellectually self-sufficient women, who are capable of making decisions for themselves, Edgeworth had expressed the opinion that the importance which was attached conventionally to female accomplishments consisted primarily in the mistaken notion that they helped to marry off one’s daughters. As Edgeworth put it rather dryly, ‘they are supposed to increase a young lady’s chances of a prize in the matrimonial lottery’.²⁴⁰ With Edgeworth’s characteristically sharp sense for the fluctuation in value, to which goods are subject in a consumer society (i.e. relative to demand and availability), she observes that at a time when every ‘land-lady’s daughter’ at ‘any good inn on the London roads ... draws a little; or ... speaks French a little .. the market was likely to be overstocked, and of course, the values of the commodities must fall’ (*PE*, 2:299).

Of course, Edgeworth was not alone in her condemnation of the late eighteenth-century “accomplishment culture”. In *Strictures on female education* (1799) Hannah More had described the period’s obsession with female accomplishments as the ‘epidemical mania’ of the age²⁴¹, and women writers from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jane Austen agreed that the exhibitionist component involved in the public demonstrations of conventional female accomplishments (such as dancing, singing or playing a musical instrument in public) was demeaning to women’s dignity and non-representative of their true intellectual capacities. Whilst Edgeworth would probably have been in agreement with More, Wollstonecraft and Austen on the above point, there is an additional dimension to her critique of conventional female accomplishments. Edgeworth believes that accomplishments, at best, can be ‘agreeable

²⁴⁰ Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2 vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 2:295. Henceforth abbreviated as *PE* and cited parenthetically within the main body of the text.

²⁴¹ See Hannah More, *Strictures on female education* (1799), 2 vols. (Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), 1:69.

talents, but [that they are] subordinate parts in her [i.e. a woman's] character' (*PE*, 2:297). For Edgeworth, the main difficulty with regard to accomplishments is that by their very definition they tend to hide rather than reveal the private person. The element of public display, which goes hand in hand with the performance of most female accomplishments, which are en vogue in late eighteenth-century Britain, means that accomplishments as such are of very limited use when it comes to deciding on a suitable marital partner. Edgeworth insists that there is more to female identity than the accumulation of accomplishments, and she argues also that a proper evaluation of an individual woman's character should not take place in public places, such as assembly rooms, but in the private and domestic setting of a family home.

Belinda is no exception in this respect, and one of the reasons why Clarence Hervey becomes attracted to Belinda is that he is given the opportunity to directly compare her personality and behaviour in a domestic setting to those of both Lady Delacour and Rachel Hartley (alias Virginia St. Pierre). During the course of the novel Clarence comes to see that neither the greatest accumulation of female accomplishments, as in the shape of the incredibly suave and sophisticated but deeply discontented and emotionally troubled Lady Delacour, nor the complete absence of accomplishments, as in the unworldly, beautiful and timid but ignorant and very dull Virginia, is desirable. This, of course, only happens after he has been cured of his fanciful notions about women generally. Although Clarence declares himself initially much charmed with the simple airs of Virginia, whom he sees as an uncorrupted and innocent 'child of nature' (*B*, 289), he eventually comes to the conclusion that he values mental 'capacity' and a 'taste for literature' higher in a prospective marriage partner than personal 'beauty' or even 'sensibility' (*B*, 289). Virginia, as Edgeworth is careful to point out, is so stunted in her mental and psychological development that she is incapable even of analysing her own feelings (*B*, 295) but, worse still, she completely lacks any kind of intellectual 'curiosity', and it is primarily for this reason that Clarence begins to dread the prospect of being married to her. Edgeworth argues that the problem with a construction of femininity along the lines envisaged by Rousseau (i.e. the idea of the woman as ornament in man's life) is that women — like Virginia —, who lack education and any understanding of the real world are entirely useless as wives and as domestic women.²⁴²

²⁴² In was during his time in France that Clarence, inspired by his reading of Rousseau's works, conceived of the 'romantic project of educating a wife for himself' (*B*, 280). Edgeworth based this narrative strand of *Belinda* on the real-life experiment with two orphan girls her father's English friend, the author Thomas Day, had undertaken in the 1790s. For a detailed account of Day's experiment, see Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth*.

However, throughout the novel Edgeworth makes clear that much of the blame has to be attributed not just to Clarence's own 'romantic' and unrealistic ideas on the female sex but to a culture which places such enormous emphasis on external appearances (both in the form of accomplishments and, as in Virginia's case, on personal beauty) in its evaluation of women. The issue, then, is not that accomplishments per se are to be condemned (as Edgeworth says, they can be 'agreeable talents' in a woman) but, rather, that they are highly unreliable tools in the evaluation of a woman's character. In order to emphasise the nature of her objection to female accomplishments Edgeworth, in *Practical Education*, had drawn a distinction between accomplishments which required an element of public display and 'domestic accomplishments', such as needlework or drawing, which could be exercised in the privacy of a domestic setting. Far from condemning 'domestic accomplishments' Edgeworth realised the inherent value these held for many a domestic woman. As she remarked: 'Every sedentary occupation must be valuable to those who are to lead sedentary lives; every art, however trifling in itself, which tends to enliven and embellish domestic life, must be advantageous, not only to the female sex, but to society in general' (*PE*, 2:295).

With her above remark Edgeworth raises two important points. Firstly, she argues that women, whose main sphere of occupation and influence lies — by agreed social convention — in the family home, must be granted the time and space to employ themselves in any manner they deem conducive to their own domestic contentment. The 'sedentary occupation' referred to by Edgeworth could simply be a conventional domestic accomplishment, such as knitting or sewing, but — crucially — her definition leaves room for other activities and creative projects a domestic woman may want to pursue. The 'art' an intellectually curious woman may want to practice within a domestic setting could include not only the reading of, but conceivably — as in Edgeworth's own case — the production of literature.

Secondly, Edgeworth establishes a strong link between the cohesion in family-life and relationships, which, to her mind, is dependant entirely on the influence which the domestic women exerts over her household and family, and the state of 'society in general'. Edgeworth's domestic woman, then, whilst remaining in, and acting from, her circumscribed position as an essentially 'private' individual, nonetheless directly influences events taking place at the heart of Britain's public life. One can already see how any attempt to apply a simplistic categorisation in terms of private and public spheres to her ideal domestic woman, necessarily fails to do justice to Edgeworth's conceptualisation of her. By its very limited

perspective such an approach fails to capture the very complex relationship between the domestic woman and society which Edgeworth envisages.²⁴³

Inevitably the question arises as to how the “private” behaviour and actions of Edgeworth’s domestic woman can be said to permeate society. One way in which the domestic woman has an immediate effect on society as such is through her role as her children’s early educator. As early as 1798, in *Practical Education*, Edgeworth had spoken of ‘the national importance of education’ (*PE*, 1:311). Of course Edgeworth was not alone in continually emphasising ‘the national importance of education’ at that time. Her contemporary, the English historian Catharine Macaulay, had — as far back as 1790 — stressed that the educational standard of a nation was never as important as in the present age of revolutions. Macaulay had written that ‘the education of the citizens, and more especially of the better sort, becomes a matter of the highest importance’.²⁴⁴

In *Belinda*, Edgeworth’s heroine realises the immense responsibility involved in the task of imparting a good education to one’s children when she observes the exemplary Lady Anne Percival at work with her children. As the children’s mentor in all things educational and social Edgeworth’s ideal domestic woman has a uniquely important role to play. The sort of education Edgeworth has in mind consists of much more than the accumulation of factual knowledge. It has to include the mundane as well as the modern and scientific but, most important, it can only be acquired as the result of action and self-learning on the part of the individual child. Edgeworth believes that the most appropriate and safest place where an individual’s education can take place is the domestic setting of the family home. This is one reason why the domestic woman’s own educational standard is of such crucial importance.

In this context Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has summed up the subject of *Belinda* as ‘the implementation of a particular mode of domesticity necessary to ... a new-style patriarchy’ and describes Lady Anne Percival as an example of ‘the perfect mother’, who ‘under her husband’s supervision, oversees all aspects of the children’s education’.²⁴⁵ I would

²⁴³ The concept of the nation as bound up with everyday life is prevalent also in the works of Edgeworth’s contemporary Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who wrote: ‘Love then this Country; unite its idea with your domestic comforts ... remember that each of you, however, inconsiderable, is benefited by your Country; so your Country, however extensive, is benefited by everyone of you’. Cited in Harriet Guest’s “Eighteenth-century femininity: ‘a supposed sexual character’”, 59-60. Edgeworth had admired Barbauld’s works long before their eventual meeting in Clifton in 1799, after which the two women writers began to correspond with each other regularly.

²⁴⁴ See Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education* (1790), in *Female Education in the Age of Enlightenment*, Volume 3, ed. Janet Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto: 1996), 231.

²⁴⁵ See Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s “Home Economics: Domestic Ideology in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*”, in *The Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 29 (1988), 246; 252.

like to suggest that Kowaleski-Wallace, by stressing the element of Edgeworth's supposed and total complicity with the 'new-style patriarchy', fails to take into account the extent to which a woman in Lady Anne's position can herself become an active agent in the process of educating her children. Edgeworth's portrayal of the Percival family strongly suggests that theirs is a household where the matriarchal influence dominates. There is not just the circumstance that Mr Percival is often absent from home whilst his wife instructs the children (so that his patriarchal influence cannot be said, as Kowaleski-Wallace would have us believe, to dictate matters in the family classroom) but also that Lady Anne has complete control over the education of both her female and her male children. As the prime educator within the home she is in the uniquely powerful position to decide which subjects, and by what methods, the children are taught. Her role as the children's principal teacher leaves her at liberty to direct their education in any manner she sees fit.²⁴⁶

It is helpful to keep in mind the historical period during which Edgeworth began to invest her ideal domestic woman with the role of primary educator. Over the course of the fourteen year span during which *Belinda*, *Leonora* and *Patronage* were written and published, Napoleon Bonaparte's expansionist ambitions were such that the political map of Europe was being largely redrawn. For most of this time Britain was at war with France. In a period of perpetual uncertainty over the future, and Britain's constant fear of invasion, the figure of the domestic woman was invested by many writers with a special role. She is seen to be instrumental in the formation of the future generations of the British gentry. The boys and girls brought up under her supervision are the young men and women who will have to defend a Britain which, on the one hand, is under threat from the aggressive attempts of incursion by France and, on the other, increasingly shaken by inner political turmoil. The Britain of the early 1800s is just recovering from the nightmarish memories of its own home-grown revolutions, such as the Irish rebellion of 1798. Tellingly, Godfrey Percy reminds his sister

²⁴⁶ In fact, capable and educated women like Lady Anne may have relished the opportunity to take on a significantly more active role in the organisation and education of her children. Randolph Trumbach argues that the death-rate for children under five years of age, which decreased by a significant 30% in the 25 year period after 1750, brought about a cultural shift where 'biological mothers' increasingly also wanted to take on the role of 'nurturing mothers', which had hitherto been consigned to wet-nurses and governesses. See Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1978), 187; 190.

Caroline in *Patronage*, that much is expected of her; in fact nothing less than that she will one day become 'the mother of heroes'.²⁴⁷

The historian Linda Colley, who pays particular attention in her study of the period to the way in which British women mobilised their energies under the uniting banner of the war-effort against France, remarks that 'the most conventional of British women accepted that they had to play a patriotic role'.²⁴⁸ What is noticeable about the period is that even conservative writers, like Hannah More, for instance, actively encouraged her fellow English women to 'contribute their full and fair proportion towards saving their country'.²⁴⁹ A palpably patriotic tone is struck also by Edgeworth in *Belinda*, where comparisons are drawn not just between various kinds of domestic women (i.e. Belinda is placed alongside Lady Delacour, Virginia St. Pierre and Lady Anne Percival) but also between English women collectively and woman of other nationalities.

In the presence of Belinda, Mr Vincent, her suitor from the West-Indies, for instance, discusses the character of 'Creole ladies' (*B*, 181) with Mr Percival. He expresses the opinion that the habitual 'indolence', for which Creole women have a reputation, is really quite an 'amiable [character] defect' and may even 'attach them to domestic life' (*B*, 182). Mr Vincent even goes so far as to suggest that ignorance may 'be bliss' (*B*, 182) for women. Mr Percival, Lady Anne and Belinda, each in turn, question how a culture which upholds the idea of ignorance as a virtue in women can be considered as really desirable. There is more to the above exchange between Mr Vincent and Mr Percival than meets the eye. For it is only through listening to Mr Vincent's ideas on the qualities which make women attractive to him that Belinda becomes aware that his is an attitude (to women) which differs substantially from that of an English gentleman like Mr Percival, who values education and intellectual competence in women. Conversations about women of other nationalities thus reveal as much, if not more, about the speaker than they do about the foreign culture itself.

Later on in the novel, Lady Delacour remarks on the practise of 'the ladies of Antigua' (*B*, 275) who undergo tortuous skin-peeling procedures for the express purpose of lightening their sun-darkened complexions. Whilst recovering from this very painful procedure, and in order to prevent their new skin from becoming wrinkly due to premature facial movement, the

²⁴⁷ See Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage* (1814), Volumes 6 and 7 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Connor Carville and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 1:87. Henceforth abbreviated as *P* and quoted within the main body of the text.

²⁴⁸ See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), 250.

²⁴⁹ Hannah More, *Strictures*, 1:4.

women from Antigua are forced to absent themselves altogether from society. For weeks on end they have to remain at home, spend their time in darkened rooms and refrain from speaking so as not to damage their precious new skin. Here, as in the previous case, West-Indian women are portrayed by Edgeworth as living in a culture in which more value is accorded to appearances (i.e. to appear languid or beautiful) than to substance (i.e. being knowledgeable). Coming, as it does, from the mouth of Lady Delacour, the description of the terrible pain the ladies of Antigua endure in the name of “keeping up appearances” is especially interesting. Not only are there obvious parallels to Lady Delacour’s own situation (in which she feels compelled to carry on playing the role of the fashionable beauty whilst suffering in silence from great physical and emotional pain) but Edgeworth may very well be pointing a warning finger at her own culture, in which she has identified a dangerous tendency to value women primarily for their ornamental and not their personal qualities.

As one might expect, French women come in for particular criticism in *Belinda*. Clarence, during the course of his continental tour had occasion to witness first-hand the ‘licentious gallantry’ (*B*, 280) practised among some sections of French society. In fact, it was his disgust at the loose morality of some French women, whom he describes as ‘depraved’ (*B*, 280), which decided him to turn to Rousseau in his search for an alternative model of femininity. However, Edgeworth’s attitude to French women is not as sweepingly negative as Clarence’s wholesale indictment of them suggests. She is careful to direct his criticism of French women towards one small section of the upper classes in pre-revolutionary France. Edgeworth makes clear that the women described by Clarence in such deeply unflattering terms were part of France’s *ancien regime* and as such belong to the class of people who have lost most of their (social) influence since the advent of the Revolution. In part, Edgeworth’s criticism of women belonging to the high French aristocracy is informed by her prejudices towards the aristocracy in general.

Edgeworth’s letters suggest that she had little personal contact with the English aristocracy until some years after *Belinda* was written. For instance, when she was collecting ideas for what was to become her short fiction *Mademoiselle Panache*, she asked her cousin’s advice about ‘what rank in life are the parents who trust their daughters to this lady?’.²⁵⁰ As late as 1809 Edgeworth evinced surprise when passing on reports she had received from England of the unconventional behaviour of some of its leading aristocratic women. She wrote

²⁵⁰ See ME to RR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, October 1797, Letter 165, Reel 2.

to her aunt: 'The account Mrs Clifford gave me of the profligacy of the high bred ladies in England is really shocking'.²⁵¹

In common with many writers of the period Edgeworth deemed the wasteful and decadent life-style of the aristocracy in need of moral reformation.²⁵² It is not by accident that Edgeworth selected a character like Belinda — a person of gentle birth, though modest means, whose virtues are emphasised from the outset of the novel — to become the much needed catalyst for bringing about Lady Delacour's conversion to domesticity. Of course, Belinda, by attracting Clarence, ends up being married to a man of position and wealth, and the fact that she is able to do so is in itself evidence of a significant social shift, which took place in the late eighteenth-century. Ruth Perry observes that the 'cognatic kindred system', around which families had been organised hitherto, 'was gradually replaced with a system that favoured affinal bonds (bonds of marriage) over consanguineal bonds (bonds of blood)', and comments further that 'the increased possibility of social mobility, and the spread of democratic ideology ... reduced the absolute determining significance of the family into which one had been born. The importance of who one married, on the other hand, gained significance'.²⁵³ Nonetheless, much as Edgeworth enables her heroine to reap the rewards of her exemplary behaviour in the form of her highly favourable marital alliance to a man of Sir Clarence's considerable wealth, she leaves her readers in no doubt that he is the one who has most to gain from being married to someone with Belinda's excellent credentials as a domestic woman.

Despite Edgeworth's unquestionably prejudiced attitude towards the aristocracy she is careful to point out that, in England, women of Lady Delacour's elevated social position, still feel under obligation not to veer away too far from conventionally accepted standards of female behaviour. It is significant that Lady Delacour, even prior to her conversion into a domestic woman, is revolted by Harriet Freke's²⁵⁴ suggestion that she should forgo her moral

²⁵¹ See ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, not dated, June 1809, Letter 696, Reel 5.

²⁵² *Ennui* is perhaps the clearest expression of Edgeworth's critical attitude towards the high aristocracy. The resolution of this novel revolves around the conversion of Lord Glenthorn from a bored, depressed, self-indulgent and irresponsible character into an individual who is willing and capable of fulfilling his obligations to society.

²⁵³ See Ruth Perry's "Women in families: the great disinheritance", in *Women and Literature in Britain*, 111-112.

²⁵⁴ Although we, as readers, are of course meant to be repelled rather than fascinated by Harriet Freke's highly unorthodox behaviour and her extraordinary zest for manly adventures, she is without doubt one of Edgeworth's most colourful and enduring fictional creations. Throughout her representation of Harriet Freke, Edgeworth stresses her opposition to long established social and sexual conventions. Her thoroughly revolutionary outlook and actions suggest that Harriet Freke's character could have been based on historical feminist activists, such as the French woman Olympe de Gouges or the Belgian radical Théroigne de Méricourt, whose demands for female suffrage had won them a notorious reputation during the French Revolution. Through the wide distribution of foreign language newspapers in Ireland, which increased especially during the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, Edgeworth would certainly have come across reports of these women's activities. For a detailed

scruples and turn her flirtation with Colonel Lawless into a full-blown sexual affair. Interestingly it is Mrs Stanhope — herself a manipulating and manoeuvring woman — who expresses an awareness of just how far English women can go when it comes to bending the rules which prescribe the bounds imposed by the traditional relationship between the sexes. She reminds Belinda that: ‘Ladies of the best families, with rank and fortune, and beauty and fashion, and every thing in their favour, cannot, as yet in this country, dispense with the strictest observance of the rules of virtue and decorum’ (*B*, 156-157). As a group then, English women (as compared to women of other nationalities) are represented by Edgeworth as being both more observant of old customs and traditional standards of female behaviour, and as being more genuinely attached to their husbands. English women, in turn, are more valued and respected by their husbands than most foreign women are by theirs. *Belinda* is thus an example of one of the first fictional pieces in which Edgeworth began to bring together discourses on gender and nationality in her portrayal of the ideal domestic woman. With *Leonora*, as I will argue, she consolidated this practice.

To return briefly to *Belinda*, the most obvious and often commented upon problem with Edgeworth’s first full-length domestic novel is that Belinda — as a character — is completely overshadowed by the effervescent personality and scintillating wit of Lady Delacour. Although Edgeworth tries her utmost to stress that Lady Delacour is actually a flawed and deeply troubled woman she is, nonetheless, by far the most captivating character in the novel. This is so much so the case that one cannot help but heartily agree with Lady Delacour’s pronouncement of Belinda as a bit too ‘cool’ to readily excite one’s sympathy (*B*, 279). During the many moments of crisis, to which Clarence’s perpetually vacillating attachment exposes her, Belinda exhibits extraordinary control, not just over her outward behaviour but even over her inner-most feelings. Her propensity to remain silent, coupled with her habit of leaving the room just when Lady Delacour’s conversation turns to subjects, such as the unwritten rules of courtship or the appropriateness of arranged marriages, which are directly relevant to Belinda’s personal situation, make it difficult for the reader to gauge her attitude. In a way Edgeworth forces one to read between the lines and to pick up on her authorial intrusions into the text. Perhaps this rather stiff quality in Belinda can be accounted for by Edgeworth’s anxiety to make her first ideal domestic woman into a fictional character who was beyond the possibility of moral reproach. Her letters tell us that *Belinda* was intended

discussion of Harriet Freke’s sexuality, see Darryl Jones’s “Frekes, Monsters and the Ladies: Attitudes to Female Sexuality in the 1790s”, in *Literature and History*, No. 4 (1995): 1-24.

to be a literary gift for her aunt, Mrs Margaret Ruxton, who emerges as a rather formidable matron (and someone who placed much emphasis on correctness of manner and strict adherence to propriety) from the Edgeworth correspondence but, for whatever reason, *Belinda* lacks life-like qualities and this is clearly a major weakness of the novel.²⁵⁵

In *Leonora* (1806), her next full-length novel, in which an ideal domestic woman is placed centre-stage, Edgeworth chooses a narrative technique, which is designed to reveal much more of her heroine's inner life to the reader. Written in Edgeworthstown between 1803 and 1805, *Leonora* is an epistolary novel, and Edgeworth's decision to tell *Leonora*'s story through a series of private letters is significant for a number of reasons. The epistolary novel, as Nancy K. Miller has pointed out, had been the dominant literary form for most of the second part of the eighteenth-century and women writers, in particular, had been drawn to the first person feminine voice of the epistolary novel.²⁵⁶ However, by the time Edgeworth decided to use this literary format in *Leonora* the popularity of the epistolary novel as a genre was already distinctly on the wane.²⁵⁷ Inevitably, one asks oneself why a woman writer as well aware of current literary trends as Edgeworth chose it nevertheless for *Leonora*. The question, as with so many complex aspects of *Leonora*, can be partly answered by looking at Edgeworth's experience of Paris, where she stayed with her father, step-mother Frances and half-sister Charlotte during the winter and spring of 1802/03.

It was during her time in the French Capital that Edgeworth heard of Staël's epistolary novel *Delphine* (1803). Initially Edgeworth, who decided to read the work, declared herself unimpressed by the novel, describing it as 'tiresome and immoral' in a letter to her half-brother Henry²⁵⁸ but, as Christina Colvin argues, she is likely to have been influenced in her first opinion of the work by the public hostility which Napoleon Bonaparte's party had whipped up against it everywhere.²⁵⁹ Nonetheless, despite her reservations, and some of the

²⁵⁵ One unfortunate consequence of this circumstance has been that much of the critical work devoted to *Belinda* has focused almost entirely on Lady Delacour, or, rather, her slow and painful reformation, or on Harriet Freke, as one of the earliest proto-type lesbian characters in nineteenth-century fiction.

²⁵⁶ See Nancy K. Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men and Ancien Régime Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 84.

²⁵⁷ This was the case not only in England but also in France, where Genlis, to name but one woman writer with whose works Edgeworth was familiar, had already discarded the epistolary conception of the novel.

²⁵⁸ Cited from *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth family letters*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 82.

²⁵⁹ Edgeworth wrongly attributed Staël's absence from Paris during that time to her supposed displeasure at the 'ill success of her novel'. See *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, 83. In fact, Staël, having excited the ire of Bonaparte by hosting meetings of prominent Frenchmen opposed to his government in the salon of her house, had been ordered by an official government decree not to come within forty leagues of Paris. Interestingly, she records in her Memoir how deeply she resented this banishment from Paris during a winter when so 'many

negative publicity which surrounded *Delphine*, it became evident to Edgeworth during her stay in Paris that this novel was *the* talking point of the many social gatherings the Edgeworths attended. Edgeworth, unfamiliar with France's sophisticated salon culture²⁶⁰, was evidently surprised by the great attention which the French generally paid to new literary productions. She reported back to her cousin Sophy in Ireland how, in Paris, 'conversation turns upon the new petites pieces and little novels which come out daily and a new novel is talked about for days and with as much eagerness as a new fashion in other places. They also talk a vast deal about little essays of criticism'.²⁶¹ Paris, then, was — for Edgeworth — a place in which the recently published works of women writers were not only taken seriously but discussed in great detail by some of the leading figures of French society.²⁶² Moreover, the subject of *Delphine*, which explicitly addresses the question of women's role in society, and comments on the character of love, marriage and divorce in post-revolutionary France, must have been of particular interest to Edgeworth. Given the above, one can begin to understand why Edgeworth may have been inspired to copy the epistolary format, which had worked so well for *Delphine*, in *Leonora*. Part of her must have hoped that she could emulate the literary success of Staël's work with her own novel.

Leonora differs from *Belinda* not only in terms of it being an epistolary novel but also in the age and situation of its heroine. This time Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman is some years older than Belinda. Leonora is a more mature woman who is already married.²⁶³ Her difficulties arrive in the shape of her attractive French house guest Olivia, whose predatory advances towards Leonora's husband threaten to destroy the very basis of her domestic happiness. Edgeworth's shifting of the scene and focus to a set-up where the heroine finds herself within a marital relationship is significant. In her memoir of Edgeworth, Frances

illustrious Englishmen' had been assembled there. See Germaine de Staël's *Ten years' exile* (1821; Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1968), 73. The Edgeworths belonged to the group of the English tourists who took the first opportunity of visiting Paris following the brief cessation of war between England and France in 1802.

²⁶⁰ Colvin points out that 'there was no real counterpart of the French salon [in England], nor is there to be found in English memoirs of the period that sense of value of style and elegance in conversation to which the French attached so much importance'. However, whereas her father appears to have 'preferred Parisian to London society', and even considered for a while moving with his entire family to France, Edgeworth was of the opinion that the English were, on the whole, better listeners than the French. See *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, introduction: xx.

²⁶¹ See *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁶² Interestingly, it was whilst staying in Paris that Edgeworth, for the first time, tasted of her own literary success by experiencing the novelty of being introduced into company as 'the author of *Castle Rackrent* and *Belinda*'. See Maria Edgeworth, *Leonora* (1806), *Volume 3* in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Susan Manly (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), introduction, ix. Henceforth abbreviated as *L* and quoted within the main body of the text.

²⁶³ Although of aristocratic origin Leonora has married for love, and not for status, by choosing to become the wife of the untitled 'Mr L.'

Edgeworth confirms that thoughts of marriage and domestic life were to the forefront of her step-daughter's mind whilst she was in Paris, and also, when she began to write *Leonora* shortly after her return home to Edgeworthstown. It was during her stay in Paris that Edgeworth received a marriage proposal from the Swedish courtier Edelcrantz, who was in France on a diplomatic mission for his King. Although Edgeworth, after some days of agonising deliberation, decided to reject his proposal her step-mother later maintained that's she had been 'mistaken as to her own feelings', and that she had 'felt much more for him than esteem and admiration, [that] she was exceedingly in love with him'.²⁶⁴ Frances Edgeworth also said that *Leonora* 'was written [by Edgeworth] with the hope of pleasing the Cavalier Edelcrantz; it was written in a style which he liked, and the idea of what he would think of it was, I believe, present to her in every page she wrote'.²⁶⁵ Of course, one can only conjecture as to the truth of Frances Edgeworth's assertion but, irrespective of whether she was right or wrong in the estimation of her step-daughters real feelings, what Edgeworth has to say on the subjects of love, marriage and marital domestic life in *Leonora* clearly had immense personal relevance for her.²⁶⁶

Her anxiety to please Edelcrantz could also account for the notably more conservative tone which Edgeworth strikes at times in *Leonora*. Whereas Edgeworth had confined herself to some critical remarks directed towards one small portion of French women in *Belinda*, she ratchets up her patriotic agenda in *Leonora*. From the opening of the novel she portrays the battle over Mr. L's love, which breaks out between Leonora and Olivia, as a clash of two different national cultures. Edgeworth begins by drawing attention to the 'wonderful changes in female manners', which have become noticeable in France since the advent of the Revolution (*L*, 14), and goes on to identify as the greatest danger to the British way of life a strand of powerfully persuasive rhetoric, which, emanating from across the Channel, presents 'vice as virtue' so convincingly that it threatens to overthrow long established home-grown values and customs. As Leonora's mother, the Duchess, warns, this rhetoric, which has the

²⁶⁴ *MME*, 1:142.

²⁶⁵ *Life and Letters*, 1:109.

²⁶⁶ In *Helen*, written many decades later, Edgeworth wrote about Lady Katrine Hawksby, a female character in her early thirties: 'Her ladyship had now come to that no particular age, when a remarkable metaphysical phenomenon occurs; on one particular subject hope increases as all probability of success decreases. This aberration of intellect is usually observed to be the greatest in very clever women'. See Maria Edgeworth, *Helen* (1834), ed. Maggie Gee (London and New York: Pandora, 1987), 179. The slightly (self-)mocking tone of Edgeworth's above description suggests that, in her close observation of Lady Katrine's state of mind, she was speaking from personal experience.

potential to 'perplex the ignorant and seduce the imagination' could, if not forcefully countered, eventually 'effect a revolution in public opinion' (*L*, 15).²⁶⁷

What the Duchess refers to in her above remarks are some of the remarkable post-revolutionary changes in the organisation of French society, which Edgeworth had had occasion to witness during her stay in Paris. For instance, in a letter written to Sophy, Edgeworth remarked: 'My aunt asks me what I think of French society? All I have seen of it I like extremely, but we hear from all sides that we only see the best of Paris, - the men of literature and the *ancienne noblesse*. *Les nouveau riches* are quite a different set. My father has seen something of them at Madame Tallien's (now Cabarus) and was disgusted'.²⁶⁸ Edgeworth, as one senses whilst reading *Leonora*, felt that the liberal and highly accommodating relationships which existed between some husbands and wives in France (i.e. the French penchant for close and sometimes sexual relationships between married couples and their personal friends), coupled to the relative ease with which divorce could be obtained there, were in danger of finding a following also in Britain. The Duchess expresses the fear that if this were to happen it would spell not only the breakdown of the institution of marriage but, more importantly, of all the traditions and customs which have underpinned British society as of old. At its opening *Leonora* therefore reads like a rehearsal of arguments long familiar from the conservative rhetoric of someone like Edmund Burke. At times in *Leonora*, Edgeworth's own rhetoric threatens to obscure the many positive connotations France and French culture held for her personally. However, compared to other contemporary women writers Edgeworth's criticism of certain aspects of modern French society appears relatively mild. Hannah More, for instance, had described the French as a nation sent by God to act 'as a scourge for the iniquities of the human race'.²⁶⁹

Of course, *Leonora*, who — in the best tradition of British liberalism — is an educated, tolerant and open-minded individual, is unfamiliar with women of Olivia's manipulative character. She is convinced that Olivia is, at heart, a feeling and unfortunate woman whose

²⁶⁷ Although the Duchess comes across as unnecessarily alarmist in her words of warning to *Leonora*, Edgeworth — through her character — managed to capture the apprehensive mood which was making itself felt in a Britain, which was in a state of war with a militarily increasingly aggressive France. When an English translation of *Déiphine* was reviewed in 1806, Staël's novel was attacked specifically for the 'fatal and foolish sophistry' it contained, which, as the reviewer believed, 'has power enough over the heart, not to need the aid of fine composition, and well-contrived incident [to make it effective]'. See *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume II, 1806, 176.

²⁶⁸ *Life and Letters*, 1:115, Edgeworth's emphasis.

²⁶⁹ Cited from Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 149.

marital difficulties have been misrepresented by people who judge her too harshly.²⁷⁰ The Duchess seeks to convince her daughter that, in this time of political instability, English women have to show themselves decidedly on the side of principle and that she should be more than hesitant of receiving into her home a person of Olivia's questionable reputation. She warns Leonora that she could easily become guilty by association, and that, once English women are even suspected of developing a taste for the libertine life-style of the French, the consequences will be far reaching. The Duchess reminds her daughter of the companionate relationships which English women have managed to built up with their husbands over the past decades, and the increased educational opportunities they enjoy, which women of Leonora's generation have come to take for granted. She warns that: 'If men find that the virtue of women diminishes in proportion as intellectual cultivation increases, they will ... decide that one is the effect of the other. They will ... prohibit knowledge altogether as a pernicious commodity' (*L*, 15).

As the above quote clarifies, what Edgeworth feared was not just the socially corrosive influence of the new Continental-style philosophies²⁷¹ but, more particularly, the conservative cultural backlash their popularity could cause in Britain, and the attendant consequences of such a development for educated women like Leonora. Women, so Edgeworth argues, are the ones who have most to forfeit in such a scenario. What is at stake here is nothing less than women's access to knowledge, or, rather, to the sites of knowledge production. This, then, is the underlying motive of Edgeworth's concern with the pernicious influence which French women like Olivia might exert, once what they stand for is allowed to gain a foothold in British society. The Duchess adds that the situation is already precarious enough and not made the easier by prominent women writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, whose abrasive feminist rhetoric²⁷² she considers as having already damaged women's educational cause.

²⁷⁰ Significantly, Olivia tells Leonora that she did not marry for love but, rather, to facilitate an advantageous alliance between two influential families. Lawrence Stone writes that, in France, arranged marriages were the norm until well into the nineteenth-century and that there was 'no tradition built up ... of allowing the bride and groom the right of veto, much less of allowing them to choose for themselves'. Stone stresses that 'after marriage, however, they [i.e. the French couple] enjoyed a degree of sexual freedom ... that far exceeded anything known in England'. See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson: 1977), 323.

²⁷¹ Edgeworth criticises not just French but also German schools of thinking in *Leonora*. She sees philosophic positions which appear to promote the self-interest and personal fulfilment of the individual above the interests of the group as a real threat to the stability of British society.

²⁷² The Duchess refers explicitly to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by reminding Leonora that 'of late we have heard more of sentiments than of principles; more of *the rights of woman* than her duties' (*L*, 15).

Leonora decides to ignore her mother's warning and declares that she reserves the right to judge of Olivia for herself. She reminds her mother that she has 'never, even from childhood, required from me [i.e. Leonora] a blind submission' in matters of judgement (*L*, 21). Ironically, Leonora by this very act of non-compliance reveals herself as somebody who is evidently accustomed to the careful weighing of the pros and cons in matters of debate. Indeed, her defence of Olivia's taste for 'metaphysical books' marks her out as an intellectually confident and self-reliant thinker. She argues that an engagement with the new philosophical thought-currents of the day can only be beneficial as it forces one to consider the validity of the arguments which are put forward:

To examine human motives, and the nature of the human mind, is not to destroy the power of virtue, or to increase the influence of vice. ... From analogy we ought to infer, that the motives of metaphysicians ought to be purer than those of the vulgar and ignorant. ... in the pursuit [of metaphysics], useful discoveries may be made. (*L*, 23)

Having established Leonora as being of independent mind Edgeworth goes on to directly compare her with Olivia. Initially the differences between the two women appear to be accounted for mainly by their contrasting personalities. However, Olivia's letters show her English hostess is a complete mystery to her. Although she is 'certainly a beauty', and in possession of 'a figure that would grace any court', there is nothing in Leonora's way of moving or speaking which is designed to attract attention, and 'all her gestures and attitudes ... are those of nature' (*L*, 28). Olivia's comments on Leonora's bearing and behaviour show up the extent to which Edgeworth tries to juxtapose the 'naturalness' of her ideal domestic Englishwoman with the Frenchwoman's artificiality in her way of moving and speaking.

When she goes on to directly compare the domestic habits of French and English women, Edgeworth's patriotic agenda with respect to *Leonora* is at its most visible. Leonora, as Olivia remarks dismissively, belongs to that group of English women who 'devote their lives to their children, and ... are doomed to see them half the day, or all day long, go through the part of the good mother in all its diurnal / monotony of lessons and caresses' (*L*, 28).²⁷³

²⁷³ Olivia, of course, cannot see the point in attending to 'the minute details of [the children's] education' (*L*, 28). She is more astonished still when she finds out that the children Leonora takes such pains to instruct are not her own, but orphans left to her care by a now deceased elder sister. She is clearly perplexed by Leonora's child-centred daily routine and explains that, in France, 'the insipid details of domestic life are judiciously kept behind the scenes', so that even married women (with children) can 'appear as heroines upon the stage' (*L*, 28) and concentrate their feminine energies on charming their guests.

The inference which Olivia draws is that her hostess's apparent lack of (French-style) sophistication must be due to 'the different organization of French and English society' and the circumstance that 'in England, gallantry is not yet *systematized*, and our sex look more to their families than to what is called *society* for the happiness of existence' (*L*, 28, Edgeworth's emphasis). One reason for her growing dislike of Leonora is simply founded on the circumstance that, to her taste, she is too English. Olivia bemoans the fact that Leonora's 'ideas are exclusively English: she has what is called English good sense, and English humour, and English prejudices of *all sorts*, both masculine and feminine. She takes fire in defence of her country and of her sex' (*L*, 33, Edgeworth's emphasis).

As Olivia's comments illustrate, Edgeworth strives to represent Leonora as being as much the product of a certain educational ethos²⁷⁴ as she is the product of a particular national culture, which in terms of its life-style and values differs essentially from the sort of life Olivia is accustomed to lead in France. Well educated and cultivated English women like Leonora, so Edgeworth emphasises time and again, place great value on family-life and define themselves largely through their roles as wives and mothers. Unlike Olivia, who seeks mental and emotional stimulation by leaving the domestic sphere in order to seek out the entertainment on offer in Parisian society, much of Leonora's life revolves around the daily occupations of her husband and the children, as well as the general management of the family's country-estate. Edgeworth stresses that the attachment Leonora feels for her home and her family is not just an individual character trait, by having Olivia observe about Mr. L. to her French correspondent Madame de P. 'to an Englishman's ears there is some magic in the words home and wife. These are necessary to his well-being' (*L*, 104).

As Olivia's comment shows, attachment to one's home and family is identified by Edgeworth as a defining characteristic not peculiar to Leonora and her husband but to the English as a nation. Edgeworth goes further still by suggesting that the decided preference which the English have for domestic life and domestic pursuits is one reason why England has not had to suffer from the dismantling of major political and cultural traditions of the kind which has taken place in France since the Revolution. English women like Leonora are not only deeply attached to their home and family but, more importantly, they choose to stay at home. This, then, is another crucial difference between Leonora and Olivia. Whereas the

²⁷⁴ Everything we learn about Leonora during the course of the novel confirms that she has been brought up in line with the main pedagogic principles, and according to the modern teaching syllabus, advocated by Edgeworth in *Practical Education*.

French woman misses the wide circle of her acquaintances and the fast pace of the urban life she is used to in Paris, Leonora, like the wives of most landed English gentlemen, prefers the relative seclusion of her existence in the English country-side²⁷⁵ to the social life available to her in London (where she and her husband own a spacious town-house). On one level Leonora's preference (for country-over town-life) can be read as a straightforward observation on the part of Edgeworth on some of the real and existing differences in the living arrangements of the English and French upper classes.²⁷⁶ Historians confirm that the primary residence for an English gentleman and his wife was usually their country-estate and that — although most members of the upper classes possessed additional residences in London — a couple's town-house would be occupied only for a relatively short time during the year (i.e. usually the winter season).²⁷⁷

However, a closer reading of *Leonora* reveals a semi-political dimension to Edgeworth's close association of the English gentry with their country-seats. In a paradigm which to become typical for her Irish tales, Edgeworth portrays a gentleman's country seat as the place where the immediate effects of good or bad management are most easily discernable. In his capacity as landlord a gentleman and his family have a profound moral responsibility towards those people who are dependant for their livelihoods on the employment the estate can provide for them.

In *Patronage* the notion that the country-seat is the most appropriate and desirable sphere of action for the gentry is stressed by Mr Percy, who expresses the hope that his eldest son Godfrey will, subsequent to some years of military service 'in the defence of his country', one day settle down to become 'a really respectable, enlightened, and useful country gentleman – not one of those booby squires, born only to consume the fruits of the earth, who spend their lives in coursing, shooting, hunting, carousing, 'who eat, drink, sleep, die, and rot in oblivion' (*P.* 1:55).

²⁷⁵ During the course of the novel only Miss C., one close friend of Leonora's, comes to visit.

²⁷⁶ Trumbach, for instance, points out that, unlike France, where young couples customarily continued to live in one of the parental houses for the first years of their marriage, in England, where the ideal of a romantic marriage was popular, couples married later in life (i.e. the man at around 30 and the woman at around 24 years of age) and usually established themselves in a separate household. See Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, 126-127.

²⁷⁷ Stone is one historian who comments on this marked difference between English and continental living habits. He states that there was 'a notable reluctance among the English nobility to live in cities' (year around). See Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite: England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 15.

By measuring the state of health and prosperity among the people surrounding a country-estate the influence and leadership skills of the land-owning gentry can be judged. In *Leonora*, the aristocratic Madame de P. informs Olivia that reports of hunger and suicide among the peasants circulate in Paris and that there is a noticeable shortage of fire wood in the French capital. Tellingly, Madame de P., who has an estate in the country, never inquires into the causes of these developments and is clearly out of touch with the day-to-day problems facing the French peasantry (*L*, 42). Such blatant lack of interest on part of the ruling classes in France, so Edgeworth suggests, was bound to have bred a sense of disaffection among the French working classes. *Leonora*, then, is a work as much concerned with the present social and political situation in France (and England) as it is an attempt to analyse some of the causes which have led to the breakdown of traditional relations between the different classes in France.

One major problem with regard to *Leonora* is that the plot militates in some way against the main argument of the novel (i.e. that well-educated, intelligent and informed women like Leonora are just the kind of wives which are needed in the present political climate). For Edgeworth's ideal domestic woman, despite her enlightened and patriotic attitude, and her erudition, cannot, in the end, prevent her husband from succumbing to Olivia's seduction attempts.²⁷⁸ Actually, Mr L. names Leonora's 'edifying propriety' to General B. as one of his wife's most dislikeable personality traits and justifies his plan to excite her jealousy by saying that he wants to test 'how far vanity and pride can console a virtuous woman for the absence of love' (*L*, 108). It takes the discovery of Leonora's letters to her mother to finally make Mr L. see that he has completely misread his wife's behaviour.

Significantly, the Duchess advises her daughter at the end of the novel to come out of her rural 'retirement' and to make a habit of spending the 'winters in London', where Leonora's 'character, manners and abilities' will enable her to mix with 'persons of the best information and of the highest talents'. The Duchess counsels: 'Your husband will find, in

²⁷⁸ In fact, it is largely Leonora's outwardly calm and decidedly rational approach to the whole affair, and her seeming lack of jealousy, which perturbs her husband and even makes him question the strength of her affection. Despite being advised by his elderly friend General B. that he really is indulging in a form of 'jealous hypochondriacism [sic]' Mr L. is not really convinced of his wife's love for him (*L*, 89). His falling in love with Olivia is all the more significant because she manages to disguise her merely flirtatious interest in him by striking a number of heroine-style poses taken straight from some of the most widely-read Continental plays and novels of the period. At one point Olivia affects to suffer from melancholia and compares her life to that of the suicidal young Werther (*L*, 126) in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *The Sorrows of Werther*. She also sets herself up in direct imitation of Rousseau's *Héloïse* (*L*, 140). Despite Olivia's obvious taste for stage-effect Mr L. is unable to discover her true character until he sees himself dismissed in one of her letters as 'a lover from pure charity, pure curiosity' (*L*, 158).

such society, every thing that can attach him to home, and in you, his most rational friend and charming companion, who will excite him to generous and noble exertion' (*L*, 160). Interestingly, Edgeworth, with the Duchess as her spokesperson, acknowledges that even an exceptional domestic woman like Leonora cannot afford to remain entirely at home. She needs to mix in a larger social round, if she wants to afford her husband the opportunity to compare her to other women and to really appreciate her merits. Paradoxically, Leonora's virtues as a private person can best be shown off in a public setting.

The Duchess suggests that a circle of educated, well-read and travelled individuals — within which an exchange of opinions and ideas would naturally occur — could nurture the interests of both Leonora and her husband. Through the means of a letter-writing network they could maintain these contacts, as well as their mutual interest in the wider world of society, even when residing at their home in the country. The Duchess's advice is interesting as it can be seen to reflect Edgeworth's own experience of a much enlarged circle of contacts, which she had managed to build up subsequent to her 1802/03 visit to France. It is from this time onwards that Edgeworth, whose correspondence had formerly consisted mainly of the letters she exchanged with relations and close family friends, began to write to some of the new acquaintances she had made in France (and also, on her departure to and from there, in England). With most of her new correspondents Edgeworth continued to remain in contact for decades to come.²⁷⁹ In fact, as I have argued in Chapter One, it was in a large measure due to her extensive correspondence-network that it became possible for Edgeworth to pursue her numerous literary projects from the relative social seclusion of a geographically isolated location like Edgeworthstown.

In her denouement of *Leonora*, Edgeworth delivers a potentially liberating message to her early nineteenth-century female reader. For whilst she has the Duchess advise her daughter to stretch her mental and social skills so as 'to attach' her husband lastingly to her (and therefore to his children and home), such a course of action will be productive for Leonora in more than one way. By following her mother's advice she will not merely continue to be a well-informed and interesting companion to her husband, but in the process, she can discover new friends and new books, which will add to her pleasure, and stimulate her own intellectual

²⁷⁹ In 1820, for instance, prior to taking her two half-sisters Harriet and Fanny to France with her, Edgeworth had no difficulty in reviving most of the social contacts she had made during her 1802/03 stay in Paris. Prior to setting out from Ireland, she wrote to old acquaintances like the famous society hostess Mme Recamier, informing her of her imminent visit and, once in France, Edgeworth managed to meet up with many of the friends she and her family had made during their previous visit.

and personal growth. Especially in the leisure time available to a woman of Leonora's elevated social status there is considerable scope for the reading and studying of all manner of subjects; be they the latest books, newspapers and periodicals, philosophical works or books on political economy, such as Edgeworth herself was likely to read. What I am arguing is that Edgeworth, with *Leonora*, illustrates how women in Leonora's situation can effectively turn the period's cultural demand for wives to be knowledgeable and well-informed to immense personal advantage. For, whilst Leonora complies with all that can be expected of a truly exemplary nineteenth-century domestic woman (she is a dedicated wife, principled mother, well-qualified teacher and capable mistress of an extensive household), she nonetheless belongs to a distinctly new breed of intellectually active and curious domestic women.

Perhaps the full extent of Leonora's intellectualism can best be gauged when she is placed alongside other early nineteenth-century fictional creations of ideal domestic women. Lucilla Stanley, for instance, the ideal domestic woman in Hannah More's highly successful novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808)²⁸⁰, is portrayed as being unusually well-educated. More stresses that Lucilla has competence in all the subjects 'which should be common to all gentlewomen' (she mentions in particular Arithmetic, History, Geography, Chronology and French as well as 'domestic economy').²⁸¹ However, although Lucilla is unusual in so much that she is proficient in Latin (a subject belonging to the Classics and traditionally reserved for the male members of the gentry), More's authorial interventions in the text clarify that education, for her, consists mainly in 'the inculcation of fortitude, prudence, humility, temperance and self-denial'.²⁸² Lucilla's suitor Coelebs declares bluntly that 'intellect', in women, is not desirable, and can only be tolerated if women, who possess intellectual leanings 'bear their faculties meekly'.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ *Coelebs*, the only novel More ever wrote, made her almost instantly famous and earned her the great sum of £2,000 in its first year. This put her on a par with Walter Scott, who had received about the same for *The Lady of the Lake* and was considerably above the £350, which Jane Austen got for *Mansfield Park*. See Anne Stott, *Hannah More*, 281.

²⁸¹ See Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), intro. Mary Waldron (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), 204.

²⁸² In the course of the ensuing discussion on women and learning, Coelebs declares that a woman with 'technical' knowledge is, to him, an 'inelegant woman', and that he would prefer even 'learned ladies' to 'scientific ones'. Surprisingly, he even dismisses the idea that knowledge of the basic principles of chemistry could be useful to a domestic woman. He maintains that such knowledge 'will add little to the delights of our summer evening walk, or winter fireside'. See *Coelebs*, 177; 206. The pronounced anti-scientific stance taken by Coelebs is in direct contrast with the educational programme laid out for girls in *Practical Education*, where the Edgeworths had argued that a knowledge of the basic principles underlying the modern sciences (such as chemistry or mechanics) was an indispensable part of modern female education.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 177.

As the above shows, More is an example of a woman writer who expressed a deep suspicion of women who possess anything approaching a 'critical spirit'; she even goes so far as to name religion as 'the only safe and infallible antidote for knowledge of every kind'.²⁸⁴ Of course, religion, or rather, the schooling in a particularly Evangelical understanding of Christian humility, is one important component in the education of More's ideal domestic woman, which is missing completely in Edgeworth's conception of female domesticity. The stark contrast between More's and Edgeworth's respective conceptions of the ideal domestic woman finds expression also in More's *Strictures*. One of the underlying tenets of Edgeworth's approach as an educationalist, on the other hand, consisted in her conviction that women — given a sound education — were as capable as men in arriving at correct intellectual and moral judgements.

To return briefly to *Leonora*, Edgeworth was obviously convinced that it was one of her better works, for she took the unusual step of circulating drafts of the novel to readers outside the family circle, which was not her normal practice when preparing for publication. Edgeworth's normal procedure was to involve other members of her family in the process of correcting, editing and copying her final draft of a piece of work. Whilst she would often discuss the progress of her on-going literary projects with her cousin Sophy, and also ask her aunt Margaret Ruxton for ideas and suggestions, most of the detailed work prior to the publication of a piece was usually left to the 'family editing committee' at Edgeworthstown, as Edgeworth came to refer to it.

In the case of *Leonora*, Edgeworth's sent drafts of her novel to her elderly friend Lady Moira in Dublin, to Lady Spencer, one of the new social contacts she had made in London, and to Madame Gautier, one of the hostesses to the Edgeworths during their stay in Paris. Encouraged by positive responses from Lady Spencer and Mme Gautier, Edgeworth appears to have been ready to send *Leonora* off for printing by her English publisher Joseph Johnson in London during the summer of 1804. However, she had been anxious to test the reactions of more conservative male readers to *Leonora*, and therefore also sent parts of the novel to her uncle John Ruxton and to her step-mother Frances's father Dr. Daniel Augustus Beaufort.²⁸⁵ In the end, her uncle's evident discomfort with the French femme fatal Olivia, combined with

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 113-114.

²⁸⁵ For the full publication history of *Leonora*, see Marilyn Butler's and Susan Manly's introduction to *Leonora*.

her father's advice to carefully go over the work once more, resulted in a long delay before *Leonora* was finally published in 1806.²⁸⁶

Despite Edgeworth's high expectations for her only epistolary novel, *Leonora* did not prove popular with either the critics or the public. Jeffrey, who discussed it in the *Edinburgh Review*, found that 'Edgeworth's criticism here [i.e. in *Leonora*] of morals and manners is too direct and preachy'.²⁸⁷ Interestingly, *Leonora* sold better in Dublin than it did in London but this, as Edgeworth found out to her additional disappointment, was due to the mistaken assumption that she had based the fictional character of Olivia on that of a Lady Asgill (whom she had never even met).²⁸⁸ Writing to her half-brother Sneyd, Edgeworth admitted that *Leonora* 'is the only one of my works I ever rated more highly than my father did and you see it is a good lesson to me – it will give me a still firmer reliance upon his critical prophecies'.²⁸⁹ Edgeworth's above sentiments convey the impression that the disappointing reception of *Leonora* left her, for a while, in a depressed if not a diffident state of mind. It certainly must have struck her as strange that a work, which had been written with the explicit intention of pleasing a conservative character like that of her suitor Edelcrantz, had met with disapprobation, not just from her notably traditionalist uncle Ruxton but, also, from quarters where it was least expected²⁹⁰, and even from her usually liberal-minded father.

Despite the set-back which *Leonora* must have been for her, Edgeworth was not lastingly put off by the male criticism she had encountered but, in fact, continued to portray a series of domestic women in the fictions she wrote over the following years. I want to suggest that this was, in a large measure, due to her critical engagement with Staël's *Corinne*, which burst onto Europe's literary scene to almost universal acclaim in 1807. In England, even the *Edinburgh Review*, which only a few years previously had expressed strong censure towards Staël's *Delphine*, took note of this new French novel, describing it as a 'story', which was 'in a high degree original' and one, which was thought to illustrate exceptionally well 'the

²⁸⁶ Edgeworth explained to Sophy in 1804 that her father was 'still their [i.e. the letters] determined foe – He says Olivia is a chambermaid and writes not like a *demirep* but like a whole *rep* and in this particular he brings my uncles opinion in support of his own'. Cited in introduction, viii. The emphasis is Edgeworth's.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

²⁸⁹ Cited in introduction, xxiii.

²⁹⁰ Whereas Jeffrey had criticised Edgeworth for being too heavy-handed in her criticism of modern French mores, Dr. Burney (the younger), one of Sneyd's friends, paradoxically thought *Leonora* an 'immoral' work. Cited in introduction, xxiii.

difference of national character' between 'Great Britain and Italy ... that are personified and contrasted in the hero and heroine of this romantic tale'.²⁹¹

In *Corinne* Staël had also drawn comparisons between the personalities of her culturally hybrid heroine (Corinne is half-English, half-Italian) and Lucile Edgermond, a young Englishwoman, who — having grown up in an isolated part of Northern England — turns out to be Corinne's half-sister. A large part of Staël's novel is set in England and throughout *Corinne* she comments extensively on the domestic manners and mores, which she regards as peculiarly English. Describing the gatherings at her step-mother's country-estate in Northumberland, Corinne, for instance, comments on the unusual reserve among the upper-class English women with whom she comes into contact, and on the repetitive nature of their domestic lives. She observes: 'They drank tea, they played whist, and the women grew old always doing the same thing, always staying in the same place. ... Women's lives, in the isolated corner of where I was living, were very dull'.²⁹² Corinne leaves the reader in little doubt that she experiences England as a place where women are not encouraged to develop their intellects or speak their minds. Her remarks on the confined activities and highly prescribed nature of women's lives in England provided sufficient reason for the *Edinburgh Review* to take issue with Staël for her unfavourable representation of English domesticity. The reviewer remonstrates that 'the coldness of manner in the English ladies, their reserve and want of animation, are painted too harshly ... we must be permitted to say, that we believe the women [in England] are often superior to the men. The very circumstance of their not being destined for active or public life, renders their conversation more intellectual, more connected with general principles, and more allied to philosophic speculation. Their taste, also, is often more cultivated ...'.²⁹³

It is tempting to speculate what Edgeworth, who — with *Leonora* — had just attempted to conceptualise a peculiarly English version of the ideal domestic woman, would have made of the reviewer's above comments. What becomes clear from the reviewer's comments is the degree to which Staël with her remarks on English women and English domesticity had managed to touch a nerve in a Britain which was still very much at war with France. In any case, Staël's unflattering portrait of English women helped to stimulate a new

²⁹¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume XI, 1807, 183.

²⁹² Germaine de Staël, *Corinne* (1807), intro. John Isbell; trans. Sylvia Raphael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 249.

²⁹³ *The Edinburgh Review*, 192.

interest in the figure of the ideal domestic woman in fiction generally.²⁹⁴ One can see why Edgeworth is likely to have been curious about Staël's new novel. She had certainly heard a lot about *Corinne* and, as she told her aunt Ruxton, she was eager to read it, but was as yet fully occupied with finishing work on her own *Professional Education*.²⁹⁵ When this was completed in the April of 1808, one of the first things Edgeworth did was to immerse herself in *Corinne*. Few of Edgeworth's letters give the same detailed insight into her reaction to the work of a fellow woman writer as the one she wrote to Sneyd, whilst still reading Staël's novel. For this reason I will quote in full what Edgeworth has to say about *Corinne*. She starts off by criticising some aspects of the novel, telling her half-brother:

I have within these two days read 2 Vols & a half of her [i.e. *Corinne*] and am in one word much of your opinion qu'elle n'entraîne pas – The hero my father calls a snivelling rascal – And as to the heroine there is not only bad morality but bad taste & awkwardness in making her stand so much on the man's side in the dance – She makes all the love & all the figure & he is carried about by her whilst she takes all – The alternate slices of sentiment & antiquities I cannot relish & the continually interrupting the story with the travels & putting off fits of passion whilst they go to look at ruins & volcanos is very unnatural²⁹⁶

Edgeworth's above remarks show that she clearly disapproves of the heroine's willingness to dispense with normal social conventions but, despite her reservations with regard to certain aspects of *Corinne*, she then goes on to sing its praises:

But notwithstanding these obvious faults and absurdities I am actually dazzled & amazed by the genius of the work & feel provoked and grieved to see such fine materials so ill put together & worked up with such a tiresome story – The fine arts never had a more eloquent or abler champion than Madame de Staël – Her descriptions of Rome Naples Venice are admirable – Her criticism on Italian writers & on the subjects fit for painting appear to me very valuable & extremely judicious & I only wonder how a woman who had judgement enough to make them could throw them away on such a hero & heroine – as to their loves they are the most tiresome ever I saw or heard of. The Loves of La Belle

²⁹⁴ More, for instance, was one writer who, spurred by *Corinne*, decided to conceptualise her ideal domestic woman in a fictional framework. The character of her Lucilla in *Coelebs* even borrows her name from that of Staël's model English woman Lucile in *Corinne*. However, following in the footsteps of Staël's novel with its highly unconventional heroine, the entirely proper and exceedingly modest ideal domestic woman of More's fiction must have appeared to many comparatively old-fashioned, if not dull. One reviewer criticised Lucilla for being 'totally uninteresting'. See *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume XXVII, 1809, 146.

²⁹⁵ See ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 11 March 1808, Letter 625, Reel 5.

²⁹⁶ See ME to CSE, Edgeworthstown, 4 April 1808, Letter 629, Reel 5.

et la Bête which Molly Bristow²⁹⁷ translates to me every morning interests me forty times more than Corinna²⁹⁸ and her Lord – But my Lord Nelville blessed in his fortune blessed in every grace is always doing his worst to make himself disagreeable & to make miserable the woman who would sacrifice everything to him – which by the by she is so over-prompt to do that it makes the sacrifice of no value –

What is interesting in Edgeworth's above comment is that, whilst she criticises Staël for the representation of her hero and heroine in the novel, she was nonetheless very conscious of the fact that something new and highly original had been attempted by her in *Corinne*. Moreover, despite her obvious impatience with Staël's long drawn out and frequently melodramatic representation of Corinne's and Oswald's ill-fated love affair, Edgeworth is more understanding of their dilemma, and of the novel on the whole, than her father. Describing his reaction to the novel she writes to Sneyd:

I am sure you would have been diverted by the varieties of my father's exclamations whilst he read *Corinna* – Now cursing the book & the woman – now pitying the author & extolling the book to the skies – William & H one evening took a list of his exclamations in the course of two hours – The curses upon the whole preponderated – Yet he acknowledges that there is great genius in the book & admires the criticism as much as I do – but is far more intolerant for the love & the lovers – He says he would not have such a wife as Corinna for the world.

Several interesting conclusions can be drawn from Edgeworth's above reportage of her father's reaction to *Corinne*. Her comments shed an interesting light not just on their different attitudes to the novel but also on Edgeworth's relationship with her father.²⁹⁹ Richard Lovell

²⁹⁷ Molly Bristow was a child related to a member of the Edgeworths' household staff. Edgeworth had taken a personal interest in Molly's education and makes mentions of her in a number of letters during the period.

²⁹⁸ Edgeworth anglicised spelling of the heroine's name suggests that she read an English translation of Staël's novel. If so, it is likely to have been Isabel Hill's translation of *Corinne*, which came out in England as early as 1807, only a few months after the original French publication.

²⁹⁹ A few days after writing to Sneyd, Edgeworth also discusses *Corinne* in a letter she sent to Sophy. She wrote: 'I have read *Corinne* with my father – I like it much better than he does – in one word I am dazzled with the genius & provoked by the absurdities ... But I will not dilate upon it to you in a letter because I could talk of it for three hours to you and my aunt – I almost broke my foolish heart over the end of the third volume & my father acknowledges that he never did read anything more pathetic – But he is infinitely more out of patience than I am with the absurdities of the heroine lying howling on the high road & indignant against the namby-pamby character of Oswald'. See ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 15 April 1808, Letter 631, Reel 5. What is noticeable in the above letter is that Edgeworth, when relating her father's opinion of *Corinne* to Sophy, is careful to strike a much more neutral and respectful tone than in her letter to Sneyd. This, in all likelihood, is probably the case because Edgeworth knew that there was a strong possibility that the letters she sent to her cousin might also be read by her aunt and uncle and, on occasion, even to a larger audience, which could be comprised of visitors to the Ruxton's home Blackcastle in Navan. Generally, the letters Edgeworth wrote to close family members are much more intimate in content, tone and style than the ones she wrote to other correspondents.

Edgeworth's strong dislike of Staël's highly unconventional heroine is not really surprising, given that Corinne's desire for self-realisation and for fame alarmed many a male reader at the time.³⁰⁰ Madelyn Gutwirth argues that whereas other examples of highly accomplished literary ladies can be found in domestic European fiction up to the early nineteenth-century, none of these are, in quite the same uncompromising way, which Corinne represents, 'a modern heroine capable of embodying feminine genius'.³⁰¹ The poetess and improvisatrice Corinne is certainly a unique heroine, in that Staël celebrates her in the novel not only as the glory of her nation and age but as a woman who dedicates her life to the fulfilment of her artistic talent and vision. In many respects Corinne argues with Aristotelean logic that it is her duty not to waste the artistic potential with which she has been gifted. Not only does Staël's heroine, in Gutwirth's words, 'advocate life as art' and 'equates domesticity with slavery' but she repeatedly expresses the wish to live self-contained, free of ties and answerable to no one but herself.³⁰² In effect, Staël argues in *Corinne* that the 'ordinary rules for judging women cannot be applied to her [i.e. Corinne]' and proposes that 'every woman, like every man' ought 'to make a way for herself according to her nature and talents'.³⁰³ Whilst such an outspoken proclamation of one's talents and desires would, one imagines, have been regarded (at worst) as immodest or boastful in a man, coming, as it does in Staël's novel, from the mouth of a woman, it is must have struck Edgeworth's father as extraordinary indeed.

However, what is most striking about Edgeworth's reportage of her father's response to *Corinne* is the very light-hearted manner in which she relates to Sneyd how he reacted to the novel. Edgeworth, it would seem, can barely veil her amusement over her father's tendency to be alternately amazed and put off by *Corinne*. In fact, her remark to Sneyd that her siblings recorded and counted her father's many excited expostulations over the course of the evening (in her presence and with her evident approval) suggests that Edgeworth herself looked upon him (or, rather, his amazement about the novel) with the indulgent eye of a fond parent. The scene which she paints for Sneyd is one in which the usual roles between her and

³⁰⁰ Staël's biographer Madelyn Gutwirth emphasises that in an age when women did not normally express any aspirations 'to fame, to glory ... these goals were simply deemed absurd ones for a woman'. She also remarks on the fact that Corinne came to be regarded by many as a literary self-portrait of the author and that Staël was eager to encourage this identification. See Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël*, 160. Just as Corinne came to be seen as an insubordinate heroine, Staël herself was criticised by some of her most formidable opponents for her refusal to bow to male authority. Napoleon Bonaparte said of her: 'She has wit, a great deal of wit, but she is unaccustomed to any kind of subordination'. Cited in *Madame de Staël*, 248.

³⁰¹ See Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël*, 204.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 243.

³⁰³ Germaine de Staël, *Corinne*, 47; 247.

her father have been reversed. On this occasion Richard Lovell Edgeworth is the one who is pictured in the role of the naïve adolescent female reader who becomes completely preoccupied with a new novel and who over-reacts in response to the fictional scenario which is presented to her. It becomes apparent from Edgeworth's recounting of the amusing incident which took place in the Edgeworthstown family room³⁰⁴ that both she and her siblings were laughing partly with, and partly at, their father's highly animated response to *Corinne*. The intimate domestic scene, which she describes in such detail to Sneyd, certainly paints a very different picture of the relationship between Edgeworth and her father than the one which has been popularised by certain literary scholars, who portray Edgeworth as a writer whose life and career suffered from being too much influenced by the overbearing and intimidating patriarchal stature of her father.³⁰⁵

The fact that Edgeworth and her father had diverging opinions with regard to *Corinne* is interesting in itself, as it can be seen as an illustration of their different temperaments and personalities, but it is also a clear indication that Edgeworth — certainly where fiction was concerned — was emancipating herself from her father's opinions on what constituted good writing. Edgeworth herself was evidently captivated by *Corinne* and one can only wonder what she and Staël would have discussed had they ever met face to face. By some strange quirk of fate they nearly met on a number of occasions but actually managed to miss each other each time. For instance, in 1813, when Edgeworth was on a visit in England, her father's travel plans forced her to leave for Ireland just days before the scheduled arrival of Staël. Writing to Sophy, a disappointed Edgeworth reported: 'I fear Madame de Staël's arrival may be put off till we have left Town. I hear now that she is not coming till the beginning of June. The *Edinburgh Review* of her last book [i.e. *De la littérature considérée dans ses Rapports avec Institutions Sociales*] has well prepared all the world for her arrival. It is a flourish of trumpets before her entrance onto the stage. I think the praise of transcendent genius

³⁰⁴ There were no separate drawing and dining rooms at Edgeworthstown. When the Edgeworths gathered together as a family they generally spend their time in the family room, which also doubled as the library. This room contained a large table, which could accommodate all of the family, as well as a number of sofas and easy-chairs, which were grouped around the fireplace. Edgeworth wrote nearly all her works in the family room, on a small movable writing desk, which her father had made for her, and which was usually placed in one of the room's alcoves.

³⁰⁵ I have in mind here, for instance, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's *Their father's daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and patriarchal complicity* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

indisputably hers and no more is given to her in that Review than is justly due but I think the Review itself paradoxical and disheartening. It is written by Jeffrey ...'.³⁰⁶

Edgeworth's above comments on Staël are typical of her mixed opinion of her in general. There were clearly aspects of the French woman's turbulent private life³⁰⁷, coupled to her flamboyant personality and the celebrity circus, which was created around her wherever she travelled, of which Edgeworth would have been almost instinctively wary. Despite some reservations, Edgeworth, as her above comment on Jeffrey's review shows, recognised Staël's enormous contribution to literature³⁰⁸ and found it easy to sympathise with her when it came to dealing with reviewers, who seemed more interested in peddling their own agenda than in delivering a balanced and considered opinion of the work under discussion.

To return briefly to Edgeworth's own response to *Corinne*, the importance of her critical engagement with Staël's novel can hardly be overstated.³⁰⁹ As becomes apparent from Edgeworth's above comments on *Corinne* she clearly disapproved of some aspects in Staël's representation of her hero and heroine. Her comments to Sneyd leave one in little doubt that Edgeworth considered the highly unconventional and very modern character of *Corinne* as

³⁰⁶ See *Letters from England*, 49. In his review Jeffrey had confirmed Staël's status as 'the first female writer of her age'. He had also expanded on why Staël as a writer was taken more seriously by many a male reviewer than most of her fellow women writers: 'she has pursued a more lofty as well as a more dangerous career; that she has treated subjects of a far greater difficulty, and for more extensive interest, and, even in her failures, has frequently given indication of great powers, than have sufficed for the success of her more prudent contemporaries. While other female writers have contented themselves, for the most part, with embellishing or explaining the truths which the more robust intellect of the other sex had previously established – in making knowledge more familiar or virtue more engaging ... this distinguished person has not only aimed at extending the boundaries of knowledge, and rectifying the errors of received opinions upon subjects of the greatest importance, but has uniformly applied herself to trace out the operations of general causes, and, by combining the past with the present, and pointing out the connexions and reciprocal action of all coexistent phenomena ... We are not acquainted, indeed, with any writer who has made such bold and vigorous attempts to carry the generalising spirit of true philosophy into the history of literature and manners...'. Having praised Staël for her high standard of writing Jeffrey goes on to criticise her for her limited understanding of English literature, which she (according to him) displays in her latest work. See *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume XXI, 1813, 2.

³⁰⁷ Following on from a marriage of convenience Staël had obtained a divorce, had had a string of affairs and a number of children by different lovers.

³⁰⁸ Edgeworth's admiration for her is not always obvious. However, hints can be glimpsed here and there throughout her correspondence. For instance, writing to her aunt Waller, Edgeworth remarks on a translation of Schiller's *Maria Stuart*: 'You remember I am sure the beautiful passages Mme de Staël gives in her *Allemagne* in prose'. When visiting France and Switzerland in 1818, Edgeworth made a special detour to see Staël's country residence Coppet. Although Edgeworth was not usually given to break out into enthusiastic raptures, she felt deeply affected when being given a tour of the house by Staël's son Auguste. Writing home to her step-mother Frances, Edgeworth said: 'All the rooms which she inhabited and of which we could not think as common rooms. They have a classical power over the mind'. See *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, 109; 217. Staël had died the year previous to Edgeworth's visit.

³⁰⁹ Clíona Ó Gallchoir argues that Edgeworth's initial critical engagement with Staël dates back to the time immediately before the Union between England and Ireland came into effect in 1801. See Clíona Ó Gallchoir's "Germaine de Staël and the Response of Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth to the Act of Union", in *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship: Studies in History, Literature and Politics*, eds. Eamon Maher and Grace Neville (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004).

bordering on the side the distasteful (Edgeworth, in her own words, sees little dignity in a heroine who 'is lying howling on the high road'). However, despite some reservations, and Edgeworth's ambivalent attitude to Staël generally, *Corinne* had demonstrated new and interesting ways of combining the discourse on gender with that of nationality. Moreover, Staël's criticism in *Corinne* about the confinement of English women to the domestic sphere, and her related argument that this was responsible for their hampered intellectual and personal development, and was consequently harmful to English society as such, must have been of particular interest to Edgeworth, who had, after all, argued in her own works that the domestic sphere could (ideally) provide the best conditions for the free exercise of female agency. In a sense, all of her detailed portraits of women characters, which Edgeworth presented to her readers from 1808 onwards, become part of an open conversation with Staël on the subject of (especially English) domestic women.³¹⁰

Following her critical engagement with *Corinne*, Edgeworth implemented some significant changes with regard to the fictional representation of her ideal domestic women. Thinking about Staël's novel also seems to have had the long-term effect of opening Edgeworth up to other new literary influences. What is immediately noticeable in her representation of the domestic women which people her *Patronage* (1814) is Edgeworth's endeavour to make them into as natural and life-like creations as possible.³¹¹ In addition, Edgeworth strives to make Mrs Percy and her two daughters into distinctly different personalities. For instance, from the beginning of the novel Caroline's good sense, her seriousness and unfaltering self-possession is contrasted with the character of her sister Rosamond, whose liveliness, lovable nature and obvious good intentions compensate for her sometimes flighty imagination and the occasional blunders she is prone to make in her reasoning. Rosamond is entrusted with the task of explaining Caroline's character to the reader. She says:

³¹⁰ Her on-going literary dialogue with Staël finds its most direct expression in her last fictional work *Helen* (1834), where Edgeworth comments on several occasions directly on Staël's opinion of English women. In her Irish novels Edgeworth introduces a number of complex and culturally hybrid female characters, such as Grace Nugent in *The Absentee* (1812).

³¹¹ The Percy girls are again young women of about Belinda's age (Caroline's age is given as 'not quite eighteen' (*P*, 1:38) but, unlike Belinda, who as an orphan is thrown back on her own resources, or Leonora, who is left to solve her marital difficulties largely on her own, Caroline and Rosamond still live in the parental household and take their first steps towards marriage under their parents' watchful eyes. This alternative fictional situation makes it possible for Edgeworth to chart the progress of the sisters' home-education and individual development in far greater detail than done before.

Good people are acknowledged to be the bane of the drama and the novel – I never wish to see a reasonable woman on the stage, or an unreasonable one off it. – I have the greatest sympathy and admiration for your true heroine in a book; but I grant you, that in real life, in a private room, the tragedy queen would be too much for me; and the novel heroine would be the most useless, troublesome, affected, haranguing, egoistical, insufferable being imaginable. So, my dear Caroline, I am content that you are my sister and my friend, though I give you up as my heroine. (*P*, 1:71)

Rosamond's above observations about her sister reveal much about Edgeworth's new approach in *Patronage*. On the one hand, Edgeworth (anticipating criticism of her serious-minded heroine) concedes that Caroline is perhaps too reasonable to pass for a heroine in the conventional novelistic sense. On the other hand, Edgeworth introduces a new standard by which fictional female characters ought to be judged. By making their relevance to 'real life' the deciding criterion for their success or failure, Edgeworth dismisses the high-flown fictional heroines of the old school of writing as amusing but irrelevant to modern life. In a way Edgeworth also comments on changing literary tastes with her claim that a normal young woman like Caroline — as a character — is much more germane to the needs and problems of the early nineteenth-century female reader of novels.

Another innovation in *Patronage* is the degree to which the Percy sisters reveal themselves through the means of conversation. Whereas Edgeworth's heroine in *Belinda* had remained silent at crucial points of the novel, and we are only told by means of letter reportage of the heroine's verbal exchanges with others in *Leonora*, in *Patronage* the Percy sisters constantly discuss their notions on romantic love, prospective husbands and their expectations with regard to marriage during the course of the novel. This allows one more immediate access to their feelings and state of mind, and makes them, in turn, into much more flesh-and-blood fictional creations. On the reverse side, the conversations the Percy sisters have with others give them, as much as the reader, an opportunity to see the characters of their suitors unfold themselves naturally. Edgeworth even intrudes into the text to stress that 'A woman may always judge of the real estimation in which she is held, by the conversation which is addressed to her' (*P*, 3:16).

Edgeworth's pairing and contrasting of the two Percy sisters also bears a noticeable similarity to Jane Austen's treatment of the sisters Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Caroline (like Austen's Elinor) is represented as possessing far more 'judgement and discretion' (*P*, 1:39) than her sister, and as showing 'magnanimity and

superior understanding' whereas Rosamond has 'wit and generous simplicity' (*P*, 3:14). Throughout the novel she is shown to be the one who is more controlled and cautious in her dealings with others and she is altogether far less spontaneous and enthusiastic in her responses and ideas than Rosamond. However, as in Austen's novel, at the half-way stage of *Patronage*, Caroline is revealed as a character capable of great emotion and strong passion. Having already rejected Buckhurst Falconer's marriage proposal and about to reject Mr Barclay's, Caroline explains her requirements in a husband to her sister. Her expectations are so exalted (she is looking for a man of 'invention' and 'genius', who can exhibit the 'higher qualities of the mind') that Rosamond, who one moment before was afraid that her sister could be 'reasoned into marrying (*P*, 2:168)' is truly surprised and calls Caroline 'a little romantic (*P*, 2:169)'.³¹²

By Edgeworth's normal standards Caroline is indeed unusually 'romantic', at least where her expectations on marriage are concerned. Tempting as it is to speculate that Edgeworth may have taken inspiration from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* neither the Edgeworth correspondence nor Marilyn Butler's biographical study of Edgeworth indicate as to whether or not this was actually the case.³¹³ We know that Edgeworth read *Mansfield Park* (1814), for which she showed 'qualified approval', that she was impressed by *Persuasion* (1818), which she liked for its 'naturalness' and that she also read *Northanger Abbey* (1818), in which she thought 'certain scenes untrue' to life.³¹⁴ Edgeworth's letters show, moreover, that Austen sent a copy of *Emma* (1816) to Edgeworthstown³¹⁵ and certainly later in her life Edgeworth appears to have increasingly appreciated Austen's skills as a novelist.³¹⁶ With *Sense and Sensibility*, being published in 1811, it is certainly possible that Edgeworth could have read the work while still working on the writing of *Patronage*. In any case, *Patronage*, especially when measured against Edgeworth's other fictional texts, had a very long gestation

³¹² Caroline is slightly hurt that her sister could suspect her of marrying for any motive other than love. She expostulates: 'For what else could I marry ... for a house in Leicestershire? or a barouche and four? ... or on the *Missy* notion of being married, and having a house of my own, and ordering my own dinner, and like Miss Dannel in *Camilla*, having every day minced veal and mashed potatoes? – Was this your notion of me?' (*P*, 2:169). Caroline's dismissive reference to Miss Dannel in Fanny Burney's *Camilla* indicates the degree of distance and remoteness between the concerns of a character like hers and those of modern young domestic women like the Percy sisters.

³¹³ Paradoxically we know more of Edgeworth's influence on Austen than vice versa. For instance, Butler maintains that *Lady Susan*, one of the pieces Austen had begun to work on in 1795, but which was published as late as 1871, was influenced by *Leonora*. See Butler's introduction to *Leonora*, xxvi.

³¹⁴ See Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 447.

³¹⁵ *Life and Letters*, 1:235.

³¹⁶ By 1833 Edgeworth stated that anyone with a liking for Austen's novels exhibited 'good taste' in literature. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 447.

period and appears to have absorbed material and themes from a number of disparate literary sources.³¹⁷

Edgeworth also varies her usual fictional constellation by employing a foreigner, the German Count Altenberg, to speak about English women generally. He is the one who pronounces them to be ‘the most charming and the most amiable women in the world (*P*, iv. 198)’. This has some force, coming as it does from someone who is a well-travelled diplomat and, as such, has personal knowledge of women from ‘Germany, Poland, Switzerland, France’, all of whom he has found ‘want[ing] either good temper’ or ‘good sense’, with too strong a taste for either male ‘admiration’ or sheer ‘notoriety’ (*P*, iii. 51).³¹⁸ In this instance Edgeworth craftily employs the foreigner’s (supposedly unbiased) judgement to aide her in her celebration of English women.

Clíona Ó Gallchoir points to the importance of Staël’s *De l’Allemagne* (1810) in connection with *Patronage*.³¹⁹ Count Altenberg’s different cultural origins are certainly significant. Coming from Germany, a country where national identity is still in the process of construction, the Count brings a different perspective to his pronouncements on the social and political state of affairs in England. Not only is he — as the foreigner — the one to highlight the gap which exists between England’s reputation for respecting the rights of the individual and the actual practices of the period,³²⁰ but he is also the character who suggests that the solution to most of England’s present problem lies in the beneficial influence, which domestic English women like Mrs Percy and her daughters already exert. Having distinguished English

³¹⁷ It originated in an oral bedtime story called ‘The Freeman Family’ told by Edgeworth’s father to the younger members of the family in 1787. See introduction to *Patronage*, viii.

³¹⁸ Although Edgeworth makes Count Altenberg stress the attention-seeking behaviour of many Continental women, Stone cites traveller’s reports of the period as tending to show that ‘In Germany, wives, ‘are very obsequious to their husbands, have less command in their houses than English or French women, and are not allowed the upper end of the table’’. Stone argues that ‘England and America were well in advance of continental Europe in the shift of power over marriage from parents to children, in the shift of motives away from economic and towards more affective considerations, and in the development of less authoritarian relations between husbands and wives in marriage. ‘The dear English privilege of choosing a husband’ was an established fact among the bourgeoisie, squirearchy and lesser nobility by 1770’. See Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, 324. Count Altenberg has an ‘imperious father’ (*P*, 4:191) who expects his son to comply with his parental wishes by marrying the Countess Christina, a woman whom his son has never even met. Although she is passionately in love with another man, she is prepared to be married to Count Altenberg until he informs her of his deep attachment to Caroline.

³¹⁹ See Clíona Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), 103-131.

³²⁰ The Count, for instance, expresses his astonishment when he becomes witness to the press-ganging of ‘a freeborn British subject returning to his native land’ into the naval service. He surmises that certain duties of an English sea captain are those of ‘an African slave merchant’ (*P*, 2:238; 2:239). Although the footman who is pressed into service in *Patronage* is an Englishman, Edgeworth –with Ireland in mind– emphasises that this practice can affect any ‘British subject’.

women collectively from other European women the Count goes on to identify in Caroline his ideal domestic woman.³²¹ Realising her excellent qualifications for leading a domestic existence (especially her ‘intellectual superiority’), the Count decides to flee the revolutionary turmoil brought about by the French in his native German principality, and to reside with his new English wife in England, where he hopes to enjoy ‘the blessings of real liberty, and of domestic tranquillity and happiness’ (*P*, 4:230).

According to Ó Gallchoir, Edgeworth, in *Patronage*, ‘uses the domestic sphere as the place which can challenge official ideologies of patriotism and national character’.³²² It is certainly remarkable that the only man in the novel — apart from Count Altenberg — who questions the present political status quo in Britain is Mr Percy³²³, who is himself an example of a feminised domestic man. Edgeworth stresses from the outset of the novel that Mr Percy is ‘a really honest independent’ gentleman of ‘no connexion with any party’ (*P*, 1:19). She emphasises that his character and interests are entirely those of a private family man. The fact that the dark political machinations which operate in near-secrecy in *Patronage* threaten to embroil even an individual like Mr Percy sheds a particularly unfavourable light on the England which Edgeworth depicts in her novel. To some extent, Edgeworth takes the sting out of her criticism with her happy ending of the novel but, even so, *Patronage* often reads like a reminder to the powers that be that England’s reputation for justice and tolerance needs to be remembered and actively upheld.³²⁴

Ó Gallchoir maintains that Edgeworth, with *Patronage*, insists on ‘the feminisation of the English national character’. She sees Edgeworth as responding in particular to *De l’Allemagne*, in which Staël had described England in terms of being the ideal nation but where she had also constructed it as a masculine country.³²⁵ Her reading of *Patronage* has much to recommend it, but whether one studies the novel for its complex relationship with other literary sources or not, what is certain is that Edgeworth depicts the ideal domestic

³²¹ Despite the fact that Rosamond is of a less intellectual bent than her sister, both are clearly so different to most young women of marriageable age that they are perceived as ‘blue’ (*P*, 3:4) by the visitors to the Percy’s home.

³²² See Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth*, 106.

³²³ He dismisses Mr Sharpe’s opinion that in ‘the existing circumstances’ all responsible-minded and patriotic gentleman should ‘endeavour to strengthen, instead of weakening the hands of government’ as ‘common place cant, by which all sorts of corruptions ... are screened’ (*P*, 1:60). Edgeworth set the action of *Patronage* between the years 1807 to 1812. The French declare war towards the closing stages of the novel (*P*, iv. 215). In this specific historical context Mr Percy’s remark amounts to a particularly trenchant criticism of British government policy during the period.

³²⁴ By 1814, the time *Patronage* was first published, many of the hopes which Edgeworth had with regard to the economic and social benefits England’s Union with Ireland would bring about were already disappointed.

³²⁵ See Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth*, 112.

women of *Patronage* in terms of being of national importance to Britain as a whole. It is by dint of their civilising influence that traditional British values such as tolerance and fairness will be safeguarded.

As a novel, *Patronage* was criticised by reviewers for 'departing from one intimately known milieu (Ireland) and straying into another of which she [i.e. Edgeworth] had little experience (the diplomatic circles in London)'.³²⁶ But, as critics like W. J. McCormack have pointed out, *Patronage*, despite being set on the southern coast-line of England 'is not congruent with its English setting'.³²⁷ There are many characters and places in the novel which clearly owe much to Edgeworth's experiences of life in Ireland. Not only has the fictional Mrs Hungerford of *Patronage* much in common with the historical Lady Moira, whom Edgeworth admired and had known since her early years in Edgeworthstown, but she describes the fictional Hungerford-Castle in very similar terms to those used by actual visitors in their descriptions of the castellated mansion Castle Forbes (situated in the north-western corner of County Longford), which was the home of Edgeworth's acquaintance Lady Granard. The lamentations of the village poor at the time when the Percy family are temporarily deprived of their estate by the actions of an avaricious relation also sound conspicuously Irish, and the phraseology of the estate steward John, who bewails the 'banishment' (*P*, 1:101) of his master from his ancestral home and lands evokes some of the heart-rending eviction scenes common in Ireland.³²⁸

More than any other of Edgeworth's novels *Patronage* also reveals something of Edgeworth's own domestic arrangements. It has been noted that Edgeworth's description of the farm-house residence The Hills, to which the Percy family repair until they can prove their title to Percy-Hall, is based upon an actual property Richard Lovell Edgeworth built in County Longford as a second family home.³²⁹ Edgeworth, who as a rule shies away from visual descriptions of places, goes into unusual detail when describing The Hills. She specifically mentions its setting in the landscape, the income it generates ('700-800 a year') and even the size of individual rooms within the 'scantily furnished', 'small' house (*P*, 1:103).³³⁰

³²⁶ See introduction to *Patronage*, vii.

³²⁷ See W. J. McCormack, "The Tedium of History: An Approach to Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage*", in *Ideology and the Historian*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), 95.

³²⁸ Although most commonly (in an ironical reversal) the class of persons driven from their homes in Ireland belong mainly to the landless peasantry.

³²⁹ See introduction to *Patronage*, xix.

³³⁰ Alfred describes Rosamond's room as measuring '14 feet square' (*P*, 2:196). In her biography of Edgeworth, Butler cites the remarks of one mid-nineteenth-century inhabitant of Edgeworthstown who commented on the cramped conditions of the house's upper floor: 'Up the curving staircase ... was a labyrinth of bedrooms of all

Patronage is clearly an expression of Edgeworth's conviction that a 'Rousseauvian retirement' from the world, to borrow from Ó Gallchoir, provides the best conditions for a domestic life, where 'men and women can play an equal part', and which Edgeworth ideally envisages.³³¹ Edgeworth attributes one reason for the Percy sisters' unusual intellectual attainments to their father's preference for leading an independent and retired life (at Percy-Hall), and their later residence in an isolated part of the country (at The Hills). Living at some distance from the attractions and distractions of the wider world is portrayed by Edgeworth as being conducive to the development of their critical faculties. The Percy girls have studied, researched and read widely since their childhood and, with their knowledge of literature and thirst for information, are equipped with the ideal mental make-up to lead future lives as intellectually largely self-sufficient married women. Edgeworth certainly concurs with Mr Percy in his choice of country-above town-life.³³² Although Alfred's wife Sophia is shown as an example of 'domestic happiness ... naturalized in a capital city' (*P*, 4:154) Edgeworth emphasises that a gentlewoman like Caroline feels out of place in a large city such as London. The problem is not that town-life fails to provide opportunities for meeting interesting people and making new social contacts (Caroline meets in her brother's house eminent authorities from 'the literary and scientific world' (*P*, 4:154) whose company she enjoys) but more that Edgeworth cannot see it as the natural sphere of action for a woman of Caroline's class and abilities.³³³

Edgeworth, then, is a great advocate of female agency, even though, as Mona Narain observes, 'she does not fit the strict mould of contemporary feminist requirements for

sizes, the smallest being Maria's with its little bow window added ... though even with this addition the room can hardly have measured ten feet square, and it was generally shared with a sister!'. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 82.

³³¹ See Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth*, 24.

³³² Edgeworth's correspondence shows that her predisposition towards country-life grew even stronger as she got older. In a letter to Mrs Lazarus she wrote 'there are more materials for thinking in Town but less time for thought – More presented to the mind but less exertion of the mind itself – At least so my mind has always felt it'. See *Letters from England*, introduction, xvi. In *Helen* Edgeworth states that one gets tired of London's town-life after two seasons and Helen and Beauclerk determine 'to live all the year around in the country' (*H*, 319).

³³³ Even in *Belinda*, where Lady Delacour and Belinda move within the most fashionable districts of London, there is already a noticeable anti-urban thrust to the novel. Lady Delacour observes that 'one grows strangely selfish by living in the world' and argues that her life may have taken quite a different turn 'had I lived in the country' (*B*, 61). Mr Percival maintains that 'the world at Oakly-Park and in London are two different worlds', and that when residing in the country 'the butchers, bakers, ploughmen, and spinsters ... compose our world' (*B*, 246; 247). His comments appear to suggest that to Edgeworth's mind an existence in the country-side brought one more in contact with the real world.

emancipative writing'.³³⁴ Unlike her more radical contemporaries, such as, for instance, Wollstonecraft or Macaulay, Edgeworth does not challenge the traditional consignment of English women to the domestic sphere. Instead she accepts the existing socio-cultural arrangement, which insists that the place most appropriate for women's sphere of action lies within the home. Where Edgeworth does depart noticeably from conservative writers, such as More, is in her conceptualisation of what a domestic life can ideally encompass. Edgeworth uncovers great potential in a domestic existence for the further personal and intellectual development of (especially but not exclusively) women. Well-educated, resourceful and cultivated women like Belinda, Leonora and the Percy girls, so Edgeworth argues, will be able to find an outlet for all their individual interests and talents within a largely domestic existence. Moreover, Edgeworth argues that men, also, benefit from participating in a mode of existence, which places its values on the consolidation of the family, as the smallest social unit. As Edgeworth sees it, the civilising role, which English women fulfil in their homes, is especially important during a period when Britain is in a state of active military and ideological conflict with nations like France, whose revolutionary politics threaten to overthrow many of its traditional values and principles.

³³⁴ See Mona Narain's "Not the Angel in the House: Intersections of the Public and Private in Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales and Practical Education*", in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 58.

Chapter 4

ENNUI, THE ABSENTEE AND ORMOND:

MARIA EDGEWORTH'S GENTLEMAN HERO AND HIS CHANGING SENSE OF PLACE

The experience of her domestic life in Edgeworthstown influenced Edgeworth's conceptual development of the ideal domestic woman and her fictional representation of female domesticity. In the present Chapter I will consider the significance which Edgeworthstown in its broader context occupied in Edgeworth's thinking. For Edgeworthstown, apart from being a household with an unusual domestic constellation and way of life, was, to Edgeworth, also unique in terms of being a very particular kind of place. Indeed, as I already touched upon in Chapter One, Edgeworth proclaims the distinctiveness of the locale from which she writes in some of her earliest letters from Edgeworthstown. In her letters to Fanny Robinson, for instance, Edgeworth refers time and again to the looks and sounds of the people she newly encounters in Edgeworthstown.³³⁵ Even in her first letters to the Ruxtons — who, as relations living in Navan, had, of course, first-hand knowledge of Ireland — Edgeworth often imparts details, which explicitly comment on the location of her new home as part of a larger village community. For instance, she remarks to Sophy on one occasion that the date of the letter she is writing to her is significant, it 'having the honour to be the fair day of Edgeworths' Town — well proclaimed to the neighbourhood by the noise of pigs squeaking and cows bawling'.³³⁶

As her above remark to Sophy already illustrates, Edgeworth endeavours to make Edgeworthstown — as a place — come alive in the letters she sends to her friends and relations. Indeed, her repeated references to Edgeworthstown as a locality have a two-fold effect. First of all, through her many allusions to the local way of life, Edgeworth stresses the distinctive character of the area in which her home is situated. Secondly, her many references to the village's geographical location as a place which is located in the heart of the Irish midlands emphasises the regional character of Edgeworthstown itself. In fact, Edgeworth's early letters give the impression that she was motivated by a desire to implant Edgeworthstown firmly on Ireland's map as well as on the mental map of the recipients of her

³³⁵ See, for instance, ME to FR, Edgeworthstown, not dated, August 1784, Reel 16. In this already mentioned letter Edgeworth comments upon the labourers and wages which are paid in Edgeworthstown, the disappearance of Gaelic as a spoken language in the neighbourhood and Edgeworthstown's setting in the flat and boggy midlands landscape.

³³⁶ See ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 2 July 1794, Reel 1.

letters. Living in Edgeworthstown became an integral part of Edgeworth's self-definition; both as a private individual as well as in her capacity as a writer.

However, as is to be expected, Edgeworth's view of, and relationship with, Edgeworthstown as a place evolved over the course of her long residency in County Longford. This chapter argues that Edgeworth's changing relationship with Edgeworthstown is reflected in the changing representation of place in her Irish tales. This, in turn, can be charted by Edgeworth's changing representation of the gentleman hero who is placed centre-stage by her in *Ennui*, *The Absentee* and *Ormond*. The format which Edgeworth invariably employs in these fictions (with the notable exception of her last Irish tale *Ormond*) is to introduce to Ireland a male character with distinctly English cultural affiliations. Upon arrival there and on being confronted by peoples, sights and scenes which are entirely new to him, Edgeworth's gentleman hero initially experiences a sense of profound disorientation. Unfamiliar with the local way of life he encounters he is at first totally lost in Ireland and reliant entirely on the opinions which other people (i.e. both residents of, and visitors to, Ireland) impart to him. Unable to judge for himself, Edgeworth's gentleman hero is exposed to a number of key influences and experiences which have a lasting influence on his general outlook and a direct bearing on his relationship with the place in Ireland where he eventually decides to settle down permanently.

What makes Edgeworth's representation of the gentleman hero in her Irish tales so interesting is that she actually establishes a link between the personal growth of her protagonist and his gradually developing sense of place. In fact, Edgeworth, as I will argue, measures the extent of her hero's maturity as a person by the degree to which his relationship with the locale gradually becomes more refined. In this sense she expands on, and adds to, the *Bildungsroman* format she makes use of in her Irish tales. Whereas in the novel which is structured along the conventional *Bildungsroman* format the protagonist's personal growth is indicated, on his part, by the development of a more mature attitude to his environment, Edgeworth — in her Irish tales — goes one step further by making her hero's relationship with the locality where he is to live into the ultimate marker of his maturity. She thus cleverly and subtly weaves in the element of place as an additional strand in her Irish tales.

By looking successively at Edgeworth's representation of her gentleman hero in *Ennui*, *The Absentee* and *Ormond*, I will examine the ways, in which these can be seen to register Edgeworth's own and gradually changing relationship with Edgeworthstown. Further, I will

illustrate how Edgeworth's relationship with place has noticeably and lastingly altered by the time she writes *Ormond*, her last Irish tale.

Edgeworth's depiction of her gentleman protagonist in the Irish tales is highly significant for another reason. For, it was during the course of the early nineteenth-century that the definition of what it meant to be a gentleman came to be discussed with renewed interest. In the decades following England's Union with Ireland — at the time when Edgeworth is working on her fictional representation of her gentlemen heroes — Great Britain as a whole was undergoing some momentous social changes, of which Edgeworth as an ever alert observer of national manners and mores would have been well aware. For instance, many of the letters which she penned from England, from about 1800 onwards, convey a sense that Edgeworth was, in effect, witnessing a modern-style capitalist society in the making.³³⁷ In a cultural climate where industrialists and other self-made men came to display their new-found wealth and influence in a number of ways (i.e. from ambitiously designed private residences to privately sponsored new public buildings, civic amenities and philanthropic ventures), the definition of gentlemanly behaviour was also subject to reinvestigation.³³⁸

Another feature of this distinctly modern society, which Edgeworth would have noted, was the steadily growing number of members of the professional classes who were setting up in urban centres throughout Great Britain. The modern professions as such, which had emerged throughout Britain during the course of the eighteenth-century, had, by the turn of the century, begun to organise themselves into self-regulating bodies, each with their own distinctive set of rules and qualifications.³³⁹ As the younger sons of most genteel families in Britain could not, as a rule, expect to inherit a sufficient amount of money or property to live in the material comfort and style to which they were accustomed, the professions were looked

³³⁷ Edgeworth, for instance, remarked about Liverpool, one of England's earliest centres of large-scale industrial development: 'All the faces you see [here], money making faces, every creature full drive after their own interest, elbowing, jostling, headlong after money! money! money!'. See ME to Mrs. R., Liverpool, April 6th 1813, contained in *Letters from England, 1813-1844*, 10. As her above remark illustrates, Edgeworth was not uncritical of the new frantic pace of life which manifested itself in densely populated urban centres like Liverpool.

³³⁸ Encouraged by the example of her father, who, as a formerly active member of the Lunar circle, had kept up contacts with leading figures in English industry and manufacture, such as Josiah Wedgewood, Edgeworth also began to form acquaintances among some of these self-made men. Especially her *Letters from England* show her to have numbered investment bankers, merchants and members of the professional classes among her steadily expanding correspondence network.

³³⁹ An exception, in this respect, are the medical and legal professions, both of which were already well established at this time.

upon as a means of obtaining a good income whilst maintaining a respectable social position.³⁴⁰

Catering to this new market of a large number of young British men who had to decide on their future professions, Edgeworth brought out *Professional Education* (1809), which could be described as one of the earliest career-guidance manuals for the junior sons of privileged families.³⁴¹ Although *Professional Education* belongs to that group of her works which are nowadays neglected and rarely, if ever, discussed (even by Edgeworth scholars), it is a very useful source of information in relation to the definition and role which Edgeworth allots to the figure of the gentleman in early nineteenth-century Britain. Crucially, the conceptualisation of the country gentleman which is proposed and actively promoted by Edgeworth in *Professional Education* can be seen to owe much to her experience of growing up as a gentleman's daughter in County Longford. In fact, the country gentleman which Edgeworth describes in detail in this work could be said to have been conceptualised by her specifically with his suitability for Ireland in mind. In a sense this is hardly surprising, as Edgeworth wrote *Professional Education* whilst she was also working on the representation of her first gentleman hero Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui*. A reading of the Irish tales in conjunction with *Professional Education* can greatly enrich our understanding of the reasons behind Edgeworth's particular representation of the (country) gentleman. For this reason the following analysis of Edgeworth's changing representation of her gentlemen heroes draws extensively on *Professional Education*.

Of course, no discussion of Edgeworth's changing representation of place in her Irish tales would be complete without considering the significance of her first Irish tale and masterpiece *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Ironically, Edgeworth's most scrupulously edited and footnoted Irish tale remains the one work among the body of her fictional oeuvre whose meaning has proven notoriously elusive. In my discussion of *Castle Rackrent* I will focus on its importance

³⁴⁰ The historian Lawrence Stone argues that the 75 per cent of younger sons (belonging to families of genteel background) in England, who were in possession of a professional education, make for a striking contrast in relation to the privileged classes of other European countries. Stone draws attention to the fact that the younger sons of gentlemen in England were potentially 'downwardly mobile to a degree unknown abroad'. See Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite: England, 1540-1880* (1984; Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995), 71; 132.

³⁴¹ In the manner of a comprehensive modern employment manual, Edgeworth, in *Professional Education*, discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each of the professions; considering, in turn, all aspects of them, from the cost of the initial training to final salaries but, also, and importantly, how each profession is viewed in society. As well as discussing those fields of employment which are recognisable as modern professions (such as the Clerical, Military and Naval, Medical and Legal Profession) Edgeworth also included chapters on the education of a statesman, that of a Prince and that of a modern country gentleman in this work.

in connection with Edgeworth's evolving sense of place. For, although not in a manner which is immediately obvious, *Castle Rackrent*, does contain an crucially important statement about Edgeworth's early relationship with the place where her family home is situated. Edgeworth's writing of *Castle Rackrent*, as I will argue, amounts to the act of wiping clean the slate, which had already been heavily inscribed by the past behaviour and actions of her ancestors in Edgeworthstown.

In her *Memoir* of Edgeworth, Frances Edgeworth recounts the first impressions of Edgeworthstown, which her step-daughter related to her from the vantage point of many decades after her initial arrival there. According to her, Edgeworth experienced Edgeworthstown as a place where everything struck her as 'new and extraordinary'.³⁴² Indeed, her remarks on Edgeworthstown paint the locality almost in terms of representing an Aladdin's cave of exiting new sights and sounds to Edgeworth. Due to Edgeworth's romantically tintured reminiscences about her arrival in Edgeworthstown and her repeated insistence that everything there struck her as 'new and extraordinary' it is easy to overlook the fact that neither she nor her family did come to Ireland as strangers. For, although Edgeworth herself does not appear to have remembered much about her own and previous experience of Edgeworthstown, where she stayed for a period as a very young child³⁴³, the Edgeworths, as a family, had of course a long history of involvement with the locality where they decided to move to permanently in 1782.³⁴⁴ Edgeworth may have experienced Edgeworthstown in terms of representing an exiting and even exotic new world to her, but as a locality, it was not by any means a place with neutral connotations; either for her or for her family.

The highly complex nature of Edgeworth's relationship with Edgeworthstown as a place can also be seen in her first Irish tale. In one sense *Castle Rackrent* can be read — straightforwardly — as evidence of Edgeworth's continued fascination with the distinctive Hiberno-English culture, which she has opportunity to observe in and around Edgeworthstown on a daily basis. However, although a character like that of Thady, the old family retainer of the Rackrent family, provides much of the local colour and may even be said to lend the

³⁴² I have already quoted from this passage in the *Memoir*. See my Chapter 1, 7.

³⁴³ See Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography*.

³⁴⁴ According to the *Black Book*, Edgeworth's ancestors came to Ireland in 1593, and had had a presence in Edgeworthstown since 600 acres of land had been granted to them by James I in 1616. See *The Black Book of Edgeworthstown and other Edgeworth Memoirs*, eds. Harriet Jessie and Harold Edgeworth Butler (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), 8; 9. All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *BB* and henceforth cited parenthetically within the main body of the text.

element of authenticity to Edgeworth's first Irish tale, *Castle Rackrent* is not really a work about Irish people of his class.

Rather, it is a work very particularly concerned with the gentry class in Ireland and, in respect to this class, a rather disturbing and dark undercurrent is making itself felt, from the very outset, in Edgeworth's most famous work. The Rackrents, as many critics have pointed out, are resounding failures on a number of levels. Not only do they abrogate their responsibilities as landlords so as to finally lose their entire estate but, as private individuals, too, they are failures. Among the successive generations of the Rackrents — from Sir Patrick to Sir Condry — there is not one member of the family who does not behave in either an irresponsible, greedy, dishonest or amoral manner.

The information about the family's background, which Edgeworth provides at the opening of *Castle Rackrent*, is significant. Thady explains that: 'The family of the Rackrents is, I am proud to say, one of the most ancient in the kingdom. Everybody knows that this is not the old family name, which was O'Shaughlin'.³⁴⁵ As Thady's comment demonstrates, Edgeworth, by drawing attention to their former family name — one with a typically Gaelic prefix and one, which sounds distinctly Irish — attempts to emphasise the fact that the Rackrents are supposed to have descended not from the Anglo-Irish but, rather, from the indigenous Irish gentry. So as to make the point even more forcefully, Edgeworth goes on to stress that they have had to change their religion in order to inherit. As Thady remarks: 'the estate came straight into *the* family, upon one condition, which Sir Patrick O'Shaughlin at the time took sadly to heart, they say, but thought better of it afterwards, seeing how large a stake depended upon it, that he should by act of parliament, take and bear the surname and arms of Rackrent' (*CR*, 10, Edgeworth's emphasis).³⁴⁶

The bleak picture which Edgeworth draws of the Rackrents and their gradual downward descent from privileged, wealthy estate owners to the dispossessed, impoverished, alcohol-dependant and depressed character of Sir Condry — the last member of the Rackrent

³⁴⁵ Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1801), *Volume 1 in The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 10. All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *CR* and cited parenthetically within the main body of the text.

³⁴⁶ 'The 1704 act to prevent the further growth of popery [in Ireland] forbade descent by entail of the lands of a catholic to the eldest of his sons'. See Karen J. Harvey's "The family Experience: The Bellews of Mount Bellew", in *Endurance and Emergence*, 172. As Harvey's above comment clarifies, Sir Patrick, in order to circumvent the many limitations which applied to Catholic property-ownership in Ireland, and to prevent the future subdivision of the estate which was coming to him, had no choice but to convert to the religion of the established church.

family — has a great deal more to do with her own family history than first appearances would lead one to believe. A number of Edgeworth scholars have pointed out that Edgeworth took inspiration from the *Black Book of Edgeworthstown* — a collection of family papers and memoirs, to which she had access in Edgeworthstown — for some of the gentry class characters she depicted in *Castle Rackrent*. However, the significance of the *Black Book* amounts to more than that of being just another source of creative material for *Castle Rackrent*. For *Castle Rackrent* as a work could be described as an attempt on Edgeworth's part to displace part of her own family narrative onto the class of the native Irish gentry. What is certainly startling is the degree to which the behaviour and actions of Edgeworth's own ancestors, whose personalities and (mis-)deeds are recorded in considerable detail in the *Black Book*, put even the worst failings of the supposedly native Rackrent family into the shade.

The *Black Book* reveals, for instance, that John Edgeworth, the first Edgeworth ancestor to have resided in the Edgeworthstown neighbourhood, at a place called Castle Crannelagh, was a man so vain about his personal appearance that he sold a large house in Dublin in order to buy a 'fine beaver hat' to which he had taken a passing fancy (*BB*, 11). Even when residing at Crannelagh the six foot high John Edgeworth, known to his Irish neighbours as 'Shaen More [i.e. big, or, great John]' is unwilling to retrench his expenses. In his 'open house' he keeps a table 'constantly supplied with meat, ales, pipes and tobacco', which he did, as Richard Edgeworth, author of *The Black Book*³⁴⁷, ruefully remarks, 'to the great joy of the common Irish and the great detriment of his fortune' (*BB*, 111). Upon the death of his first wife, and in need of new funds to finance his highly extravagant and wasteful life-style, John Edgeworth goes fortune-hunting in England, where he eventually succeeds by getting married to a Mrs. Bridgeman, a wealthy English widow.

His son, another John — apparently a chip off the old block — starts on a disreputable path even earlier in life. At the tender age of only seventeen, John Junior persuades the thirteen year old daughter of Mrs. Bridgeman to run away with him. He is so afraid that his plan of getting his hands on the considerable fortune of the rich child heiress Anne Bridgeman might not come to fruition that he arranges to have the marriage solemnised not only 'by a clergyman of the Church of England' but, in addition, by 'a Presbyterian minister, and lastly by a Justice of the Peace' (*BB*, 15). His blackguardly behaviour does not finish here. Before settling down in the house his father is building for him at Lissard, in County Longford, the

³⁴⁷ Edgeworth's paternal grandfather Richard Edgeworth is the author of that part of *The Black Book*, which relates the history of the Edgeworth family in Ireland.

young couple decide to spend some time in England, where they go on a spending spree, which makes anything Sir Kit Rackrent loses whilst gaming at Bath in *Castle Rackrent*, appear positively conservative. The *Black Book* states that 'they went to London with a very large bag of gold and being then both young and giddy, emptied it very fast, each of them going to it as they had a mind ... As soon as they had emptied it, they returned to Lancashire [where Anne has an estate] for more money (*BB*, 15).

As the above account from the *Black Book* testifies, the first two generations of Edgeworths, who lived in the Edgeworthstown area, were guided primarily by vanity, greed and their over-riding desire to enjoy themselves, irrespective of any of the consequences. The treatment to which some of the Edgeworths subjected their womenfolk also leaves a lot to be desired. It is certainly on a par with the cruel treatment Sir Kit meets out to his Jewish wife Jessica in *Castle Rackrent*. When the senior John Edgeworth dies in 1688, he leaves his wife, the very widow Bridgeman, whose fortune he had enjoyed so much, practically destitute. It is only by the charitable impulse of one of her grandchildren that she manages to eek out a meagre living.

John Junior, who prefers to spend his time in Dublin and abroad, leaves his wife and children alone and barely protected at Lissard. Left there, Lady Edgeworth has to fight off bands of robbers, which periodically attempt to break into the house, and is terrorised by some of the local people, who, at night time, light bonfires on a nearby hill, howl, cry and do their best to frighten her out of her senses. Again, when her husband dies in 1700, leaving behind an ambiguous will, which is not established until decades later, she is left un-provided. As mother to a large number of young children, Lady Edgeworth, who returns to England, where she finds herself in severe financial distress, complains in a letter to her eldest son Francis, now heir of the Edgeworthstown lands: 'I am neither an Irish nor an Indian widow, and will have my right' (*BB*, 45). Her patience finally put to breaking point she writes some weeks later: 'How in the name of Jesus do you imagine I can support those orphans whose just curses cater up the dishes of your luxury, and whose bread raises the pampered scandal to a butt for satire' (*BB*, 46).

Francis Edgeworth, meanwhile, seemingly unmoved by his mother's repeated pleas for assistance, and already saddled with the many debts his father has left behind, decides, nevertheless, to embark on the building of a 'fine' and 'richly furnished' house in Edgeworthstown (*BB*, 46). He forbids his wife to have any further contact with his mother,

giving as his reason that 'her kindness is more for her dogs than her children; I am sorry she is my mother' (*BB*, 50).³⁴⁸

Taken as a group, then, those of Edgeworth's ancestors, who people the *Black Book*, come across as a very undisciplined and highly selfish lot. What is worse, unlike *Castle Rackrent*, wherein Sir Condy's basically good nature makes up to some degree for his neglect of, and incompetence in, estate matters, none of the Edgeworth ancestors mentioned in the *Black Book* appear to be in the least bit even likeable characters. Indeed, some of them, as Richard Edgeworth readily admits, were so proud and ready to get into quarrels with family and neighbours alike that he considered them plainly 'mad'.³⁴⁹

In fact, the only person in the entire memoir who emerges as a truly disinterested and decent character is a local, catholic, Irishman named Edmond McBrian Ferrall, without whose foresight and cleverness the junior John Edgeworth Junior, then aged only three, would not have survived. Ferrall rescues the infant from an excited mob intent on driving the Edgeworths once and for all off their land at Crannelagh. Their plan is to torch the castle and kill the Edgeworths' only child and heir. Farrell manages to save the child by telling the blood-thirsty crowd that he has a personal interest in both the preservation of the castle and the killing of the Edgeworth heir.³⁵⁰ Pretending to take away the boy to kill him with his own hands, Ferrall hides him in a near-by bog until cover of darkness, when he obtains a horse, hides the young Edgeworth heir in one of the panniers and makes it to Dublin without being discovered in his design.

³⁴⁸ However, it has to be said that not only the male Edgeworths but also some of the female members of the family exhibit some very unorthodox behaviour. For instance, when Francis's sister Dorothea, comes to visit him in his house in Dublin and finds him unwilling to pay her the portion she considers due to her, she 'made a reply to him in a very abusive language and flung out of the street door in a most immoderate fury. She there set up the Irish cry in a most melodious natural voice, which she was mistress of, and shed tears in great abundance, which she could command at will. All the doors and windows in that part of Capel Street ... where instantly thrown open, and a prodigious mob surrounded her. ... When she had sufficiently entertained the mob, she returned to her hackney coach' (*BB*, 49). The above description of one of her female ancestors is especially interesting in relation to Edgeworth's representation of the typical Irish funeral cry in *Castle Rackrent*, which suggests that it was a habit solely practiced by the Irish labouring classes.

³⁴⁹ Arthur, for instance, another of Sir John's male children, tries to cheat his own brother out of 60 acres of land by changing a boundary. Richard Edgeworth says of him: 'his pride and vanity were excessive ... his rapaciousness and extravagance unbound, his anger outrageous, and his morals so bad that he would stick at nothing' (*BB*, 56).

³⁵⁰ Richard Edgeworth explains that the Ferralls formerly owned the lands and castle at Crannelagh. This, if anything, is an understatement of the elevated social position which the Ferralls - as a clan - occupied in Longford prior to the Elizabethan settlement of Ireland. James P. Farrell states that the Ferralls [also spelt Farrell, Farrelly and O'Farrell] at one stage controlled most of Longford. He also comments that 'A strong family of the ruling chieftains [of the Ferralls] lived near Edgeworthstown'. See James P. Farrell, *Historical Notes and Stories of the County Longford* (1886; Longford: Longford Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd, 1979), 21.

In the light of the Edgeworths' particular family history, Richard Edgeworth's emotional appeal to his son, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, at the opening of the *Black Book*, to at least try to manage his estate and life not as badly as his ancestors have done, is given an unexpected force:

I pray God that my son my make a right and proper use of the income of the estate which I leave him, not only to his temporal, but his eternal advantage; and let him always remember that the poor and distressed have a right to some of the profits of it as well as his own family (*BB*, 6).

What Richard Edgeworth's above message to his son clearly conveys is that there was an urgent need for the Edgeworths as a family to reform, and to fix on a new and better way of conducting their lives.

A good deal of his wariness with regard to the history of his family's record (to date) in Longford filters through also into his granddaughter's first Irish tale. For, with respect to her own family, Edgeworth, in *Castle Rackrent*, disowns the regional connection of the Edgeworths even as she expresses it. In this respect, *Castle Rackrent* reads like an attempt on Edgeworth's part to lay the ghost of her own family history in Edgeworthstown to rest once and for all. It is as if Edgeworth, by disclaiming her family's past involvement with the place, wants to create the space which will be required if she and her family are to make a fresh start there.

Edgeworth's strategy of embedding the less savoury parts of her own family history deep within *Castle Rackrent* may, apart from resulting in the highly original quality of her first Irish tale, also explain why she would never again use a format which allowed her reader quite such a close-up view of the domestic lives of the gentry class in Ireland. Compared to *Castle Rackrent* where one, in a literal sense, goes to bed and wakes up with a character like that of Sir Condy, Edgeworth's subsequent Irish tales do not allow one quite the same degree of intimate access to the private lives of her upper-class Irish characters.³⁵¹ In fact, it is not until her last Irish tale *Ormond* (1817) that Edgeworth, with her representation of Harry Ormond, decides once more to select a home-bred Irish character for her main protagonist. The considerable time gap which exists between the writing of *Castle Rackrent* and the publication

³⁵¹ Whereas in *Castle Rackrent*, where she had plunged her reader rather unceremoniously into the strange world inhabited by the gentry in Ireland, Edgeworth, in her next two Irish tales (*Ennui* and *The Absentee*) takes her reader on a structured journey through the island. This plot device, among other things, allows for a much more gradual introduction to Irish life and society.

of her next Irish tale *Ennui* (1809) strongly suggests that Edgeworth was actively searching for a new literary format; one which would be capable of expressing her sense of place in a different and more positive way.

The composition time of *Ennui* overlaps with that of *Professional Education* (1809) and although these two of Edgeworth's works appear, at first sight, to have little in common (i.e. the former being a fictional work, which is set in Ireland, and the latter conceived as a career-guidance manual for the junior sons of the British middle- and upper classes) both share a strong thematic link. For, broadly speaking, both of these works explore new models of masculinity and fields of male employment. What is more, both of them, albeit in very different ways, directly address the question of what it means to be a gentleman; in the general context of early nineteenth-century Britain, as well as in a particularly Irish context. In *Professional Education* Edgeworth also introduces the notion that the modern British 'country gentleman' ought to be in possession of a number of semi-professional qualifications, without which, as she believes, he is simply not equipped to deal with the demands and exigencies of early nineteenth-century life. With the character of Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui*, Edgeworth gives her readership for the first time a hero who, although described by her at the beginning of the tale as 'a gentleman', seeks and achieves additional and professional qualifications as a barrister.

Crucially, both *Professional Education* and *Ennui* make pronouncements on the sort of relationship which the country gentleman ought ideally to have with the place of his permanent residence. In fact, both these works begin to articulate the notion that a country gentleman can only be deemed to have succeeded in his particular sphere of occupation in life if he has managed to acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of the locality where his home is situated.

Edgeworth's engagement with the concept and definition of the gentleman (and gentlemanly behaviour) is significant, not just in light of the revelations about her own ancestors in *Castle Rackrent*, but also in that it reflects an awareness on Edgeworth's part that the development of a new and different set of male role models for the present generation of her family was not only desirable but indeed necessary. The need to explore new ways of living and generating an income was something to which Edgeworth, as an elder sister to a large number of younger male siblings, would have been alert. The estate at Edgeworthstown, which Edgeworth's father had greatly modernised and improved since the family's permanent

move there in 1782³⁵², would, in the event of his death, and as was customary at the time, pass on to Lovell, as the most senior male member of the family.³⁵³ This meant that all of Edgeworth's remaining brothers needed to be directed towards and assisted into professional careers of their own. In this sense, *Professional Education* is a work which was strongly motivated by a personal concern on Edgeworth's part for the career-opportunities and future advancement of her younger male siblings.

In fact, one of the reasons why *Professional Education* turned out to be a — for the period — unusually well-researched and up-to date work was that Edgeworth was already actively advising some of her brothers with respect to the careers they had chosen. For instance, in 1808, when her half-brother Henry had just completed his medical studies in Edinburgh, and was about to set up in his profession, Edgeworth, together with her father, advised him as to the suitability of the contacts he had made, and the positions he should accept or decline. Indeed, Henry's professional progress became a regular topic in the letters Edgeworth at the time sent to her aunt Mrs Ruxton. In one these, she reported, for instance:

Henry was a favourite with the Doctor and he has suggested a scheme for him in his own profession — a sort of half hypochondriac, half maniacal patient who is to be [guarded?] and amused by letting off rockets etc. He is in want of a medical guardian, and his friends offer 300 £ per annum fee. Dr B. proposed this to Henry & Henry wrote to papa for counsel. My father was of the opinion that it was beneath Henry — unsuited to his own health & spirits & that it would retard instead of advancing him in his profession & the 300 per annum cannot be sufficient compensation for all this; consequently he advised H. to decline the offer.³⁵⁴

The above excerpt illustrates clearly that even somebody with Henry's good qualifications was in need of sound advice when it came to deciding which offers of professional placements were desirable. It is likely to have been with young men like Henry in

³⁵² Apart from changing the terms and conditions of tenancy agreements in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth's father, in line with the improvement schemes proposed by the Englishman Arthur Young — who could be described as the founding father of modern agriculture — also implemented many other changes on his estate. His *Memoirs* mention particularly his efforts with regard to the large-scale drainage of bog-land, experimentation with new crops and crop-rotation as well as the trialling of new fertilisers.

³⁵³ Richard, Edgeworth's older brother, and the most senior male child in the family, had gone to America and married there. Subsequent to visiting his family, he decided in 1792 to leave Britain altogether and to settle permanently in his adopted country.

³⁵⁴ See ME to Mrs R., Edgeworthstown, February 1808, Letter 624, Reel 5. Some weeks later Edgeworth wrote 'would you believe it Henry is a candidate for being physician of St. George's hospital. Dr. Pearson, who is very kind to him advised his giving in his name as candidate by all means, not with any hopes of success but to bring his name forward he said would be of use to him — I am right glad to see that Henry begins to warm to his profession & to like it & to have good hopes — he says London is a famous place for making money'. See ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 11 March 1808, Letter 625, Reel 5.

mind that Edgeworth, urged on by her father, decided to start collecting information and material for *Professional Education* in 1807.

From the very outset Edgeworth must have been acutely aware that the content of *Professional Education* was a subject few women writers would be prepared to tackle. Writing this work involved her in not only straying from her familiar milieu as a writer (of fiction), but necessitated making pronouncements on spheres of employment which, by their very definition, were exclusively the domain of men. Edgeworth appears to have been somewhat apprehensive about complying with her father's request; especially as it was planned right from the beginning to publish the work under his name alone. However, despite her reservations she eventually agreed to take on the task of writing *Professional Education*, in which she also involved her aunt Ruxton and Sophy, both of whom she asked to assist her in the collection of relevant material. Grateful for their help and support with regard to this particular project, she wrote to her aunt: 'thank Sophy for having copied pages from Mercier ... [my father] thought the quotation would be too long & he would allow me only to refer to it in a note. Tell Sophy I am very grateful for the 2000 sins of the casuists & the 1500 diseases of the medical writers & have made them my own with good effect. We have now almost finished – nothing but a few pages to add to a Prince's education & a first chapter ... I am truly obliged by Dr. Gibney's offer of his notes & beg you will send them to me in all haste'.³⁵⁵ Working diligently, Edgeworth appears to have made quick progress with the writing of *Professional Education*. By the April of 1808 she sighed one huge sigh of relief in a letter to Sophy, telling her: 'Prof Ed [sic] my dear is at last fairly out of the house & heartily glad am I & most anxiously & ardently do I wish that it may do credit to my beloved father'.³⁵⁶

Although Edgeworth wrote *Professional Education* entirely in Edgeworthstown, and the work was later to be available for sale in Ireland, both she and her father were careful to include information and materials which would be seen as up-to-date and applicable to the professions as they were practiced in Great Britain as a whole. Prior to its publication, and in order to test its likely reception, the Edgeworths distributed the work to an unusually large and

³⁵⁵ Ibid. The above excerpt illustrates the extent to which Edgeworth, even as a well-established author, relied on especially the women in her larger family circle for inspiration as well as practical help (i.e. copying parts of the manuscript). It is quite typical of how Edgeworth worked and would seem to indicate that Marilyn Butler was misleading in suggesting that Edgeworth's relationship with her aunt Margaret Ruxton and her cousin Sophy declined in importance over the years.

³⁵⁶ See ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 15 April 1808, Letter 631, Reel 5. As it turned out, Edgeworth was wrong in believing that *Professional Education* was just about to come out in print, as it was not until March 1809 that her English publisher Joseph Johnson sent the first proofs to Edgeworthstown.

varied group of people; beginning with members of their extended family, such as Edgeworth's conservative-minded uncle John Ruxton, to local contacts, such as their neighbour Mr Keir and even to important figures in public life, such as the Primate of Ireland.

It was the latter who brought one small error of attribution on Edgeworth's part to her father's attention. Edgeworth's description of his reaction to this piece of information is worth quoting as it shows how concerned Richard Lovell Edgeworth became lest his own reputation as an author might be exposed to criticism through the imminent publication of his daughter's *Professional Education*. Edgeworth told her aunt:

His [i.e. the Primate's] eagle eye ... darted instantly upon a great blunder of mine, in one of the notes in which I have mistaken Charles Fox's father for Charles Fox. I had found this out after the book went to press; but too late for the errata & my father had absurd hopes that by some jumblement [sic] it would pass undetected but upon [receiving?] the Primate's letter his alarm was so great that he wrote to Gilbert & Hodges to forbid his sending any of the copies just arrived for our friends, till he cd [sic] see and correct this blunder. ... Mrs Foster brought us down a copy which her son got out of the Custom House, from Gilbert's parcel, last night, before she came down here – We have now seen the blunder face to face. It is not so glaring or hideous as I dreaded. ... My father is most anxious that he should have all the honours of war about Prof Ed, as he says my uncle gratified him much by the kind attention with which he read it. ... My father, who will bear all the blame of it, has been so good-humoured & so kind about it, that I can hardly forgive myself for my carelessness.³⁵⁷

What is noticeable in her above account of her father's reactions to the Primate's criticism is that Edgeworth, whilst ostensibly very regretful of having slipped up with respect to one minor detail in her work, regards her error of attribution really as quite a small 'blunder'. Moreover, a definite irritation with her father for his being so unduly anxious with regard to the reception of *Professional Education* shows through. Edgeworth's above response also conveys her sense of disappointment at the realisation that after the months of hard work and detailed research, which she had invested in this project, it is her father who wants to 'have all the honours of war about Prof Ed'.

Professional Education was eventually published in the summer of 1809. It sold well and the Edgeworths' publisher Joseph Johnson brought out a third edition by November of the same year. As both Edgeworth and her father had hoped, the work was also discussed by the prestigious *Edinburgh Review*. However, the review itself turned out to be a great

³⁵⁷ See Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Ruxton, Edgeworthstown, not dated, June 1809, Letter 696, Reel 5.

disappointment as the reviewer had skirted around the crucial question as to whether *Professional Education* was a book 'worth buying' or 'worth borrowing' and had remained, at best, ambiguous in his observations about the work. He remarked, for instance, 'we would advise our readers to weigh diligently the importance of these interrogations, before they take any decided step as to this work of Mr Edgeworth's; the more especially as the name carries with it considerable authority, and seems, in the estimation of the unwary, almost to include the idea of purchase'.³⁵⁸

Worse than this damning of *Professional Education* by means of faint praise was the fact that the review shifted the entire discussion of the work away from its actual subject onto an old debate among men of letters as to the relative importance of Greek and Latin in the educational curriculum of public schools. An exasperated Edgeworth reported back to her aunt Ruxton: 'I have this morning seen the Ed Rev [sic] of Prof Ed [sic] which we all think the most stupid insufficient review of a book we ever read – in fact it is no review of a book but an essay on two or thrice pages in the work on the classical literature – and in this essay of theirs they have repeated a dozen times all that my father has said & without reference or acknowledgement almost his very words'.³⁵⁹ Due to the reviewer's preoccupation with the Classics versus modern languages debate, practically no attention was paid to some of the more unconventional aspects of Edgeworth's discussion of the professions in *Professional Education*.³⁶⁰

Among them Edgeworth's inclusion of the category of the 'country gentlemen' among the range of modern professions.³⁶¹ For, what had traditionally distinguished the gentleman from the rest of society was precisely the circumstance that he was a man of leisure and, as such, had no circumscribed area of employment.³⁶² By deciding to critically examine the education which a country gentleman was likely to receive in early nineteenth-century Britain,

³⁵⁸ *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume XXIX, 1809, 41. The reputation of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's 'name' as a writer which the reviewer draws attention to was, of course, mainly built upon the publication of *Practical Education* (1798). As I have pointed out in Chapter 3, it was Edgeworth, not her father, who wrote the overwhelming part of *Practical Education*.

³⁵⁹ See Maria Edgeworth to Mrs. Ruxton, Edgeworthstown, 10 November 1809, Letter 716, Reel 5.

³⁶⁰ It is interesting that the reviewer, who assumes that the author of *Professional Education* is a man, praises the writer for refraining from canting in a 'canting age' and not 'harping upon Church or King, in order to sell his books'. He compliments the author on being 'manly, independent [and] liberal' and for being an 'active, enterprising and unprejudiced' writer. See *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume XXIX, 41.

³⁶¹ Maria Edgeworth, *Essays on Professional Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1809). All subsequent references to *Professional Education* are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *PE* and cited parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

³⁶² In his study of the landed classes in England, Stone stresses that the 'appearance of leisure' was still essential to the self-understanding of the gentleman. He maintains that it was important to the self-definition of the English gentleman that there was nothing professional about him. See Stone, *An Open Elite*, 169; 174.

and by suggesting ways of altering and improving the same, Edgeworth questions not just the adequacy of the traditional educational model, but also probes the question which actual function the country gentleman is to have in modern British society.

She argues in her chapter 'On the Education of Country Gentlemen' that parents of the up-and-coming generation of the male British gentry would be well advised to inculcate in their expectant heirs a desire 'to seek distinction [in life] by other merits than merely those of bearing a certain name, or being heir to a certain number of acres'. The trappings of a gentlemanly existence, such as the luxurious life-style — the convivial drinking, dining, hunting or gaming — which is shared by large sections of the gentry, should not be confused, so Edgeworth insists, with the essence of what the term 'gentleman' ought ideally to stand for.³⁶³

In the above and similar passages contained in *Professional Education*, Edgeworth suggests that even men who would traditionally be classed as members of the gentry, have to strive towards the attainment of certain mental and moral qualities before they are entitled to merit the epithet of 'gentleman'. The circumstance of a genteel birth provides a man with a privileged starting position in life but it does not entitle him automatically to either regard himself, or be regarded by others, as a gentleman. The latter description is reserved for those alone who have demonstrated by their behaviour and their actions that they merit the title.

Edgeworth's ideal country gentleman has to possess not only 'independence of character' and 'principles of honour' (*PE*, 251) but a 'range of knowledge ... more extensive than can be conceived by men of contracted views' (*PE*, 256). According to Edgeworth, the model country-gentleman combines in his person the multiple roles of 'master of the family', 'landlord', 'magistrate', 'grand juror' and 'elector'. Additionally, he must be 'a good subject'

³⁶³ Edgeworth distinguishes between conventional country squires and modern country gentlemen. She claims that 'The obstinacy of ignorance and of imaginary self-importance used to be one of the common ludicrous characteristics of our English squires, but the Sir Wilful of Congreve, the Western of Fielding, and the Tony Lumpkin of Goldsmith, are not now to be found in the most remote part of England. The ignorant, hunting, drunken, obstinate, jovial, freedom-loving tyrant is no more to be seen, except in old novels and plays. The ptarmigan, the bustard, the cock of the woods, and the country squire, are nearly extinct. Instead of country squires, we now have country gentlemen. The diffusion of knowledge, and the advantages of polite and literary education, have silently and gradually operated this melioration' (*PE*, 255). Edgeworth's insistence in *Professional Education* that the former type of English country squire is a practically extinct social species is a move familiar from *Castle Rackrent*, where Edgeworth had consigned gentry families like the Rackrents to a antiquated past which has long since become history. The fact that she is making a similar claim with regard to the English country squires in *Professional Education* suggests that, to Edgeworth's mind, there was nothing culturally inherent or distinctive in the national character of either Ireland or England which in itself could account for this change in social mores. In Edgeworth's model of civilisation, social change takes place as the result of a natural evolutionary process in which mankind progresses gradually from one stage of development to the next.

and, in order to exercise his many social functions correctly, he must possess qualifications in a number of different professional fields (*PE*, 256). Ever attentive to economic realities, Edgeworth readily concedes that a gentleman's 'independence of mind' can only be guaranteed by his having access to an 'independent fortune' (*PE*, 247), but leaving this caveat aside, *Professional Education*, at times, reads like a manifesto for a new social order. The society Edgeworth envisages is certainly one in which inherited privilege plays less of a role than that which the talented and self-disciplined individual can achieve by dint of his own exertions.

The potentially radical implications of the attitude exhibited by Edgeworth in *Professional Education* can best be judged by considering how she translated her version of the new country gentleman into fiction. *Ennui*, which she had written whilst she was still working on *Professional Education*³⁶⁴, reflects Edgeworth's close engagement with questions surrounding the definition of the modern British country gentleman. Half-way through *Ennui*, Edgeworth's hero finds out that, despite his highly privileged up-bringing as heir to an aristocratic family, he is not actually of genteel birth. Although clearly shaken by this unexpected discovery, Lord Glenthorn decides after a short period of reflection to do the honourable thing and pass on the vast Irish estate, which he had wrongly believed to be his, to Christy O' Donoghoe, a local blacksmith, who, although brought up among peasants, is the legitimate son of the late Lord Glenthorn and therefore the rightful owner of the castle and lands. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that Lord Glenthorn is suddenly reduced from a life of opulence to the modest income of £300 per annum, Edgeworth portrays him as regaining his equanimity of mind surprisingly quickly. Lord Glenthorn appears remarkably resigned to his fate, consoling himself by the consideration that — even if he is not actually of genteel birth — 'at least I have been bred a gentleman'.³⁶⁵ His ready acceptance of the notion that education

³⁶⁴ A reference to the publication of her *Tales of Fashionable Life* series (of which *Ennui* was a part) in a letter to Sophy illustrates Edgeworth's method of working simultaneously on a number of different writing projects. She remarked: 'Thank you for sending Prof Ed. to her [i.e. an acquaintance of the family] — a copy of *Tales of Fashionable Life* reached us here yesterday in a frank of Fosters — they look well enough — not very good paper but better than Pop. tales — they will be out in a week from this day & Johnson swears (but will certainly deceive me) that 10 copies for our friends shall be in Dublin as soon as coaches & ships can carry them — My other plan was to write a story in which young men of all the different professions should act a part — like the Contrast in higher life or like the Freeman family only without Princes and without any possible allusion to our family'. See ME to SR, Edgeworthstown, 10 May 1809, Letter 688, Reel 5. Edgeworth's mentioning of her plan to write a fictional work with a whole cast of professional characters is an early reference to what was to evolve into her novel *Patronage* (1814).

³⁶⁵ Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui* (1809), *Volume 1* in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 276. All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *E* and appear parenthetically in the main body of the text.

rather than a birth makes a man into a gentleman gives a first indication that Lord Glenthorn's definition of gentlemanly status and behaviour will differ from traditional models.

As Lord Glenthorn begins to adjust to his newly straitened circumstances, and the loss of social status which goes hand in hand with his no longer having either a title, a fortune, or an estate, he gives voice to the opinion that 'any man ... may be made a lord; but a gentleman, a man must make himself' (*E*, 282). This statement, coming, as it does, from one, who, up to recently, defined himself a lord draws attention to the idea that not all the upper-class men who nominally belong to the social category of the gentlemen class may be de facto gentlemen.

And yet, how unconventional is Lord Glenthorn really in declaring that a man is made a gentleman by something other than genteel origins? Even characters in mid-eighteenth-century British literature, such as Tobias Smollet's hero in *Roderick Random* (1748), had to learn early on in their journeys towards mature selfhood that to be of genteel birth was not in itself enough for the individual who aspired to be regarded as a gentleman by society. During the course of the novel Roderick is thrown into the company of fox-hunting squires similar to the kind depicted by Edgeworth in her chapter on country gentlemen in *Professional Education*. His encounters with these serve to strengthen Roderick's growing conviction that being a gentleman involves more than birth, money or even good manners. As John Barrell points out in his subtle and elegant discussion of Smollet's novel, Roderick gradually learns through his observation of others (i.e. of would-be and actual gentlemen) that 'it is not enough to be of gentle birth; nor is it enough (though it is indispensable) to have the means to support oneself without any need to follow an employment; it is also necessary to behave, and to think like a gentleman'.³⁶⁶

However, whereas life teaches Smollet's hero that genteel origins alone do not suffice, Edgeworth, in her portrayal of Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui*, goes one step further. For Lord Glenthorn states not only that a genteel birth is not a sufficient condition in the determination of whether a man can justifiably be considered a gentleman, he considers it not even as a necessary one. Edgeworth, in line with her reformist agenda for the British upper classes generally, replaces the necessity of a genteel birth with that of a sound education. Edgeworth emphasises that Lord Glenthorn's biggest failing in life to date has been that he deliberately spurned the opportunity to acquire an education which is commensurate with the position of

³⁶⁶ John Barrell, Chapter 3: "A diffused picture, an uniform plan: Roderick Random in the labyrinth of Britain", in *English Literature in History: 1730-80; An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 194.

social responsibility into which he had been placed since birth. Lord Glenthorn's lack of education has had a detrimental effect not only on his own life, which so far has been wasted on purely hedonistic pursuits, but has prevented him from contributing anything useful to society. As Lord Glenthorn reflects on the mistakes of his former life:

I had travelled through my own country without making even a single remark upon the various degrees of industry and civilisation visible in different parts of the kingdom. In fact, it never occurred to me that it became a British nobleman to have some notion of the general state of that empire, in the legislation of which he has a share; nor had I the slightest notion that political economy was requisite to my rank in life or situation in society.
(*E*, 252)

What Edgeworth, in essence, argues is that Lord Glenthorn — although possessed in his life up to now with all the outward appearances of a gentlemanly existence — will in fact only become a gentleman when he decides to rectify the mistakes of his by-gone self-indulgent lifestyle and educate himself. Through her reference to the idle and fruitless sort of travels he went on formerly in England, Edgeworth draws her reader's attention to the importance of travelling generally.

Her emphasis on the importance of travel as a vital component in connection with Lord Glenthorn's further education also links *Ennui* thematically to *Professional Education*, where Edgeworth had strongly recommended that a gentleman ought to travel 'in his own country' as it was incumbent upon him to 'inform himself of the modes of living, manners and opinions of all ranks of people' (*PE*, 264). Describing 'the principle objects' with regard to his travels, Edgeworth had expressed the belief that travelling allowed a gentleman the opportunity of 'instructing himself [further]', of 'enlarging his mind' and therefore 'increasing his power of doing good' (*PE*, 266). As can be seen from her above comments, Edgeworth puts emphasis on the dual purpose of a gentleman's travels by stating her conviction that travelling will increase not only his self-knowledge but, crucially, also his knowledge of his country of residence.

What is noticeable with regard to Lord Glenthorn's travels in Ireland is that the journey through the country on which he goes before discovering his real parentage and subsequent loss of social status teaches him nothing useful about life in Ireland. He clearly states this when he remarks that although he 'travelled all over Ireland, from north to south' he returns

from his travels with the feeling that he 'has seen nothing of the country or of its inhabitants' (*E*, 251).

One reason which Edgeworth identifies as a cause of Lord Glenthorn's failure to draw any personal benefit or valid observations on Ireland from his first journey through the country is that in his former role as an aristocratic English visitor to Ireland he travels without having developed the capacity to study the people, sights and scenes he encounters with real and sustained critical attention. In light of the fact that the English had the reputation³⁶⁷ of having pioneered the exploration and travel to many parts of not just Europe but to other, more distant locations around the globe, Edgeworth's diagnosis of Lord Glenthorn as an inadequate traveller (on his first journey through Ireland) is initially somewhat puzzling. Edgeworth explains that one of the reasons for Lord Glenthorn's unsatisfactory first journey through Ireland is that he followed in the well-trodden paths of other English visitors to the country, taking in only the sites of common touristic interest, such as the Giant's Causeway in County Antrim and the Lakes of Killarney in County Kerry (*E*, 250). This kind of travelling, which is characterised by the pursuit of the merely pleasurable and picturesque, is, according to Edgeworth, neither fruitful nor appropriate in relation to Ireland.

Ireland requires a different approach on the part of the traveller. In fact, Edgeworth argues that Ireland deserves and ought to be treated as an object of serious intellectual inquiry. As a member of the Ascendancy in Ireland Edgeworth would have been especially aware of the politics surrounding Ireland's representation in England. She and her father had reviewed one recent English traveller's account of Ireland for the *Edinburgh Review*, which had invited them to discuss John Carr's *Stranger in Ireland* (1805). In this review the Edgeworths had, above all, expressed their disappointment about Carr's tendency to make either 'stale jests' about Ireland or pay it 'fulsome compliments'. At the opening of their review the Edgeworths explained their concept of the correct English approach to Ireland: 'The Union has certainly created a demand for a statistical, economical, moral, and political view of Ireland, with a clear explanation of the causes which have, for nearly three centuries, impeded its progress in civilization; and a statement of such remedies as sound policy and practical humanity suggests for its improvement'.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ In his study of eighteenth-century travel, Thomas M. Curly stresses that travelling was regarded as a specifically English 'national past-time'. See Thomas M. Curly, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 48. However, Curly also points out that the English as travellers 'were notorious for emphasizing human difference to the prejudice of other nations'. See *Ibid*, 84.

³⁶⁸ See the Edgeworths' review of Carr's book in *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume X, 1807, 42; 41.

What Edgeworth envisages is a traveller who comes to Ireland with an enlightened and rational frame of mind. Lacking both the education and discipline which are necessary in order to carry out such a thorough and disinterested survey of the country, Lord Glenthorn is effectively unable to draw any meaningful conclusions from his first journey through Ireland. However, whilst his lack of education is one definite factor in his failure 'to see' and make sense of what he encounters on his travels in Ireland, his nationality, as Edgeworth emphasises, is an even more serious stumbling block. As Lady Geraldine, commenting on her English cousin Lord Craiglethorpe, explains to Lord Glenthorn, most English visitors to Ireland come with both prejudices and an agenda of their own.³⁶⁹ This is the case because they themselves follow in the footsteps of a long line of English travellers in Ireland who viewed the country in terms of presenting a problem and also as 'a spectacle which was essentially different from England'.³⁷⁰ As Ina Ferris remarks, to the English, Ireland, even after its Union with England, remains to be seen and described in terms of representing 'a sister who is somehow not kin'.³⁷¹ Standard English responses to Ireland range from pronouncing it to be a place so foreign as to render it beyond the possibility of a positive comparison with England to those English visitors (like Lord Glenthorn) who travel through Ireland in a cavalier fashion, fail to take the locality seriously and treat both the country and its people as a joke.

Significantly, it is only once Lord Glenthorn has discovered his real parentage and, in a sense, shed his English birth and cultural affiliations that his travels in Ireland begin to be of both interest and value to him. That this is a transformation which is beginning to happen almost as soon as he leaves Glenthorn Castle and has to make his way through Ireland without either the status or the accoutrements of a high-born English visitor, such as fashionable clothes, his own carriage and servants, Edgeworth makes plain by observing that from that

³⁶⁹ Lord Craiglethorpe travels through Ireland with the intention of turning his observation on the country and people into a book. Lady Geraldine comments on the reasons why his account of Ireland will be inaccurate and incomplete. She says: 'Posting from one great man's house to another, what can he see or know of the manners of people but of the class of the gentry ... As to the lower classes, I don't think he ever speaks to them; or, if he does, what good can it do him? For he can't understand their modes of expression, nor they his ... So, after posting from Dublin to Cork, and from the Giant's Causeway to Killarney; after travelling east, west, north and south, my wise cousin Craiglethorpe will know just as much of the lower Irish as the cockney who has never been out of London' (*E*, 217).

³⁷⁰ See John P. Harrington, *The English Traveller in Ireland: Accounts of Ireland and the Irish through Five Centuries* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1992), introduction, 9. Harrington draws particular attention to how the 'ideological constructs [of the Irish] were perpetuated and inherited [by the English]' with the result that they eventually narrow the field of vision'. *Ibid.*, 12. His analysis seems especially apt in view of Edgeworth's description of Lord Glenthorn as not being able 'to see' anything during his first journey through Ireland.

³⁷¹ See Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), introduction, 4. The viewing and representation of England's new relationship with Ireland in terms of a familial relationship was a common post-Union trope and something which Edgeworth herself had made use of in *Castle Rackrent* where she had described Ireland as England's 'sister country'.

time onwards Lord Glenthorn feels as if he were travelling 'incognito' (*E*, 283.) Although the discovery of his real birth robs him, for a period, of either a personal identity or a cultural identity of his own, it has the positive effect of allowing him for the first time to truly open his eyes and take a less prejudiced look at Ireland itself. In doing so Lord Glenthorn discovers many new and surprising facts about the country of his future residence.

In this manner Edgeworth cleverly links Lord Glenthorn's slowly developing sense of place to his personal, intellectual and professional growth as a man. Eighteenth-century convention dictated that a gentleman should have a broad education and it was also expected of him to be interested in a wide range of subjects and follow a number of different pursuits.³⁷² Crucial to the definition of a gentleman was, however, that he furthered his knowledge-base in his leisure time and that his sole reason for acquiring greater competence in any one subject or area consisted in the pleasure he experienced in the process of learning itself. Gentlemanly pursuits were seen in a very different light to regular occupations (such as Lord Glenthorn's work as a barrister).

To have a regular occupation, as in a trade or even in the professions, was equated with having an identity which was solely defined by one's daily employment. As Barrell points out, in a Britain of an ever expanding range of specialised trades and professions, 'people *are* what they do'. Having recourse only to the specific vocabulary of their trade or profession, people with regular occupations are seen as having a fixed identity. This is seen as 'a disability', as their narrowly circumscribed area of employment is thought to prevent them from ever being able to attain an overview of society.³⁷³ In contrast, the ideal gentleman has a general knowledge of the world and, additionally, the leisure time to reflect and make judgements on the happenings of the world. He alone is in a position which allows him (potentially at least) to gain a comprehensive view of society. Barrell describes the ideal gentleman therefore as the original 'homme universel'. Ideally, a gentleman is 'no one thing in particular, but an epitome of all men in general'. He also draws attention to the paradox underlying this traditional definition and describes the ideal gentleman as being 'in a condition of empty potential'. On

³⁷² Barnard, for instance, lists a great number of Ascendancy gentleman proprietors who prided themselves in their knowledge of architecture and their competence in designing houses according to the latest building fashions. See Toby Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure: Lives and Possessions in Ireland, 1641-1770* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

³⁷³ See John Barrell, *English Literature in History*, 182;183.

the one hand, he is 'imagined as being able to comprehend everything' but, on the other, he 'may give no evidence of having comprehended anything'.³⁷⁴

Edgeworth's hero in *Ennui* clearly goes against this older, eighteenth-century definition of the gentleman by putting his knowledge of law³⁷⁵ into practice and working as a barrister. The process involved in acquiring the discipline of studying, and in learning to apply himself to his chosen subject, provides Lord Glenthorn of course with much more than a professional qualification. The educational process, in Edgeworth's eyes, becomes the means which cures him of his psychological condition of ennui and lends his life a new moral purpose. Moreover, Edgeworth considers it as praiseworthy and as a mark of his growing personal maturity that Lord Glenthorn — upon discovering his real genetic origins — develops 'sufficient strength of mind to rely upon himself', that he succeeds in mustering up 'sufficient energy to exert his abilities' and that he 'becomes independent of common report and vulgar opinion' (*E*, 291).

Given what appears to be Edgeworth's wholesale endorsement of the life-changing course of action embarked upon by Lord Glenthorn, it comes as somewhat a surprise at the end of the novel that he decides to quit his new profession altogether (subsequent to winning his one and only case on the Irish circuit). It certainly seems to go against the grain of the novel that Lord Glenthorn, at the moment of finding his first success as a barrister, decides to retire (at the relatively young age of thirty-four) and chooses to settle down to the quiet existence of a country gentleman. However, it must be remembered that it had been Edgeworth's plan all along in *Ennui* to demonstrate that even a character with Lord Glenthorn's chequered past and his inclination to 'habitual indolence' (*E*, 307) could redeem himself by acquiring a sound education, and the self-discipline which goes hand in hand with becoming educated. Edgeworth wants to see the suitably chastened and morally reformed Lord Glenthorn back in the social leadership-position of the landlord (which he can now fulfil much better) and the denouement of *Ennui* pivots therefore on a complicated change of circumstances.³⁷⁶ Lord Glenthorn marries Cecilia, a virtuous woman and young ward of Lord

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 203; 204.

³⁷⁵ Through her choice of law as the object of Lord Glenthorn's study Edgeworth was also acknowledging and, in a way, honouring a more recent tradition in her own family, in which her paternal grandfather Richard Edgeworth, her father and her younger half-brother Sneyd had sought and obtained professional qualifications as lawyers. See *MRLE*, 1:17; 1:21; 1:30; 1:74; 1:77.

³⁷⁶ *Ennui*, when being reviewed as part of the recently published *Tales of Fashionable Life* series, was criticised for its implausible ending in *The Edinburgh Review*. The reviewer, who was otherwise very favourably inclined towards Edgeworth's work, wrote: 'Of these tales, 'Ennui' perhaps is somewhat caricatured, and the denouement

Y, who is a model landlord in his own right. In addition to giving up his work as a professional man, Lord Glenthorn — upon his marriage to Cecilia — also gives up the Irish name under which he had practised as a barrister.³⁷⁷ One reason for doing so is clearly that Lord Glenthorn wishes to please his future mother-in-law, who declares that she cannot bear the thought of having her daughter announced in Dublin's Ascendancy circle as plain 'Mrs O'Donoghoe' (*E*, 306).

Whilst some critics regard the name change from O'Donoghoe to Delamere as an indication on Edgeworth's part that she considers the former a name which betrays its Irish origins and loyalties too prominently for her hero to mix with any degree of acceptance among Ireland's ruling class, others see in his choice of new surname an acknowledgement to the positive influence of the women in his life (*de la mere*, from the French, as meaning from or of the mother). Marilyn Butler points to another and very interesting possibility. She suggests that Lord Glenthorn's adoption of the Delamere name actually indicates his acknowledgement and ready acceptance of his Gaelic racial origins. According to Butler, 'The O'Donoghue' was a folk hero in the region of County Kerry and the name 'De-la-mere', being translatable as 'over the mere, or lake' ties Lord Glenthorn newly to very region in that part of Ireland where the memory of this mythological figure is still most alive.³⁷⁸

Lord Glenthorn was of course only the first among a series of gentleman heroes depicted by Edgeworth in her Irish tales and, although she had admitted to her aunt that the

is brought about by a discovery which shocks by its needless improbability'. See the *Edinburgh Review*, Volume XXVII, 1809, 379.

³⁷⁷ Upon taking up his new and modest lodgings in the Capital, Lord Glenthorn has all his correspondence addressed to 'C. O'Donoghoe, Esq., No. 6, Duke Street, Dublin'. However, when his landlady hands him the first batch of letters, which arrive for him under this name, it takes Lord Glenthorn a few moments to remember that — to the world — he is now no longer 'Lord Glenthorn' (*E*, 285). Barnard explains that 'lawyers were automatically entitled to the suffix "esquire"', and that, in Ireland, lawyers had begun to noticeably 'swell the ranks of the squirearchy'. See Toby Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestants, 1649-1770* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 121. It is interesting to note that whereas Edgeworth's grandfather, Richard Edgeworth, had been happy to be addressed as 'Squire Edgeworth' during his life-time, his son, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, declined being addressed as such, preferring instead to be described simply as 'a country gentleman'. This suggests that attitudes to titular descriptions could vary significantly even amongst members of the same family, such as Edgeworth senior and junior. Barnard remarks upon 'the new awareness of internal stratification within the gentry and quality' which had occurred in late eighteenth-century Ireland. See *ibid.*, 70. It is likely that in a historical period which witnessed an inflation in the usage of the term 'squire' as a description for all sorts of wealthy men (from landlords and lawyers down to wealthy farmers) Richard Lovell Edgeworth saw himself as set apart from the run-of-the-mill-country squire. Throughout his life-time he prided himself on his status as an 'independent gentleman', who could not be accused by anybody of having party-political interests or giving in to motives of personal gain. For instance, when Ireland's Union with England was debated in the Irish Parliament, Richard Lovell Edgeworth was offered 3000 guineas [sic] for his vote. He later wrote: 'I had a charming opportunity of advancing myself and my family, but I did not think it wise to quarrel with myself, and lose my own good opinion at my time of life'. See *MRLE*, 2:252.

³⁷⁸ See Marilyn Butler's 'Edgeworth's Ireland: History, Popular Culture, and Secret Codes' in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (34: 2, Spring, 2001), 283.

writing of *Professional Education* had left her feeling drained and exhausted, she was soon hatching plans for her next Irish tale with a gentleman hero. She told Sophy: 'As soon as I recover the desire to write which has been somewhat satiated of late I shall look over the Tales which are lying by & shall perhaps write some new ones. – I have not forgotten my promise to my dear aunt – I am actually making notes for a story for her'.³⁷⁹

Lord Colambre in *The Absentee* (1812) is the gentleman hero amongst Edgeworth's Irish tales who is perhaps most in keeping with more conventional definitions of the ideal gentleman. His education, until the date of his visit to Ireland, has taken place entirely in England and has been exemplary. He has an excellent fund of knowledge, an open, inquisitive mind and a generous character naturally inclined to the consideration of others. Although, at the beginning of the novel, Lord Colambre states that he considers English society as offering 'superior comforts, refinements and information', compared to what can be had in Ireland, his innate 'sense of duty' and his feelings of 'patriotism' motivate him to visit his native country.³⁸⁰ Fully in line with the more traditional conception of a gentleman, Lord Colambre has to gain a comprehensive view of the country where he is to live his future life. As a preparation for his role as an enlightened and responsible landlord Edgeworth dispatches him to Ireland on a social and economic fact-finding mission.

Edgeworth describes Lord Colambre at the opening of the novel as a 'very gentlemanlike looking man' (*TA*, 6). This description of him is significant. It implies, on the one hand, that whilst Lord Colambre has all the outward accoutrements of a gentleman, he may not (as yet) be in substance what he already suggests in appearance. Edgeworth's description of Lord Colambre also highlights one of the major themes of this novel; that of appearances. In *The Absentee* a whole cast of distinctly different kinds of gentlemen are introduced. Some of these, like Mr Berryl, are obviously the genuine article. He is 'a cultivated, enlightened, independent English country gentleman' (*TA*, 40). Later on, in Ireland, Lord Colambre meets Count O'Halloran, 'a fine old military gentleman, fresh from fishing', who receives his English guests with 'a mixture of military ease and gentlemanlike dignity' (*TA*, 90). His name and past career as a professional soldier who served in continental armies, combined with his antiquarian interests mark the count out immediately as a man with strong Irish connections and catholic loyalties but he is represented by Edgeworth in a positive light.

³⁷⁹ Cited from the previously quoted Letter 631.

³⁸⁰ Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812), Volume 5 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Heidi Van de Veire, Kim Walker and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 9. All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *TA* and cited parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

Like his name-sake, the surgeon Dr. O'Halloran in *Ennui*, Count O'Halloran collects the skeletons of moose-deer, who roamed the Irish country-side in a pre-historic period but have long since become extinct. In fact, the strong interest which both of these men exhibit in the very same kind of antique relics, suggests that both of these characters are loyal to an Ireland which goes back prior to its colonisation by England.³⁸¹ Mr Reynolds, who turns out to be the grandfather of Lord Colambre's future wife Grace Nugent, is described as 'an odd gentleman'. 'In spite of the red night-cap, and a flowered dressing gown, Mr Reynolds looked like a gentleman, an odd gentleman – but still a gentleman' (*TA*, 180).

Then there are examples of men who simply defy categorisations in terms of the conventional British class-system, such as the character encountered by Lord Colambre whilst travelling around Ireland: 'across the bog, and over the ditch, came another man, a half kind of gentleman, with a red silk handkerchief about his neck, and a silver-handled whip in his hand' (*TA*, 112).³⁸² *The Absentee* is a novel singularly concerned with appearances and the implications of looking the part.³⁸³

In the case of Lord Colambre something more than his visual appearance denotes his status as a gentleman to those who meet with him. For, even whilst travelling incognito³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Medicine, as Barnard explains, was the only profession in Ireland open also to Catholics (as surgeons did not have to belong to the state church). It was however not a unified professional field and standards as well as salaries could differ substantially for those who practised medicine. Some, such as Dr. O'Halloran, whose character is partly based on that of an acquaintance of Edgeworth's father in the Royal Irish Academy, were recognised as leading practitioners of their profession and made substantial contributions to institutions of learning, enquiry and charity. See Barnard, *A New Anatomy*, 130-136.

³⁸² It had been an old complaint among the English administration in Ireland that all the Irish considered themselves as gentleman. See John Davies's 'A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued nor brought under Obedience of the Crown of England', in *Ireland under Elizabeth and James the First*, ed. Henry Morely (1612; London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890), 292. Davies maintains that the non-existence of the concept of 'bastardy' in Ireland accounts for this wide-spread attitude. As I will discuss later, Davies' book is one of the four books on Ireland the reading of which Edgeworth explicitly recommends to Lord Colambre.

³⁸³ Edgeworth mocks the set of Irish tradespeople who have aspirations to live like the quality. She observes in *The Absentee* that 'from the moment a Dublin tradesman ... has made a few hundreds, he sets up his gig, and then his head is in his carriage, and not in his business; and when he has made a few thousands, he buys or builds a country-house – and, then, and thenceforward, his head, heart, and soul, are in his country-house, and only his body in the shop with his customers' (*TA*, 68). Indeed, the most comical episode in the novel revolves around the elaborate efforts of Anastasia Raffarty to prove her genteel credentials to Lord Colambre. On a more serious note, Edgeworth criticises English women like Lady Dashfort for encouraging her servants in aping the fashions, manners and life style of their employer. Without a sense of what is appropriate for their menial station in life servants are liable to develop confused notions of their own importance in the social hierarchy. Edgeworth clearly thinks that Lady Dashfort's bad example has the potential to create political unrest among the servant classes.

³⁸⁴ Like his predecessor Lord Glenthorn, Lord Colambre is dispatched by Edgeworth on a journey through Ireland. In order to travel correctly Lord Colambre (again, like Lord Glenthorn) has to cast off the mantle of being just another English visitor to Ireland. Through his adoption of the Welsh name of 'Evans' for the purpose of his journey through the country, and his choosing to align himself in this manner with another nation situated on the Celtic margins of Great Britain, Lord Colambre signals his willingness to view Ireland from the viewpoint of a sympathetic observer.

through the country, Lord Colambre is quickly identified by his Irish coach-driver as a gentleman: 'Notwithstanding the shabby great coat, the shrewd postilion perceived, by our hero's language, that he was a gentleman' (TA, 108). Lord Colambre's education has obviously influenced how he expresses himself, and this, coupled to his complete lack of colloquial expressions, the absence of even the trace of a regional accent, and his non-usage of vulgar expressions, immediately sets him apart from the bulk of people whom Larry Brady encounters on a day-to-day basis. When it comes to distinguishing the true gentleman, the significance language and vocabulary have in this evaluative process can hardly be overstated.³⁸⁵

Lord Colambre, of course, has been educated according to English standards and ideals. As he is also in possession of a Cambridge university education his use of language is correct and discriminatory. Irene Basey Beesemeyer even argues that it is Lord Colambre's English education, which teaches him 'to think through problems and find intelligent solutions'.³⁸⁶ However, with regard to his future existence as a landlord in Ireland, his excellent English education is only of use in so much that it has equipped Lord Colambre with the intellectual tools and the discipline to apply himself to any given subject. For, from her charting of Lord Colambre's experiences in *The Absentee* Edgeworth makes clear that his real education consists in learning to develop the correct attitude to Ireland. This he learns to accomplish through his journey through the country as well as his engagement with a number of key-texts on Ireland. These have the combined effect of teaching him to be more sympathetic to Ireland but also to be less swayed by the emotionally tinged responses, to which he is prone initially (such as his reaction when first coming to Dublin), and to acquire the habit of looking at his surroundings with an attitude of 'rational curiosity' (TA, 89). As his

³⁸⁵ In this context it is interesting to recall that Edgeworth's own father, not otherwise a man who appears to have given in easily to peer-pressure, remembered being mocked by the nick-name of 'Little Irish' when sent to school at Warwick in England at the age of eight. In order to rectify this situation, which clearly made him feel deeply uncomfortable and marginalised among his fellow pupils, he tried his best to achieve a more standard English accent. However, when Richard Lovell Edgeworth was placed in a boarding school in Drogheda some years later, he was ridiculed for speaking with an accent which sounded foreign to Anglo-Irish ears. What is striking is that much later in life, when remembering this episode of his childhood, Edgeworth's father still thinks it necessary to insist that his adult accent is fully English and that anybody meeting him takes him to be an Englishman. His admission that, as far as his pronunciation is concerned, he is even nowadays sometimes thought to be a 'Cumberland man' or, even, 'a German', and his warning to parents that the speech habits developed in early childhood are 'scarcely corrigible', sit oddly with the above claim, and illustrate the intense pressure of speaking a standard, entirely accent-less kind of English, to which he must have felt subjected in his youth. See *MRLE*, 1:47-48; 1:62; 1:63.

³⁸⁶ See Irene Basey Beesemeyer's ' "I thought I never set my eyes on a finer man": Maria Edgeworth Scrutinizes Masculinity in *Castle Rackrent*, *Ennui*, and *The Absentee*', in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 129.

new friend Sir James Brooke explains he does not want him to commit ‘the common error of travellers – the deducing general conclusions from a few particular cases, or arguing from exceptions, as if they were rules’ (TA, 65).

Sir James commends Lord Colambre’s attention to four important works on Ireland (TA, 65). These are Edmund Spenser’s *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), John Davies’s *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued* (1612), Arthur Young’s *Tour in Ireland* (1780) and Daniel Augustus Beaufort’s *Memoir of a Map of Ireland* (1792). His choice of books is significant. Both Spenser and Davies, albeit at different times, had been posted in Ireland as members of England’s colonial administrative body. Their view of the country is therefore firmly located within the entrenched paradigm which sees Ireland in terms of presenting a long-term problem for England.³⁸⁷ Edgeworth’s inclusion of these two works in Sir James’s reading list for Lord Colambre strikes one initially as odd, especially in light of the fact that she, elsewhere in *The Absentee*, actively strives to get away from re-awakening deeply ingrained and unfavourable English associations of Ireland. The two works do, however, draw Lord Colambre’s attention to the long history of the difficult relationship which exists between England and Ireland.³⁸⁸ Equipped with the knowledge of past problems and misunderstandings between England and Ireland, Lord Colambre will be in a better position to diagnose remaining and even new, modern-day difficulties in Anglo-Irish relations.

Of course Edgeworth’s mentioning of Spenser and Davies (whose works on Ireland can be of only historical interest to a modern reader like Lord Colambre) also has the effect of lending her own Irish tale considerable authorial gravitas. As Ferris reminds us, this was singularly important for a genre like that of the national tale, which although part of a distinctly feminine approach to questions surrounding national identity, sought to locate itself firmly in the within the discourse of serious literature on Ireland.

Arthur Young, on the other hand, is an author, whom Edgeworth actively praises, not just in *The Absentee* but also in *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui*. Her reason for paying him repeated tribute is that, to Edgeworth’s mind, Young helped to inaugurate the style of travelling in Ireland which she deems productive and helpful. His kind of empirical approach

³⁸⁷ Although Davies, who is less hostile in his attitude to Ireland and Irish people generally than Spenser, already cites the unequal application of the law as one reason why England continued to have so many problems in its administration of Ireland. He remarks: ‘Without having the status of subjects they cannot obey the king as their sovereign’. See Davies, *A Discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued*, 368.

³⁸⁸ There is also the possibility that Edgeworth may have been drawing Lord Colambre’s attention to the history of past injustices on England’s part towards Ireland.

to travelling, which involves the collection of hard facts and statistical data on Ireland (i.e. Young made notes on everything, from the minerals, soils, practices of agriculture in Ireland to housing and observations on Irish society itself) is held up as a model for emulation. In this sense, Edgeworth's praise of Young can be seen as an encouragement on her part to Lord Colambre to follow his approach in his own explorative travels through Ireland.

Lastly, with her reference to Beaufort's *Memoir of a Map of Ireland* Edgeworth draws Lord Colambre's attention to a more recent work on Ireland and one in which the perspective is not that of an English coloniser in Ireland nor that of an enlightened modern English agriculturalist like Young but that of a gentleman who resides permanently in Ireland and who views the country with a sympathetic eye if not a patriotic attitude. Beaufort's book, although it contained an actual map of Ireland, was far more than a work which comprised information about the position of Ireland's main towns and villages as well as its main topographical features. As a man with a strong interest in local history Beaufort³⁸⁹ had carried out diligent researches in a number of different counties and been careful to include detailed descriptions of ancient Irish monuments and structures in his work. His work had been published in Dublin during the period before the 1798 rising and at a time when the vogue for all things of antiquarian interest in Ireland had been at a highpoint.

The name of the character who recommends the above mentioned works on Ireland to Lord Colambre is also highly significant. As Heidi Thomas and Kim Walker have pointed out, his surname points to the real-life person of Henry Brooke (1703-1783), an author who, like Edgeworth, was permanently resident in Ireland, in nearby County Cavan, and whose daughter Charlotte Brooke had recently brought out her *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1798) to almost universal critical acclaim (in both Ireland and England). This was a work which Edgeworth had read and of which she had expressed her admiration in a letter to Sneyd.³⁹⁰

Edgeworth's paying tribute to both Beaufort's depiction of Ireland and Charlotte Brooke's celebration of its rich poetic heritage suggests that she deems it desirable also for her gentleman hero Lord Colambre to develop a receptive attitude to these aspects of Irish life and culture. In any case, Lord Colambre's engagement with the above mentioned four key works on Ireland will ensure that he is as well-informed and as balanced as possible prior to forming his opinion about the modern Ireland.

³⁸⁹ Beaufort was also somebody whom Edgeworth knew personally and very well as he was the father of her last step-mother Frances.

³⁹⁰ See their note on the Brooke family in *The Absentee*, ed. Heidi Thomas and Kim Walker (1812; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), 265.

However, even with travelling and reading Lord Colambre's preparations for his future role are not completed. If he is to follow in the footsteps of Edgeworth's ideal country gentleman in *Professional Education*, he will, in addition, have to study 'the different practices of agriculture', talk 'to farmers' and make an effort to get to know 'their notions of rural economy' as well as 'their prejudices' (*PE*, 264). In fact, the more one looks at Edgeworth's country gentleman in *Professional Education*, the more one realises just how much Lord Colambre still has to learn if he is to measure up to the ideal. Not only will he need to possess the knowledge of an agricultural expert and the managerial skills of a steward; he also needs to be able to survey his own land and decide on its best usage. Edgeworth goes so far as to claim that the ideal country gentleman has to gain an in-depth knowledge of 'the value and price of land', 'of tenants and rents'; in fact, he has to learn 'to deal in land as tradesmen deal in different countries' (*PE*, 257).

In the above passage of *Professional Education*, Edgeworth's description of the qualifications necessary in the exemplary landlord sound curiously similar to those one would expect of a professional agent.³⁹¹ Edgeworth also expects her model country-gentleman to experiment with crop-rotation, new planting methods and machinery and generally, to contribute to 'improvements in husbandry or mechanism' (*PE*, 271). Although these unusual gentlemanly activities are mentioned by Edgeworth alongside more recognisably genteel pursuits, such as literature and landscape-gardening, there is a noticeable blurring between those spheres of masculine employment which are a gentleman's conventional leisure activities and those which are usually only filled by men with specialised professions. Edgeworth explicitly stresses that 'country gentlemen are not ... doomed to be mere amateurs' (*PE*, 276).

Amateurism was, however, as we have already seen, regarded as a positive quality and associated of old exclusively with the gentleman class. By definition a gentleman's knowledge was expected to be diffuse and not specific. Historical evidence suggests that very few of the

³⁹¹ Barnard maintains that, in Ireland, agents in the eighteenth-century used to be drawn from a 'high social station'. He further observes that although the nominal salary of an agent was often not great, when combined with other work, many an agent managed to live 'a near genteel life'. The position of the agent, for which no agreed qualification existed, was one of the few areas of employment also open to Catholics. However, Catholics, when working as agents, could not become justices of peace. From the beginning of the nineteenth-century, agents drawn 'overseas from Britain' became increasingly the norm in Ireland. See Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland*, 211-212; 226-227; 237. Barnard's historical records tie in with Edgeworth's portrayal of the agent class in her Irish fictions. Both the good agent (Mr McLeod) and the bad agent (Mr Hardcastle) in *Ennui* are foreigners. Mr Burke, the agent in *The Absentee* is described by Edgeworth as a 'right bred gentleman' (*TA*, 102), who, in his own neighbourhood, is respected by landlord and tenant alike.

landlord class in either Ireland or England were 'active in improving agriculture'. According to Stone, 'most inheritor owners of estates were little more than passive rentiers'.³⁹² Some gentleman saw their country seats indeed as places where the 'the fulfilment of paternalistic obligation' could be exercised, but to the minds of most gentleman they figured primarily as places dedicated to 'leisure and entertainment'.³⁹³

The agriculturalist Young had even claimed that gentlemen were incapable of giving a 'farmer's attention to business'.³⁹⁴ He argued that it could not be expected of a gentleman to 'forgo his diversions, his excursions of pleasure, the company of his friends' and the 'joys of society' in order to superintend the day-to-day running of an estate farm. Young reasoned that 'Cattle of no kind will thrive but in the master's eye: every variation of the season to be remarked; the lucky moment for ploughing, harrowing, sowing, reaping, etc. to be caught, and used with diligence and foresight; fences for ever to be attended to; and in short, a million of things, which require constant thought and endless application'. Summing up Young's attitude, Beth Fowkes Tobin comments: 'Young does not believe that a gentleman can be expected to perform with consistency and regularity any of these tasks and still remain a gentleman pursuing gentlemanly pleasures'.³⁹⁵

What the opinion expressed above by Young serves to underline most is perhaps the extent to which Edgeworth's own father differed from not only his fellow Anglo-Irish landlords³⁹⁶ but also from conventional English gentleman who tried their hands at farming. Working, throughout his life, not only as a writer and educationalist but also as an architect, engineer and designer of new mechanical and communication devices, as well as household appliances, Richard Lovell Edgeworth must have been a man with considerable abilities and skills in a wide range of masculine employment.³⁹⁷ As the ideal country gentleman depicted

³⁹² See Stone, *An Open Elite*, 141-142.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, 174.

³⁹⁴ Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternalist Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 32.

³⁹⁵ See Fowkes Tobin, *Superintending the Poor*, 33. Fowkes Tobin makes the point that it was in Young's interest 'to discredit the managerial abilities of the landed upper classes'. *Ibid*, 32. Young came to prominence at a time in Britain when many occupations, such as those of the farm manager or agricultural consultant, had just begun to emerge. One of his motives for arguing against a more direct involvement of the gentleman class in the running of their estates could therefore have been to keep open a newly created employment niche for men like himself, who were hired by many a landlord as agricultural consultants.

³⁹⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda argues that, in Ireland, big farmers and not landlords drove improvements in agriculture forward. See Cormac Ó Gráda's 'Poverty, population, and agriculture, 1801-45', in *A New History of Ireland, Volume 5*, ed. W. E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 129.

³⁹⁷ Additionally, he contributed to improvements in transportation vehicles, devised a revolutionary new method for surfacing roads, worked for over a year as an unsalaried surveyor of the midland's bog areas, and experimented on his estate lands with everything from fertilizers to a new miniature railway system.

by Edgeworth both in *Professional Education* as well as in *The Absentee* obviously owes so much to the personality and the diverse interests of her father, is it not surprising that there is a blurring of those spheres of manly activity which are conventional gentlemanly pursuits and those which are normally only undertaken by professional men.

Harry Ormond, Edgeworth's next budding gentleman in *Ormond* (1817), is remarkable for the fact that his portrait actively goes against one of the main principles of education to which Edgeworth's father subscribed. Not only has his education been imparted to him in a most hap-hazard and disorganised fashion (such as was the case with Lord Glenthorn), it is practically non-existent so that Harry has to completely re-educate himself when he is just at the point of reaching adulthood. Harry was 'let run wild at home' and, since his early youth, has become completely 'ungovernable'.³⁹⁸ The whole tenor of *Professional Education*, however, goes to prove that if the foundations for education are not laid early on in childhood there can be little or no hope of altering the bad habits of a previous life-time. Indeed, Edgeworth's father was so adamant in his belief that he declared a child's natural ability or preference towards certain subjects as altogether irrelevant in the process of deciding upon a future career for it. Under his influence Edgeworth wrote in the introduction: 'the [child's] predisposition is of so inconsiderable an amount, that it cannot reasonably influence the [parent's] decision' (*PE*, 4); 'bent of mind, impulse of genius, natural turn, etc., mean nothing' (*PE*, 5).³⁹⁹

Harry Ormond is also the only one among the fictional cast of Edgeworth's gentlemen who has been brought up entirely in the region of Ireland where he is later to be landlord. Indeed, being an orphan and lacking a parental up-bringing meant that Harry has spent more time with game-keepers, villagers and estate workers than with people of his own class (his

³⁹⁸ Maria Edgeworth, *Ormond* (1817), Volume 8 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Claire Connolly (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 11. All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *O* and cited parenthetically in the main body of the text.

³⁹⁹ Richard Lovell Edgeworth's conviction in this matter led to some of the more bizarre suggestions in *Professional Education*. For instance, the chapter 'On Military and Naval Education' suggests to parents, whose child is later to become a soldier or sailor, to let the head of their toddler boy become 'accustomed to the sun' and 'his feet to the snow'. It claims that it is a good idea to vary the child's 'hours of sleep and waking' (*PE*, 110), to feed it 'meals at irregular hours' and exclude luxury articles such as tea, milk and wine (*PE*, 111) from its diet altogether as this harsh regime will inure the child against the privations he is liable to experience as a adult man in the military services.

corrupt Uncle Ulick O'Shane and his tyrannical cousin Marcus being the only exceptions). In every respect Harry therefore appears to be most unlikely gentleman material.⁴⁰⁰

In *Professional Education* Edgeworth had recommended that the boy expected to inherit a landed seat should serve a period of 'apprenticeship' (*PE*, 267) on the estate. 'The boy should ride out with his father among the tenants; should see in summer the delights of haymaking, and in winter, the good old hospitality of Christmas'. Edgeworth thought that a participation in these yearly observed social events, which brought the entire community together, could serve to create a 'bond of union between landlord and tenant' (*PE*, 261). She expressed the hope that a young man brought up according to her apprenticeship model would develop a 'local attachment' to his neighbourhood, that 'he would take root in the spot from which he is to draw his sustenance and support' so as to be 'naturalized to the soil' (*PE*, 268).

As already mentioned, the model country gentleman of Edgeworth's *Professional Education* is English but her advice with regard to establishing local affiliations and loyalties has of course special significance in relation to the Anglo-Irish landlords of her Irish tales. Esther Wohlgenut argues that Edgeworth 'reintroduces local attachment against the rootlessness of absentee culture'. She goes on to say that 'this attachment, however, is not the spontaneous and emotive national sympathy suggested by the Burkean rhetoric of national affection: rather, it is a critical concern that positions its bearer as (in Grace Nugent's words) 'not a partisan, but a friend' to Ireland'.⁴⁰¹ Wohlgenut is right, in as much as that, in *The Absentee*, Lord Colambre indeed has to learn to be less emotional in his initial responses to Ireland. What is required of him is to look at the country and its people analytically, from the vantage point of an unbiased and rational observer. One important reason why Edgeworth deems his growing attachment to Ireland desirable is simply that it is in his self-interest. Possessed with a real understanding of the local culture, he is less likely to encounter resistance among his tenantry and his estate is therefore more likely to operate successfully.

However, Harry brings something to the landlord position which neither Lord Colambre nor Lord Glenthorn possess. As Clíona Ó Gallchoir points out, Harry is the first home-bred Irish gentleman to make an appearance in Edgeworth's fiction.⁴⁰² Uniquely among

⁴⁰⁰ The sheer extent of the gap of learning he has to make up can be measured by the circumstance that Harry is the only one of Edgeworth's Anglo-Irish gentleman heroes who is sent travelling abroad, to France, in order to hone his social skills and attain some measure of cultural sophistication.

⁴⁰¹ Esther Wohlgenut, "Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity", in *Studies in English Literature*, Volume 39 (Autumn: 1999), 651.

⁴⁰² See Ó Gallchoir's excellent discussion of *Ormond* in her *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005). As Ó Gallchoir observes further, the only other cultural

Edgeworth's cast of Anglo-Irish landlords, Harry has prolonged personal experience of dealing with the local people (he has lived cheek by jowl with them since being a toddler) and has a deep-rooted affection for the place, where he is to exert his influence. Since earliest childhood, Harry has always thought of the neighbourhood where he is to live for the remainder of his life as his 'home'. His 'attachment' to place is therefore not the result of a purely intellectual exercise but comes as the natural by-product of growing up in a certain location. He is the only one among Edgeworth's gentlemen heroes who does not have to travel through Ireland in order to familiarise himself with codes of behaviour in a culture which is foreign to him. Unlike Lord Colambre it is not necessary for him to immerse himself in a reading programme on Ireland's past and present in order to come to an understanding of the country and its people.

This crucial difference is also highlighted by the attitude of his future tenants to him. The Irish population of the 'Black Islands' where Harry is to become landlord are already 'warmly attached to him' and regard him not only as 'the lawful representative' (*O*, 234) but as the natural heir to their deceased, chieftain-like leader King Corny. Unusual for Edgeworth, at certain stages in the novel, she depicts Harry's future home-place of the islands in an almost romantic light. Something of Edgeworth's own fascination with the exotic life-style on offer in the more Gaelic parts of Ireland clearly surfaces in *Ormond*.⁴⁰³

Ormond also witnesses a softening on Edgeworth's part towards the many different kinds of native-born men, who consider themselves gentlemen, and whom one is liable to encounter as part of the Irish scene. The character of Old Connal is depicted as 'an idle, decayed, good gentleman of the old Irish stock' (*O*, 67) and despite the fact that with such a description he does not exactly have Edgeworth's ringing endorsement, he is still to be preferred to his son, White Connal, who has given up being an 'idle gentleman', merely to become a profiteering 'grazier'.⁴⁰⁴ What Edgeworth had begun to do in *The Absentee*, where

influence to which Harry is subjected is that of France. He is the only one among Edgeworth's gentlemen heroes not to have lived, studied or spent any time in England.

⁴⁰³ There are a number of pointers in the novel which signify some shift in Edgeworth's general attitude to indigenous Irish culture. For instance, she defends the traditional Irish funeral cry as a 'melancholy kind of lament, not without harmony, simple and pathetic' (*O*, 117), and she even views the bog areas of the island in a new light; as sources of fuel and medicinal herbs, whereas, of old, the bogs had been thought of by the English colonisers of Ireland merely as wastelands and places offering refuge to Irish rebels and other trouble-makers.

⁴⁰⁴ Edgeworth's criticism of White Connal is, however, founded not only on his having lost all pretensions to genteel living by becoming a sheep-farmer. S. J. Connolly explains that after a period of boom-time war-prices for grain, the prices for most agricultural produce fell sharply after 1815. He writes: 'The new pattern of agricultural prices made it increasingly attractive ... to use the land for grazing sheep and cattle, rather than tilling it with the aid of hired labour'. As a consequence of this shift in agriculture, many labourers found it

she had described the man emerging from the bog as a 'half-gentleman', she continues to do in *Ormond*. Mr O'Tara, for instance, an islander enamoured with cock-fighting is termed 'a strolling kind of gentleman' (*O*, 77) by Edgeworth, and this curious classification is left standing without any further explanation. Indeed, the term 'gentleman' crops up with such startling frequency and in application to such a diverse range of characters that its very inflation makes it increasingly difficult for the uninitiated reader of *Ormond* to judge who is and who isn't the genuine article. The matter is not made easier by Edgeworth's occasional indulgence in little jokes (for instance, she mocks the pretensions of Sir Ulick's personal man servant by titling him the 'gentleman's gentleman' (*O*, 228)). However, what signals an important change on Edgeworth's part in relation to *Ormond* is that she adopts in her last Irish tale some of the more local ways of estimating class in a gentleman.⁴⁰⁵

Frances Edgeworth explains in her *Memoir of Edgeworth* that *Ormond* was written by her step-daughter over the months of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's final illness. In fact, she records that Edgeworth read out parts of *Ormond* to her father on their last joint day-journey out of Edgeworthstown. It appears likely that Edgeworth, in sight of his approaching death, which affected her deeply, also re-considered her own relationship with the place to which her father had brought her all those years back in 1782. A strong emotional connection with, and

impossible to obtain work. In addition, the summer of 1816 had been unusually rainy and cold. According to contemporary records, more than 65,000 people died due to a combination of hunger and a typhus epidemic. See S. J. Connolly, "Union government, 1812-23", in *A New History, Volume 5*, 57-61. It is likely that Edgeworth, as a member of the landlord class, would have considered White Connal's specialisation in a farming method which could offer little or no employment opportunities for the thousands of Irish labourers who were looking for work as socially irresponsible.

⁴⁰⁵ According to Edgeworth's contemporary Jonah Barrington, it was the habit of 'the common people' of Ireland to define gentlemen in accordance with their own special kind of social rating system. Customarily, so Barrington explains, they distinguished between 'half-mounted gentlemen', 'gentlemen every inch of them' and 'gentleman to the backbone'. Barrington says that the gentlemen belonging to the first category were comprised of 'the only species of independent yeomanry' which 'then existed in Ireland'. By all accounts a rough-riding and boisterous lot, their chief function, so he maintains, was to keep order at large public meetings, such as horse-races or hurling matches. The gentlemen of the second type 'were of excellent old families, whose finances were not in so good an order ... but who were popular amongst all ranks'. However, the most respected class of gentlemen were those who belonged to 'the oldest families and settlers'; they were 'universally respected, and idolised by the peasantry, although they were generally a little out at elbows'. See Jonah Barrington, *Personal Sketches and Recollections Of His Own Time* (1872; Dublin: Ashfield Press, 1997), 58-59. Interestingly, what both groups of gentleman, who are generally respected by the Irish (i.e. the two latter groups), have in common is that they come from families with long traditions of genteel living. Their kind, which includes both indigenous Irish and older Anglo-Irish settler families, cuts across the usual boundaries of social segregation in Ireland: those based on denomination and income. This puts Edgeworth's express disgust of the violently protestant 'journeymen-gentlemen' who comprised the yeoman military and came to prominence after the Irish rebellion into a different context. In the *Memoirs* she had criticised these as 'men without education, experience, or hereditary respectability' (*MRLE*, 2:205). What at first notice appears to be a prejudice which one would expect somebody of Edgeworth's particular class to hold against the comparatively lower class origins of these yeomen turns out to be an objection also upheld by the majority of Irish country people.

attachment to, her own home region of Edgeworthstown certainly finds expression in Edgeworth's last Irish tale.

Edgeworth's changing sense of place, then, is, as I have argued, reflected in her Irish tales. Her first Irish tale *Castle Rackrent* has two main strands. On the one hand it is a testament to Edgeworth's early and enduring fascination with the distinctive Hiberno-English culture which she encounters upon her arrival in Edgeworthstown. However, deeply embedded within the narrative of *Castle Rackrent* is also a wariness on Edgeworth's part with regard to the history of her family's involvement in County Longford to date. By displacing elements of her ancestor's history onto the class of the native Irish gentry Edgeworth disowns the regional connection of her family even as she gives a literary expression to it.

In her subsequent Irish tales Edgeworth's own and evolving sense of place is registered through her changing representation of the gentlemen hero. In the course of charting her hero's path to intellectual and personal maturity in *Ennui* Edgeworth emphasises the crucial role of the journey in relation to Lord Glenthorn's attempts to gain a real understanding of Ireland and, more particularly, of the place where he chooses to reside in his new incarnation as an Irish country gentleman. In *The Absentee* Lord Colambre also acquires knowledge of the locale through the experience of the journey through Ireland. In addition, however, his knowledge of Ireland is supplemented by his reading of a number of key works on Ireland. Harry Ormond, the hero of Edgeworth's last Irish tale *Ormond*, goes against the pattern set by his fictional predecessors. He does not relate to Ireland through either the experience of the journey or that of the text but solely through his bonds of affection with the place where he has grown up and where he decides to spend the remainder of his life.

Chapter 5

AT HOME AND A-JOURNEYING: MARIA EDGEWORTH'S LATER TRAVELS

*One great use of travelling is to make one if possible better satisfied with home.*⁴⁰⁶

Edgeworth, as I have suggested in Chapter Four, considered travelling as an important component in the character-formation of her heroes. Her insistence that the hero's journey through Ireland will contribute to a widening of his intellectual horizons and, in addition, provide him with the means of drawing valuable comparisons between his home region and other localities in Ireland, may be taken as evidence that she attributed great value to experiences and observations engendered by travel(ling). Looking at Edgeworth's own life, it is therefore not surprising to find that — judging by the standards of her period — she travelled both frequently and extensively.

For instance, as the many letters she penned from England show, Edgeworth, especially in later life, readily accepted invitations to visit relations and friends there, often staying for extended visits, some of which lasted for months rather than weeks. Leaving these almost yearly sojourns across the Irish sea aside, Edgeworth still appears to have travelled more than was usual for many a woman of her period; be they conventional middle-or upper-class domestic women or prominent women writers. Unlike Jane Austen⁴⁰⁷ or Hannah More⁴⁰⁸ — to name but two well-known women writers contemporaneous to her, who never left the shores of mainland Britain during their life-times — Edgeworth travelled not once but twice during her life to continental Europe. With her father, step-mother and half-sister Charlotte, she spent the winter of 1802 in France and became sufficiently well acquainted with Parisian society to be able to revive the contacts she then made — almost two decades later — in 1820, when she invited her half-sisters Fanny and Harriet to join her on an extended tour through France and Switzerland.

Indeed, it might be argued that the importance of her 1802 stay in Paris to the thirty-something old Edgeworth can hardly be overestimated. Not only did this stay provide her with the opportunity to acquire a personal knowledge of, and participate in, the cultural life of a

⁴⁰⁶ *Letters from England*, 260. The emphasis is Edgeworth's.

⁴⁰⁷ For the extent of Austen's travels, see Maggie Lane, *Jane Austen's England* (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 1989).

⁴⁰⁸ For More's travels, see Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

nation which writers like Austen and More only got to know of by reportage.⁴⁰⁹ More importantly still, it influenced Edgeworth profoundly, both on a literary as well as on a personal level. As already mentioned in Chapter Three, her experience of the vibrant social life of Paris, where the literary works of French women writers were paid so much serious critical attention, had a lasting influence on Edgeworth's self-perception as a female British author.⁴¹⁰ The fact that Edgeworth decided, many years later, to introduce her half-sisters Harriet and Fanny to Parisian society confirms that she must have regarded her initial visit to France as a valuable and formative experience. Indeed, as I will argue, the letters she wrote from France and Switzerland in 1820 reveal some of the attractions which French cultural life still held for Edgeworth.

However, much as Edgeworth's visits to France may have given her advantage over many of her female contemporaries, there is a strange anomaly to be found at the heart of her own travels. For, as Christina Colvin points out, the very woman writer who 'made her reputation as an Irish novelist' — paradoxically — 'travelled very little in Ireland outside the Edgeworthstown neighbourhood except for visits to Dublin or to her aunt Margaret Ruxton at Black Castle near Navan'.⁴¹¹ Although Edgeworth lived in Edgeworthstown more or less permanently, from moving there as an adolescent in 1782 to her death in 1849, her letters record barely a handful of visits to places in Ireland other than those mentioned above by Colvin.⁴¹² In fact, her letters, prior to the death of her father in 1817, mention only three occasions on which she travelled to locations in Ireland which were new to her. In 1806

⁴⁰⁹ Many years later Edgeworth used the new network of correspondents and contacts she had managed to build up during her first visit to France to procure introductions for various members of her family. In 1815, for instance, Edgeworth smoothed the entrance of her aunt and uncle Ruxton into Parisian society, by formally announcing their intended visit to acquaintances of old. Writing to Madame Pastoret, Edgeworth said: 'My dear Madame de Pastoret, permit me to present to you and M. le Comte de Pastoret Mr. and Mrs. Ruxton (prononcé Ruston) who are on a tour of pleasure to the Continent. Mr. Ruxton is one of my nearest relations and best friends - homme de robe - he has taste for literature & for the arts - has information sufficient to please M. Pastoret and has taste enough to be charmed with Madame Pastoret - Mrs. Ruxton you will immediately perceive has been always used to live in the best company - She is formed to please and be pleased in society & I feel that I pay her taste a great and just compliment when I say that she will though a stranger quickly appreciate the charm of your conversation and manners ...'. See ME to Madame de Pastoret, 4 August 1815, Edgeworthstown, Reel 14.

⁴¹⁰ It was also whilst staying in Paris that Edgeworth was able to renew her acquaintance with the Swiss-born Marc Auguste Pictet, an Anglophile Professor and senior editor of *La Bibliothèque Britannique*, who had visited Edgeworthstown in 1801, and was to become one of the most important promulgators of Edgeworth's works on the Continent.

⁴¹¹ See Christina Colvin, "Maria Edgeworth's Tours in Ireland: I. Rostrevor", in *Studia Neophilologica*, Volume 42, 1970), 319.

⁴¹² During her latter years in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth would often spend some time with her half-sister Harriet, who had married to the Anglican clergyman Richard Butler, and now lived in Trim, in County Meath. However, the vicarage in Trim was within easy reach of Edgeworthstown and actually located en route to the home of Edgeworth's other relations (the Ruxtons) in Navan, which was less than a further ten miles away.

Edgeworth stayed for some days at her aunt Ruxton's holiday home Fort Hamilton, which was situated near Rostrevor, on the shores of Carlingford Lough.⁴¹³ In 1809, she spent a few days under the roof of James Corry, a, by all accounts, highly eccentric gentleman, whose home was situated at Shantonagh, in County Monaghan.⁴¹⁴ In 1810, as part of a family party, Edgeworth travelled to Kilkenny, in order to see some of the private theatricals, which were being performed there.⁴¹⁵

To Edgeworth, these three visits seem to have represented a welcome change from her usual domestic routine at Edgeworthstown. Not only did they allow her to see parts of Ireland hitherto unknown to her but — importantly — and as Colvin points out, they 'provided material for her writing'. King Corny in *Ormond* (1817), for instance, owes something to the real-life character of Corry and Edgeworth borrowed some of the architectural oddities of Shantonagh for her depiction of King Corny's island home.⁴¹⁶ Considering that travelling was clearly seen by Edgeworth as a useful way of collecting new ideas for her fiction-writing, and that she readily incorporated material from her travels around Ireland into her Irish fictions, it is surprising to learn that she travelled so little. Indeed, travel(ling) in Ireland turns out to be the exception rather than the rule for Edgeworth. Moreover, when Edgeworth did travel, it was usually in order to visit her relations and never on her own.

Had it not been for the Scottish novelist Walter Scott, who invited her in 1825 to join him on his short tour to Killarney, it appears likely that Edgeworth would never have had the occasion to set foot in Munster. Without Scott she certainly would not have visited the impressive medieval ruins at Cashel, the small provincial town of Mallow, or Ireland's second 'capital' city Cork. It was, in fact, not until her *Tour in Connemara*, which took place as late

⁴¹³ For an account of this visit, see "Maria Edgeworth's Tours in Ireland: I. Rostrevor" in *Studia Neophilologica*, Volume 42 (1970).

⁴¹⁴ James Corry was married to Letty Ruxton, a sister of Edgeworth's aunt Margaret Ruxton's husband John.

⁴¹⁵ These had gained a considerable reputation throughout Leinster, and the Edgeworths were especially interested in going to Kilkenny because Corry had been given a major acting part in one of the plays.

⁴¹⁶ Writing from Shantonagh, Edgeworth reported to Sophy: 'The house in which I now enjoy myself has stood, certainly, in spite of fate, and of all the efforts of man to throw it down or blow it up. ... the owner quarried, and blasted the rocks underneath, till he made a kitchen twenty feet square and various subterranean offices ... After all this was accomplished and the house, contrary to the prophecies of all who saw, or heard it, still standing, the owner set to work at the roof, which he fancied was too low. ... Undaunted by the ponderous magnitude of the undertaking, this intrepid architect cut out all the rafters of the roof clean off from the walls on all sides, propped it in the middle, and fairly raised it altogether by men and levers, to the height he wanted; there it stood propped in air till he built walls up to it, pieced the rafters and completed it to his satisfaction! But alas, he slated it so ill, or so neglected to slate it at all, that, in rainy weather, torrents of water pour in, and in winter it is scarcely habitable, by man or brute.' See ME to SR, Chantinee [sic], 3 July 1808. Contained in *Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters*, ed. F. V. Barry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 154-155. Corry's ill-contrived efforts at home-improvements and his insistence on becoming his own slater are certainly very reminiscent of King Corny's grim determination to achieve complete self-sufficiency on his Black island home in *Ormond*.

as 1833, that Edgeworth — by this time already in her mid-sixties — travelled into Connaught. This tour also represents the only occasion during her life-time when Edgeworth travelled unaccompanied by a member of her family, with people whom she only knew in passing. Her brief visit to the Moores of Moore Hall, in County Mayo, in 1836, took Edgeworth once more into Connaught.⁴¹⁷

What makes Edgeworth's lack of travel in Ireland all the more unusual is that she clearly enjoyed travelling. Judging by her correspondence, Edgeworth relished opportunities of meeting new people and seeing new places. Her letters show that she availed of invitations to stay, when and where they offered themselves, and would not hesitate to travel to the houses of family friends and relations which were easily accessible by coach.⁴¹⁸ She would do so in spite of the fact that she was always a somewhat nervous traveller; in equal measure afraid of temperamental horses, bad roads and unreliable coach drivers. In her *Memoir* of Edgeworth, Frances Edgeworth recalls how her step-daughter, when travelling in a carriage, was 'always sitting with her back to the horses', and would only be able to relax once she felt 'quite at ease about them [i.e. the horses]'.⁴¹⁹

Frances Edgeworth's above comment, apart from telling us something about Edgeworth's particular manner of travelling, touches upon another significant development in connection with eighteenth-century travel generally. For it was during the course of the eighteenth-century that travel, in Britain, 'assumed its characteristically modern form'. Edgeworth lived in a period during which travel was 'no longer an exclusively aristocratic

⁴¹⁷ Taking all the above visits into account it still strikes one as strange that Edgeworth never visited some of those Irish sites (such as the monastic ruins at Glendalough, in County Wicklow, or the spectacular natural basalt rock formation, which makes up the Giant's Causeway, in County Antrim), which had long since become areas of common eighteenth-century touristic interest. Occasionally, Edgeworth's personal lack of experience in this respect betrays itself in her *Irish Tales*. For instance, in *Ennui*, Edgeworth has Lord Glenthorn remark about the Giant's Causeway: 'From the description given by Dr Hamilton of some of these wonders of nature, the reader may judge how much I *ought* to have been astonished and delighted'. See Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui* (1809), *Volume 1 in The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 249. Although Edgeworth, in the above scene, appears eager to stress Lord Glenthorn's lack of interest and his generally blasé attitude to his environment, her referral of the reader to an authoritative guide book for further information on one of Ireland's best known landmarks reveals her lack of first-hand knowledge.

⁴¹⁸ Edgeworth, for instance, frequently made the journey to Sonna, home of the Tuite family, which was situated in neighbouring County Westmeath. She liked to spend time with Lord and Lady Granard, when invited to their seat Castle Forbes in Newtownforbes, County Longford. Sometimes she visited nearby Fox Hall, especially once her half-sister Sophy had married into the Fox family. However, Sonna, Castle Forbes and Fox Hall were all within a fifteen mile radius of Edgeworthstown and, travelling there did not involve Edgeworth in going beyond the midlands (i.e. the region with which she was most familiar).

⁴¹⁹ See *MME*, 3:267. Although Edgeworth knew how to ride, and owned a quiet pony called Dapple during her early years in Edgeworthstown, when she would sometimes accompany her father on his estate rounds, she appears to have remained always slightly afraid of horses. During her stay with the Martins at Ballinahinch, in 1833, she declined Mary Martin's invitation to go out with her on one of her spirited Connemara ponies.

preserve' but came to be regarded as 'a form of pleasure', which could also be shared by persons from a less privileged background.⁴²⁰ A greatly improved infrastructure in even the remotest parts of Britain (via the new network of modern turnpike roads) meant, moreover, that travelling itself had become much faster and more comfortable by the turn of the new century.

Indeed, Edgeworth's letters show that Edgeworthstown itself — with its convenient position adjacent to the main road from Dublin — was used by many of her family's relations and friends as a kind of staging post for travels to the West of Ireland. In 1811, for instance, Humphrey Davy, an English family friend, stayed at Edgeworthstown prior to his setting out on a fishing holiday in Connemara. Edgeworth reported to her aunt Ruxton that Davy had 'spent a day here last week' and had, since then, 'sent to us from Boyle the finest trout'. Edgeworth remarked, moreover, that her half-brother Sneyd had gone 'with him to Boyle', where he had seen 'Lord Lorton's place, and spent a pleasant day'. A few days later, two more of Davy's English 'fishing friends' called on the Edgeworths, whilst on route to Connemara.⁴²¹

As the above incident illustrates, opportunities for travelling could alter substantially, even within one family.⁴²² Edgeworth's half-brother Sneyd is a case in point. Edgeworth's letters record how he, whilst still studying for his law degree at Trinity College Dublin, sought permission from his father to accompany Francis Beaufort⁴²³ on a sea-voyage, the destination of which was as yet undecided, but could conceivably be 'the Mediterranean', 'the Brazils' or the 'West-Indies'. Edgeworth informed her aunt Ruxton that her father had given his consent, on condition that Francis 'should go to the Mediterranean', as he considered 'the West Indies

⁴²⁰ See *Writes of Passage: Reading travel writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (Routledge, London and New York, 1999), 5-6.

⁴²¹ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, not dated, October 1811. Contained in *The Life and Letters*, 1:179.

⁴²² In the *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, Edgeworth recalls her father's attitude towards travelling: 'Travelling, he used to say, was from time to time necessary, to change the course of ideas, and to prevent the growth of local prejudices'. See *MRLE*, 2:258. In accordance with this philosophy Richard Lovell Edgeworth tried to allow as many of his children as possible an occasional change of scenery. He took many of his children along with him on his travels to England, which he visited most years in order to keep up contact with his old circle of friends there. However, as the Edgeworth children matured a gradual change in the travelling pattern amongst them is discernable. Whereas the travel of the female Edgeworth offspring is increasingly confined to journeys between Edgeworthstown and a small number of visits to Dublin, that of the male Edgeworths expands greatly. Finally, as part of their professional training, all of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's sons travelled extensively; both overseas, as well as in Ireland.

⁴²³ Francis Beaufort (1774-1857) was the younger brother of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's fourth wife Frances. He had a highly successful career in the British naval service, where he became a captain and was subsequently elevated to the rank of admiral. Nowadays he is perhaps best remembered for his invention of 'the Beaufort Scale, a device for measuring wind speeds.

too distant' and necessitating 'too long an absence from his [i.e. Sneyd's] professional studies'.⁴²⁴ Writing to Sneyd some weeks later, a generous-minded Edgeworth showed herself pleased for him:

I am convinced that it is much better that my father give up for some months the pleasure of your company, for the great object of completely recovering your health and giving you full time to recover your strength. You will I hope have fine weather to enjoy and the new element & the new world – and a total change of scene will give you a fresh stock of agreeable ideas.⁴²⁵

Reading between the lines of the above letter one gets the impression that there is a note of longing mixed in with the genuine good will which Edgeworth expresses towards Sneyd's imminent sea-faring adventure.⁴²⁶ What her response to his travelling plans also illustrates is that gender was one factor, which clearly influenced the opportunity for, frequency and range of travel, even in a family of the Edgeworths' elevated social status and progressive views. As Edgeworth had tellingly remarked in *Practical Education* (1798), eighteenth-century girls — unlike their brothers — did not grow up with the expectation of being able 'to ramble about the world' as adult women.⁴²⁷ Edgeworth made the above comment in the context of discussing suitable reading matter for young adolescents. Interestingly, she urged caution about the reading of works, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Three Russian Sailors*, while 'less dangerous for girls' could still have the undesirable effect of implanting 'too much taste of adventure' in the minds of young persons.

However, if Edgeworth's adult taste in travel literature is anything to judge by, she herself retained from her adolescence onwards a fascination with adventure and the discovery of new places. Apart from reading some of the indisputable classics of travel literature, such as Tobias Smollet's *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) and Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Edgeworth's tastes were catholic, and included works as diverse as Alexander

⁴²⁴ ME to Mrs. R., Edgeworthstown, 20 March, 1808, Letter 628, Reel 5.

⁴²⁵ ME to CSE, Edgeworthstown, 4 April 1808, Letter 629, Reel 5. Throughout his life-time Sneyd's health appears to have been delicate. As there was a history of tuberculosis in the family, Edgeworth's anxiety about her half-brother's health was not misplaced. Sneyd later named his fragile health as the main reason for giving up his profession.

⁴²⁶ In her correspondence Edgeworth generally comes across as a caring elder sister; ready to lend support to any of her younger half-brothers, who is at a critical stage in his professional training. She encouraged Sneyd, and later, William and Pakenham, to write home regularly and habitually expressed curiosity about the localities, whether in Ireland or abroad, where her brothers worked in their various professional capacities.

⁴²⁷ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2 vols., (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 1:336.

von Humboldt's *Relation historique du voyage aux regions équinoxiales du nouveau continent* (1812)⁴²⁸ and that of a Captains Hinds, which was entitled *Rough Sketches of his Journey across the Pampas, and over the Cordilleras* (1827)⁴²⁹.

What Edgeworth's enduring interest in her brothers' travels and in new travel literature indicates is, that, whilst the reasons for her own lack of travel within Ireland are numerous and complex⁴³⁰, it would be wrong to put it down to a lack of interest on her part. In fact, in the letter to her youngest half-brother Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, which gives an account of her *Tour in Connemara*, Edgeworth states unequivocally that her explorative journey into the West of Ireland was the culmination of many years' wish-fulfilment on her part. When explaining her reasons for agreeing so quickly, and so uncharacteristically, to travel alongside Sir Culling and Lady Isabella Smith — an English couple, who were almost total strangers — into an region of Ireland completely unknown to her Edgeworth says: 'I thought it was the best opportunity I could ever have of seeing a part of Ireland which, from time immemorial, I had been curious to see'.⁴³¹

Given that *Ormond*, Edgeworth's last Irish novel, was published in 1817, and that Edgeworth produced no comparably large works with an Irish subject matter between then and

⁴²⁸ Edgeworth remarked of Humboldt's works: 'Humboldt is the Shakespeare of travellers – as much superior in genius to other travellers as Shakespeare to other poets'. See *Letters from England*, 110. Edgeworth's penchant for Humboldt's particular style of travel writing is interesting because he is nowadays recognised as a writer, who 'followed the eighteenth-century model of scientific exploration but displayed a broader variety of scientific interests and intellectual concerns than explorers before and after him'. During his own life-time Humboldt's unique blend of 'empiricism combined with the enthusiastic recording of subjective impressions, aesthetic judgements and emotional responses' made him famous. In fact, his approach to science generally was so all-encompassing that it 'corresponds to none of the modern scientific disciplines or specialities'. Quoted from Malcolm Nicolson's historical introduction to Humboldt's *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* (1820; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), xii; xv; xxxiii. Edgeworth had met Humboldt's elder brother Wilhelm during her 1802/03 stay in Paris, and, although she did not meet Humboldt in person until her later visit to France, they shared a common acquaintance in Marc Auguste Pictet.

⁴²⁹ Edgeworth was so taken with this work that she decided to write a letter to the author. Her opening lines to this letter, which she wrote from Edgeworthstown in 1827, paint the picture of a woman who allows herself the freedom to dispense with certain social conventions in her advancing years. Edgeworth addresses Captain Hinds simply by saying: 'I take the privilege of an old literary Lady to intrude without introduction or apology my opinion, and that of my family...'. She goes on to directly describe which aspects of his writing she enjoyed most, telling him that his work 'shows us a new world – new life – new man – new human creatures – new productions – animal and vegetable – and all the novelty, though so strange and wonderful -, bears so the stamp of truth, that it forces our belief of its reality'. See ME to Captain Hinds, 18 February 1827, Edgeworthstown, Reel 14.

⁴³⁰ As discussed at length in Chapter 1, Edgeworth had many domestic responsibilities in Edgeworthstown and sometimes found it difficult to fit her writing into an already crammed daily routine. It seems likely that during her father's life-time, when there was a house full of young children in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth would simply not have had the time to go travelling around Ireland.

⁴³¹ See *Maria Edgeworth's Tour in Connemara and the Martins of Ballinahinch*, ed. H. E. Butler (London: Constable & Company, 1950), 1.

her death, in 1849, her later travels in Ireland take on a special significance.⁴³² At their best, as in those accounts of her travels in Ireland, which she wrote as intimate letters to close family members⁴³³, they allow a unique insight into Edgeworth's reactions when she ventures outside her familiar Edgeworthstown setting. Uniquely, Edgeworth's travelogues register the full range of her responses upon being confronted with people, local modes of life and types of landscapes, which are entirely new to her.

The very act of travelling, as Duncan and Gregory point out, involves a process, through which the traveller seeks to make sense of, or, to 'translate', what he or she sees. This act of 'translation' from one 'cultural idiom into another', can either be accomplished by the 'domesticating method', which attempts to stress the similarities between one's home environment and the foreign locality, or the 'foreignizing method', which emphasises essential differences between the two places.⁴³⁴ As is to be expected, there are instances of both of these reactions to the unfamiliar on Edgeworth's part and, indeed, some of the sites and scenes she encountered put her previously held assumptions severely to the test.

However, some of the strongest negative reactions to places and situations which Edgeworth exhibited are not necessarily congruent with the geographical distances she travelled. For instance, despite the fact that she ventured into one of the most isolated parts of remote Connemara, her experience of that part of Ireland proved in many respects less alienating than the scenes she observed at Lord Dillon's seat Loughglynn, which was located in County Roscommon, at less than a day's journey from Edgeworthstown.

Also perhaps surprising is that the picture of Edgeworth which emerges from her travel accounts is, by and large, that of a woman who exhibits a flexible and developing attitude of

⁴³² After 1817, Edgeworth brought out only two short stories for children which were set in Ireland. These were *Garry Owen* (1829) and *Orlandino* (1848). In a frequently quoted letter to Pakenham, Edgeworth partly explained her unwillingness to produce a new Irish novel during a period which saw unprecedented changes in Ireland's political, social and economic structure: 'It is impossible to draw Ireland as she is now in a book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking glass. The people would only break the glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature, in a fever. We are in too perilous a case to laugh, humour would be out of season, worse than bad taste'. See *MME*, 3:87.

⁴³³ Edgeworth was usually far less guarded in giving her true opinion of people and places when writing to her own family. However, as her letters were sometimes read aloud at home and as there were often visitors present at Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth was sometimes fearful of unwittingly offending somebody. For this reason, she asked Sneyd on one occasion most particularly not to read her letters to anyone outside the immediate family circle: 'I do entreat you my dear brother not to show my letters to anybody except my two aunts Sneyd and W[illima] H[arriet] F[anny] and Sophy R[uxton] ... else I must totally refrain from giving my opinions of persons – characters and manners. Then I should be shut up – frozen, unnatural – and there would be an end of all confidence and all entertainment from my letters. You then might as well or much better read my printed books'. See *Letters from England*, 47.

⁴³⁴ Duncan and Gregory, *Writes of Passage*, 5.

mind and one who attempts to engage with a changed social reality, in, both Ireland and Europe. For instance, the society in Paris to which Edgeworth introduced Harriet and Fanny in 1820, was of quite a different composition and political outlook to the circle in which she had moved during her previous stay in Paris. Not only did Edgeworth quickly adapt to this new situation; her letters home to Edgeworthstown show her as a person who — on a social and a personal level — wants to move with the times.

In relation to her tour in Connemara, I will concentrate my analysis on an incident involving a local woman called Madgy Burke and Edgeworth's relationship with Mary Martin, the clever and highly talented but gauche and highly-strung daughter of her hosts at Ballinahinch Castle. I will argue that Edgeworth's encounter with Madgy Burke demonstrates how her attitude towards the old woman was liable to shift, depending on whether she looked at her through the eyes of a tourist or those of a landlord's daughter. Further, I will suggest that Edgeworth's position as somebody who is permanently resident in Ireland had a direct bearing on her attitude towards, and handling of, certain perennial Irish problems.

Edgeworth's attitude towards Mary Martin also indicates that she endeavoured to take the unusual circumstances and particular environment in which Mary had been brought up, into account. In fact, Edgeworth, who — as I will show — actively disliked certain aspects of Mary's personality, nonetheless became so interested in the future of this young Irish woman that she remained in letter-writing contact with her upon her return home. Edgeworth also entertained the Martins, when they — subsequent to having introduced their daughter to London society — stopped off in Edgeworthstown before travelling onwards to Ballinahinch. Significantly, Edgeworth's attitude to Mary can be seen to differ considerably, depending on the cultural context in which she views her.

Edgeworth's visit to, and subsequent correspondence with, the Moores of Moore Hall in County Mayo, is another instance of her willingness to personally engage with people who, in most respects, were located on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum. In her contact with the Moores, Edgeworth can be seen to put religious and political differences firmly to one side; choosing to concentrate not on what divided them from each other but, rather, on the interests (as landlords and as people) which they had in common. In fact, Edgeworth utilised her formidable network of contacts and correspondents to promote the careers of the Moore's two sons. In particular, she lent her expertise as a published author to George Moore, whom she considered a talented writer and actively encouraged to publish accounts of his travels to the Far East.

I want to suggest that looking at Edgeworth's later travels (especially those which took place in Ireland) can help to enrich, if not to correct, the received image we have of Edgeworth. This is especially important as — due to her lack of publishing a major Irish work subsequent to *Ormond*, in 1817 — there has been a tendency amongst scholars to treat Edgeworth's life and career as if it had finished at that point. Of the few studies of Edgeworth during her advancing years which exist, Michael Hurst's *Maria Edgeworth and the Public Scene* (1969) is probably one of the best known. The problem with Hurst's study — which, in turn, is probably due to its narrow focus on nineteenth-century party politics in Ireland — is that it highlights, above all else, Edgeworth's general sense of disenchantment with the Irish political scene and puts great emphasis on her increasing political conservatism during latter years. It leaves one with the impression that Edgeworth was unwilling, and, in a way, unable, to engage with the world in which she found herself in Ireland during the 1820s and 1830s. I argue that Edgeworth's own accounts of her later travels in Ireland — containing, as they do, references to a number of key incidents and experiences, which had a noticeable and long-lasting effect on her outlook — openly contradict this view of her.

Edgeworth's later travels are significant in another respect. As she never travelled alone but always in the company of others, Edgeworth's accounts of these travels allow us an insight not only into how she saw her own role during these tours but they also reveal something of how her travelling companions perceived her. For instance, when Edgeworth accompanied Walter Scott on his tour to Killarney and, later, when she travelled alongside the Smiths into Connemara, she acted as a sort of insider Irish tour guide for these first-time British visitors to Ireland. Edgeworth's position as the only person with first-hand experience and knowledge of Ireland necessarily had a bearing on her take of the people, sites and scenes she encountered during the course of her travels.

However, to begin with it is helpful to take a closer look at Edgeworth's second journey to France, where she took two of her younger half-sisters in 1820. This journey provides a good starting point for a discussion of her later travels as it coincides with a period in Edgeworth's life when a visible change in the manner and pattern of her travelling generally occurred. Subsequent to her father's death in 1817, Edgeworth increasingly became the organising hand with respect to travel(ling) within the Edgeworth family. One of the reasons for this was that the composition of the Edgeworthstown household itself changed noticeably after the death of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. With most of the male members of the Edgeworth family now either established on their own, or in professional training, and the

younger ones about to be sent off to boarding schools or preparatory colleges in England, the household which remained in Edgeworthstown was now almost entirely peopled by women.⁴³⁵ This being so Edgeworth found herself — probably for the first time in her life — in a position to follow her personal preferences with regard to travelling. Of course, travelling, in the first place, is only feasible if one possesses the financial means of doing so, and, in Edgeworth's case, it was her earnings from the writing of *Harrington* and *Ormond* which made it possible for her to undertake a second journey to France. According to Colvin, Edgeworth had determined a short while after her father's death that the money earned by her during the difficult period of his final illness should be laid out for her sisters' use.⁴³⁶

One of her father's reasons for visiting Paris in 1802 had undoubtedly been that such a stay would allow him to introduce his eldest daughter to a more cosmopolitan social circle than that which was available in the immediate Edgeworthstown neighbourhood. Edgeworth appears to have had similar motives in mind when she invited her half-sisters to travel with her to continental Europe. It must be remembered that there was an age gap of more than thirty years between Edgeworth and her half-sisters 'Fanny' (Frances Maria; 1799-1848) and Harriet (1801-89). It is likely that Edgeworth, to all intents and purposes, was regarded by them as less of a conventional older sister and more of a mother-figure.⁴³⁷ References to Fanny in

⁴³⁵ Towards the end of his life Richard Lovell Edgeworth changed his mind about educating his male children entirely at home. Edgeworth recalls her father stating that 'for boys he latterly never recommended private tuition, except when there is a concurrence of favourable circumstances, which I fear cannot often happen'. See *MRLE*, 2:392. Some of the home-taught male Edgeworth children, among them Sneyd and William, appear to have felt unsure of their educational qualifications when starting out on their professional training. It was therefore decided that both Francis and Michael Pakenham, the youngest two boys, should be sent away for their education. At the time of Edgeworth's 1820 visit to France and Switzerland both she and her step-mother were still actively searching for a suitable education institution.

⁴³⁶ See *Letters from England*, 214.

⁴³⁷ Reflecting this generation gap, Edgeworth, especially when in England, was always —albeit in a light-hearted and humorous vein— on the look-out for suitable prospective marriage partners for her siblings. She seems to have quite enjoyed playing up to her reputation among the family as a would-be match-maker. In 1813, for instance, she wrote home to Edgeworthstown about Lady Milbanke, a newly made acquaintance: 'the daughter is a prodigious heiress - £12,000 per annum - William look sharp! I should like her very much for my sister in law'. However, in the same letter she advised Fanny, in a much more serious tone about the importance of correct deportment: 'I have thought continually of you in public rooms, where numbers are gathered together, and where all has been done that milliners and mantuamakers, and money, and mothers can do for the appearance of daughters: and all that is nothing compared with what they can do for themselves, by taking thought in time to add at once to their stature and their grace - by holding their heads and stepping out well when they walk. Backs are what distinguish gentlewomen more than faces in public and vulgarity or gentility sits on the shoulders. My dear Fan if I did not love you truly, I could not spare time to lecture you'. See *Letters from England*, 66-67. Fanny was just fourteen years of age at the time when Edgeworth wrote the above letter.

Edgeworth's correspondence certainly give one the impression that this is how she perceived herself; especially in relation to Fanny, her declared favourite among her siblings.⁴³⁸

Prior to their 1820 journey to France and Switzerland, Fanny had only once been to England and Harriet had never been out of Ireland before. Edgeworth therefore decided to begin their nine-months tour by allowing her sisters the opportunity of seeing some of England's best known sites of common interest, such as the Bodleian library in Oxford, Canterbury Cathedral and London's Richmond Park, before setting out from Dover to Calais on the twenty-second of April 1820. This in itself represents a notable departure from the places in England which Edgeworth would have visited when she had travelled alongside her father. Then, reflecting her father's particular interests, the Edgeworths had gone to see quarries, manufactories, sites of early industrial production and feats of modern engineering, rather than the libraries, colleges, churches, country houses and parks to which Edgeworth took her sisters now.

Edgeworth's recollection of her previous stay in Paris, in the company of her father and half-sister Charlotte — both of whom had since died — must have made the sea-crossing to France quite an emotionally charged journey; especially as she had just completed work on her father's *Memoirs*, which was awaiting publication in England, an event Edgeworth looked to with considerable apprehension.⁴³⁹

However, with characteristic resilience Edgeworth appears to have decided that she needed to devote her energies not to the contemplation of the past but to the organisation of the present. As the most seasoned traveller among the small family party it naturally fell to her to sort out the details of their travelling arrangements. There were letters of introduction to be

⁴³⁸ For instance, in a letter to Mrs. Moore, which was written shortly after Fanny's death, Edgeworth tried to explain the special bond she felt for this sister: 'From the moment Fanny was born her mother let me consider her feel her to be my dear child — and the most tender loving beloved'. See ME to Mrs. Moore, 13 February 1848, Edgeworthstown, Reel 19.

⁴³⁹ She feared (as it turned out, not without justification) that her father's larger-than-life character coupled to some of the more unorthodox views on life and politics which he had expressed in his part of the memoir, were liable to be misunderstood in the notably more conservative ideological climate of 1820s Britain. However, Edgeworth, at least whilst staying in France, was spared from having to think too much about the likely reception of the *Memoir*. As Harriet observed in a letter home, there was relatively little interest on the part of the French about this forthcoming work: 'In fact, nothing but politics and novels are read at this moment in Paris'. See *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth family letters*, ed. Christina Colvin, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 183. All further references are to this edition, will henceforth be abbreviated as *MEFS* and cited parenthetically in the main body of the text.

written, means of safe transport⁴⁴⁰ to be organised, suitable accommodation to be found and servants to be hired.

Upon arrival in Paris, Edgeworth had been advised to style herself 'Madame Maria Edgeworth' on the visiting cards she had printed. Edgeworth, used to a life-time of being known and addressed as 'Miss Edgeworth', both as a private individual and in her capacity as a writer, told her aunt that it felt, at first, 'very odd to be Madame and keep house and go about in this way' (*MEFS*, 108). Despite the newness of the situation in which she now found herself, it does not seem to have taken Edgeworth long to adjust to her role as head of the family. Soon she was writing to her aunt Ruxton, pleased to be able to report about her sisters' first attempts at mingling in Parisian society, and their trying out of their as yet faltering French: 'Fanny and Harriet as far as I could see or hear were much approved ... They speak bad French without fear and therefore will soon speak well. At all events their belles dispositions pour la conversation make them agreeable to the French' (*MEFS*, 108).

She reported back to her aunt Waller, in Dublin, that Harriet, on their first evening invitation in Paris had already danced a Waltz (*MEFS*, 109). This snippet of information is in itself significant, as a somewhat disreputable, if not a distinctly risqué, reputation would have clung to the Waltz; still a relatively new dance, which had been invented only a few years back, in Austria. As Edgeworth explained to her aunt, the Waltz was a dance which Harriet had never, nor ever was likely to have the opportunity to practise in Ireland. The above incident indicates that Edgeworth — although she must have been aware that certain rules of etiquette had changed, and others were in the process of changing, since her previous stay in the French Capital — was not only prepared but quite willing to go along with the new zeitgeist.

Her readiness to adapt to a changed social reality is also reflected in the people with whom Edgeworth chose to mix during her 1820 stay in Paris. Whilst she tried her best to renew contact with old acquaintances like Mme Gautier, Mme de Pastoret, and Mme François Delessert, and also took her sisters to visit the legendary Mme Récamier⁴⁴¹ in the convent, to which she had retired, Parisian society in its current manifestation was necessarily greatly

⁴⁴⁰ After her father's death the commodious old family coach, which the Edgeworths had used for travelling, was sold. See *Letters from England*, 215.

⁴⁴¹ During her own life-time Madame Récamier had become famous as the real-life inspiration behind Jean-Jacque Rousseau's literary character Sophie, which, to him and to so many of his readers, became the embodiment of ideal womanhood. Madame Récamier had also been a close friend of Madame de Staël and helped to conceal her in her country house, close to Paris, whilst she was trying to evade capture by French government officials.

altered since Edgeworth's former stay there. As even Harriet -whose knowledge of Parisian society was confined to Edgeworth's earlier accounts of it - realised, the social circle in which they now moved contained far fewer intellectuals than the one in which her older sister and her father had mixed, in 1802.⁴⁴² In her letters home, Harriet expressed her consciousness of the fact that 'the Conversation has lost much by what the French have gained in liberty'. Passing on Edgeworth's observation she continued: 'During Napoleon's time none dared to whisper of politics – now, none can speak of anything else' (*MEFS*, 154).

Harriet's reference to politics might incline one to think that the Edgeworth sisters must have been party to some highly interesting discussions on the present state of affairs in France. However, according to their accounts, the subject of politics was as divisive and dogged by partisanship in 1820s France as it was at home, in Ireland. According to Harriet, 'Royalists', 'Ultras', 'Libérales' and 'Bonapartists' alike were fighting not only against other parties but amongst themselves; all of them eager to occupy the vacuum left at the centre of France's administration following the ousting of Napoleon Bonaparte. Part of the problem for the Edgeworths appears to have been that whilst from a social point of view, they were obviously more comfortable in the company of the aristocrats, they had nothing in common with these people intellectually. About the Royalists they encountered Fanny wrote to Edgeworthstown: 'At one moment one admires their attachment to the Bourbons and one is obliged to respect them for all they have sacrificed to their loyalty but the next instant the excessive nonsense they talk places them below contempt. They are always telling some dream of the royal family. ... We live too much with these *wrong thinking* people but their manners are decidedly superior to any other party that we have seen' (*MEFS*, 131). Towards the end of their stay in Paris, and reflecting Edgeworth's own and growing impatience with the Royalist faction, even the usually placid Harriet was ready to dismiss the Royalist society they mixed in at Versailles as comprised of nothing but 'old croaking dowagers, or rheumatic battered old counts', who would talk of little else but 'the Prince's hunts, and dinners, which made a great and brilliant era in their days' (*MEFS*, 268-69).

Harriet's above echoing of her elder sister's impatience with the Royalists illustrates that Edgeworth clearly considered their hankering after a golden, pre-revolutionary age in France as a non-productive, if not a dangerous attitude of mind. As Edgeworth sees it, an

⁴⁴² Reflecting her father's particular interests, Edgeworth had mixed with some of France's most eminent thinkers and scientists during her 1802/03 stay in Paris. In his company she had attended lectures and demonstrations on everything from physics to chemistry.

unhealthy obsession with the past and an indulgence in nostalgia was likely to lead one down the path to mental stasis. What makes Harriet's comment all the more interesting is that, even whilst it registers Edgeworth's acute awareness that times have changed, it expresses, at the same time, a consciousness of the necessity to engage with society as she finds it in the here and now. Edgeworth, then, instead of mourning a sense of *tempora mutantur*, recognises the need to move on and to focus on the present.

Judging by her sisters' account of her, Edgeworth appeared determined not only to be forward-thinking but also to enjoy herself during her 1820 stay in Paris. Harriet, for instance, reported to her mother back in Edgeworthstown:

Many of Maria's friends have left Paris but we have seen all that are now living ... We have been admitted into their small private parties where the English are seldom received – All this is owing to Maria's fame ... Indeed M[aria] is treated by foreigners of all nations in the most distinguished and at the same time gratifying manner, not as an odious author but as a delightful gentlewoman ... Indeed she well deserves all the attention she receives for well as I know her I did not know the extent of all her talents ... How astonished some of her solemn admirers would be if they were to see her rolling with laughter at some egregious folly and still more would some of the brilliant wits be [surprised] at the quantity of fancy and talent she wastes on us. (*MEFS*, 153)

Harriet's above character vignette of a living, breathing Edgeworth in full verbal flow shows that even her sisters, upon observing her in Paris, saw her in a new and different light.⁴⁴³

What is certainly noticeable is that the letters, which Edgeworth wrote during her 1820 visit to Paris have an unusually light-hearted and playful quality and an almost sparkling tone to them. Harriet's mention of 'the quantity of fancy and talent she [i.e. Edgeworth] wastes on us' points to another feature of Edgeworth's letters at that time. Unusually for Edgeworth, she devoted large sections of her letters to the discussion of clothes and the latest Parisian fashions. For instance, an almost giddy sounding Edgeworth reported back to Edgeworthstown that Fanny's new 'leghorn hat trimmed French fashion' had already excited the envy of a Mrs. Littleton and that she had had 'a most fatiguing morning ... at all the impertinent and pertinent dressmakers and milliners in Paris' (*MEFS*, 113), to which she brought her sisters.

⁴⁴³ Harriet confirms that Edgeworth's evidently good form was not confined to her time in Paris by remarking to her mother, in a letter she wrote to her from Berne: '... how good humoured we are and how good spirited she is – she is indeed a wonderful creature and though I talk of peace at Geneva I never saw her so surrounded or so adoringly attended to' (*MEFS*, 229).

Although always prudent as to how she spent her money, Edgeworth, during her second stay in France, appears to have spared no expense.⁴⁴⁴ In fact, she treated both of her sisters to an entirely new wardrobe during their time in Paris. Especially in the letters to her step-mother there are repeated and detailed references to Fanny's and Harriet's new dresses, and explanations as to why certain fabrics, cuts and accessories were absolute must-haves for them.⁴⁴⁵ The excerpt below is fairly typical:

My dear Mother you ask how we get dressed when we trudge the streets one minute and are in fine company in the next –answer- We never do trudge the streets. ... As to dress F[anny] H[arriet] and M[aria] wear in the morning petites robes de gingham –or calico bought here-which all the ladies here wear at home. These are made plain to button up about the throat like Lucy's, except two inches longer in the waist. When we go out in the mornings to breakfast à la fourchette, or to visits without fourchette, cambrick muslin gowns trimmed to the tune of from two to three guineas worth of embroidery. Striped muslin gowns trimmed with flounces of themselves, made halfway up to the throat, serve either for dresses morning, or undressed evening visits. Fannys plum colored and Harriets lilac tabbinets are the French say two of the prettiest gowns they ever saw-they serve morning and can serve some evening. My two tabbinets, sage and fawn ditto have done excellent service, new furbished. Fanny blue and Harriets lilac gowns well stood the first three weeks of morning necessities. A broad belt let in and very broad sash over covered all deficiencies. (MEFS, 159-60)

Edgeworth's above description of her sisters' new wardrobe conveys something of the immense pleasure she obviously experienced in being able to dress them à la mode. Her account book, which yields details of the expenses incurred by her during the tour, shows that Edgeworth spent £100 on dress alone.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ The purchase of clothing in the French Capital was an expensive undertaking. Writing to her step-mother, Edgeworth remarked: 'You will perhaps imagine that we have spent little money. But in this you or at least we shall find ourselves confoundedly mistaken for trimmings cost a mint of money and without trimmings it is impossible to live – that is to appear' (MEFS, 163).

⁴⁴⁵ A preoccupation with appropriate dress(ing) is also a feature of Edgeworth's later letters from England. Subsequent to their continental tour and spending some time back in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth took Fanny and Harriet with her to England, where the three sisters spent the winter season of 1821/22 in London. See *Letters from England*, 214.

⁴⁴⁶ Edgeworth carefully monitored all her outgoing payments whilst she was touring France and Switzerland. She calculated the final cost of her tour by converting her expenses from French francs into English and then into Irish pounds. She listed everything in her account book, from major costs, such as transport expenses, coach hire and repairs, apartment rents and servants' wages, to the expenses of family presents and those incurred whilst fulfilling commissions for others. Edgeworth brought some Irish money with her in cash before borrowing an additional £500 of Mr Moilliet in Birmingham prior to setting out for France. Once established in Paris money was advanced to her via numerous drafts. She gave Fanny and Harriet each £50 [Irish] before leaving Dublin and £100 [English] upon arrival in Paris. See MS Eng Misc. e1467, Reel 13. Colvin calculates the final cost of Edgeworth's tour to France and Switzerland to have amounted to approximately £1,000 (MEFS, 106).

This new interest in dress and dressing on Edgeworth's part is indicative of her general preoccupation with notably feminine areas of interests during her second stay in France. For instance, in most of her letter home Edgeworth refers to architectural features, interior designs, furniture details, new fabrics and soft furnishings which she has occasion to see whilst visiting the various houses to which she and her sisters are invited. Invariably Edgeworth compares domestic arrangements in France with those which are in place at Edgeworthstown, and other houses in Ireland, with which she was intimately acquainted, such as her neighbour's (i.e. Mrs. Tuite's) home Sonna, her step-mother's parental home at Collon or Ardbraccan, the residence of the former speaker of the Irish house of parliament, which was only a few miles distance from Collon.

A change of focus is also reflected in the sort of activities which the three Edgeworth sisters pursue whilst staying in Paris. They go to see some plays at the theatre and viewed the famous fine arts collection in the Louvre but, by and large, they appear to have spent their time just socialising or visiting those sites which would have been of interest to most early nineteenth-century tourists visiting Paris. Edgeworth, for instance, took her sisters to see the salon of the house in which Voltaire had written some of his most famous works. The sisters visited Bonaparte's former country residence Malmaison and were given a tour of Madame de Pompadour's private apartments in La Celle St. Cloud, which Edgeworth was keen to show them.

Whilst Edgeworth's own, professional fields of interests are also in evidence during her second stay in France it is probably fair to say that, at least where her interest in education was concerned, she was motivated primarily by practical concerns and considerations. Edgeworth, for instance, did visit a primary school in Paris, where children were taught to read and write according to an educational method trialled by her father and described in detail in their jointly written *Practical Education* (1798).⁴⁴⁷ However, although Edgeworth was evidently keen to test the proficiency of the young pupils, who were introduced to her, her *raison d'être* for visiting the school was really to supply her brother Lovell with data, which would make possible a comparison between this one and the village school he had established in Edgeworthstown. During this visit, Edgeworth grew somewhat irritated with the French

⁴⁴⁷ During her time in France, Edgeworth was complimented a number of times on this work and also on *Professional Education* (1809). This delighted and saddened her in equal measure, for although she clearly enjoyed being given praise for these two of her non-fictional works she felt that this praise had come too late with respect to her father: 'Mme Orłowska's governess Mrs. Ashton ... made a panegyric upon *Professional Education* which she says is most highly esteemed in France and Germany. If this *could* have been heard sooner!' (*MEFS*, 112).

head teacher of the school as she deemed him to have inflated notions of his own competence as a pedagogue. She told her step-mother: ‘The man never mentioned him [i.e. Richard Lovell Edgeworth] but plumed himself much on his new discoveries and great improvements. In paying my compliments to him at last, I said I particularly approved his methods because I had seen it practised so long and with such success my father. The man did not relish this I believe’ (*MEFS*, 177-78).

These are the words of a woman who is not prepared to take nonsense from anyone, and one who feels free to express both her opinion and her true sentiments. An Edgeworth, who is entirely confident in the superiority of the local school in Edgeworthstown, delegated the task of reporting on the French schools’ particular teaching methods to Harriet, just asking her step-mother to assure Lovell that ‘the school ... which I have seen is not in any respect equal’ (*MEFS*, 178) to his.⁴⁴⁸

Whilst touring in Switzerland, Edgeworth also took the opportunity to renew her acquaintance with the highly influential Swiss pedagogue and educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1749-1827).⁴⁴⁹ Edgeworth was treated to a tour of the school, which he had set up in 1805 at Yverdon, during which Pestalozzi gave her an account of his innovative teaching system, whereby different subjects were taught in a number of modern European languages. However, once more, her chief interest in visiting this school lay in deciding whether it would be a suitable institution for the education of any of her younger half-brothers, who still remained at home, in Edgeworthstown. Writing home, she concluded: ‘Sum total – I would not for any consideration that Francis or one of our boys were at Pestalozzi’s for their education’ (*MEFS*, 222).⁴⁵⁰

On one level, Edgeworth’s above response indicates her own competence in the field of education. Edgeworth has not only kept abreast of the most recent innovations in pedagogy but that she has very definite opinions on the efficacy of certain teaching methods. On another level, Edgeworth’s decided rejection of Pestalozzi’s system and his school at Yverdon

⁴⁴⁸ Edgeworth’s visit to Monsieur Naef’s school, in Switzerland, was, likewise, motivated by practical concerns. One of Frances Edgeworth’s brothers, the Anglican clergyman William Beaufort, had a deaf and mute son whom he was looking to place in an appropriate educational institution. On writing to her step-mother, Edgeworth briefly gave her opinion of the school and enclosed a prospectus.

⁴⁴⁹ In 1803, Edgeworth, her father and step-mother had attended a lecture given by Pestalozzi in Paris. During the height of his fame as an educational reformer Pestalozzi had been praised by writers from Staël to Wilhelm von Humboldt. His pupils included Hippolyte Leon Denizard Rivail, Charles Badham, Carl Ritter and Friedrich Froebel.

⁴⁵⁰ In fact, Edgeworth remarked somewhat dismissively that Pestalozzi ‘himself is now nearly doting – really and literally unable to say two words together of any European language’ (*MEFS*, 226).

indicates a shift in the direction of her focus with regard to education. Although still interested in the field of education as such, Edgeworth's primary concern in 1820 is to identify the best possible school for Francis's and Michael Pakenham's further education.

Edgeworths' journey through Switzerland is significant in another respect. For it was whilst they were touring the Swiss Cantons, that Edgeworth, as already mentioned in Chapter Three, decided to detour to Staël's country seat at Coppet. The fact that Edgeworth departed from her crowded travelling schedule to make room for this visit to Coppet confirms the importance which she personally attached to this most prominent of France's women writers.

At the time of their visit to Coppet, Staël herself was already dead⁴⁵¹ but the Edgeworths were given a tour of the house and grounds by her son Auguste. The outside of the residence was not quite as impressive as she had pictured it in her imagination: 'The château is not so large or *handsome* as I expected. It has neither the external beauties of age or youth. It is old without being picturesque or venerable' (*MEFS*, 216). However, what the house may have lacked in initial impact was more than compensated for by its close association with the life of its former occupant, which it clearly held for Edgeworth. During the course of their walkabout at Coppet, de Staël's son Auguste talked about his mother's approach to writing. Recounting his description of her working methods, Edgeworth reported back to her step-mother:

M. de Staël told me that she never gave any work to the public in the form in which she had originally composed it – that she *changed* the arrangement and expression of her thoughts with such facility and was so little attached to her first views of the subject often a work was completely remodelled by her as it was passing through the press. Her father had disliked to see her make any preparations through the press ... so that she used to write on a corner of a table ... and always in the room with others for her father would not bear that she should be out of the room where he was. She preserved this habit ... when she was most eager in writing any of her works she never shut her doors – Visitors came as usual! (*MEFS*, 218)

Auguste's description of his mother's preparations for writing and publishing must have resonated with Edgeworth. In stark contrast to the French writer's supposedly entirely spontaneous and easy facility for making large-scale, last minute changes to her works, Edgeworth's own works, as her letters aptly testify, were the result of many hours of laborious diligent application to everything involved in the writing process; from the making of an initial

⁴⁵¹ She died in 1817.

sketch, to the actual writing of the piece and the final correcting of it. Edgeworth's frequent references to what she humorously referred to as 'the family editing committee' at Edgeworthstown, on whom she relied for advice, proof-reading and the copying of her works prior to their (re-)publication, also conveys a sense that her works were the results of a collective as well as individual effort.⁴⁵²

Whilst there appear to be major differences between Staël's and Edgeworth's approach to the final correcting and editing of their works, there are also some striking similarities. Auguste's description of his mother's working methods reminds one that both of these women writers had fathers who played large and influential roles in their lives and with whom they had a close but at times difficult relationship. However, what is perhaps most astonishing is the realisation that Edgeworth, like Staël, was accustomed — throughout her life — to work in the midst of all the hustle and bustle created by a normal eighteenth-century upper class household. Remarkably, both of these women writers managed to practice their literary art as part and parcel of their everyday lives as women with a large range of domestic duties and family responsibilities.

Visiting Coppet seems to have made Edgeworth think and talk again about Staël and the great influence she had had during her hey-day in France. Tellingly, Harriet remarked in a letter to her cousin Lousia Beaufort: 'I had no idea that Bonaparte had feared Mme de Staël's talents, or her love of meddling in politics to the degree he must' (*MEFS*, 270). Reading between the lines of the letters in which Harriet and Fanny report of their visit to Coppet, one gets a distinct sense that Edgeworth was trying to impart something of her own and long-standing fascination with Staël to her young sisters. It is probably fair to say that the visit to Coppet was undertaken by Edgeworth in the spirit of paying homage to one of the real-life heroines of her own era.

As they progressed on their tour through Switzerland, the thoughts of the Edgeworth sisters, like those of most travellers in foreign lands, often turned to home. Of course, travelling affords unparalleled opportunities for drawing comparisons, and the Edgeworths, upon comparing the various relationships and domestic arrangements they had witnessed, appear to have come to the conclusion they got on remarkably well with one another and, that,

⁴⁵² Unlike Staël's father, Edgeworth's father had always attributed great merit to the fact that his daughter's works were edited with such careful attention to detail. Richard Lovell Edgeworth stresses his daughter's attention to detail and the scrupulous editing process her works underwent prior to publication in a number of his prefaces to her books.

despite having experienced all the interesting people and sites⁴⁵³ they had met with, they were quite 'happy to have our dear home to return to at last' (*MEFS*, 181). Perhaps it was also their occasionally very hectic travel schedule on the continent which made the recollection of the calm and ordered day-to-day regularity of their lives in Edgeworthstown appeal to them.⁴⁵⁴

Edgeworth's next opportunity for travelling arose in 1825, when she was invited by Walter Scott to accompany him, and part of his family, on a tour to Killarney. Having entertained Edgeworth previously, in 1823, at Abbotsford, in Scotland, the Scottish writer, whose son was at the time stationed on military service in Ireland, decided to pay a return visit to Edgeworthstown prior to his setting out for County Kerry. The travelling party set out on the second of August, 1825, and ended their joint travels in Dublin on the nineteenth of the same month.

Harriet, once more, accompanied Edgeworth on this occasion, and Scott had with him his son, Captain Scott, and his daughter-in law, as well as his daughter Anne and son-in-law (and latter-day biographer of Scott) John Gibson Lockhart. Together with Scott's man servant and Mrs. Scott's maid the travelling party was therefore comprised of nine persons. As Edgeworth, who later wrote an account of this tour to her friend, the Scottish writer Joanna Baillie⁴⁵⁵, explained, she and Harriet travelled with Scott and the two servants in his German-built barouche, whilst the remaining members of the travelling party travelled separately, in the Scott family chaise.

Although Edgeworth, when looking back on this tour, was eager to impress upon Baillie that 'from our first setting out till the end of our journey nothing disagreeable happened' the tour to Killarney was probably not quite as enjoyable as Edgeworth may

⁴⁵³ Upon seeing some of Switzerland's most spectacular Alpine scenery, Edgeworth had expressed her sense of enchantment with the landscape which surrounded her: 'I did not conceive it possible that I should feel so much pleasure from the sight of the beauties of nature as I have done since I came to this country. The first moment when I saw Mont Blanc will I think remain long an era in my life – a new idea – a new feeling standing alone and above others in my mind' (*MEFS*, 195). Edgeworth's rapturous description of Mont Blanc stands out, as she was not usually given to make detailed observations on landscapes in either her personal letters or her books.

⁴⁵⁴ Neither Fanny nor Harriet met with a suitable marriage partner during their tour of France and Switzerland. In 1826 Harriet, as mentioned before, married the Anglican clergyman Richard Butler and, in 1829, Fanny finally married Lestock Peach Wilson, a man who had courted her for years but whom Edgeworth and her step-mother had deemed not a good enough match. Even shortly before Fanny's wedding Edgeworth found it difficult to reconcile herself to the idea of living in Edgeworthstown without her favourite sister: 'It will be dreadful to us to part with her! – But it is so much for her own happiness that I must not be so selfish as to repine'. See ME to MPE, Edgeworthstown, 29 November 1828, Reel 11.

⁴⁵⁵ As Colvin explains, Edgeworth had made friends with the Scottish woman writer during her 1813 stay in London. See Christina Colvin, "Maria Edgeworth's Tours in Ireland: II. Killarney", in *Studia Neophilologica*, Volume 43 (1971), 252-253. All subsequent references are to this article, will be abbreviated as *K* and cited parenthetically within the main body of the chapter.

privately have anticipated (K, 255). One major problem being that Scott was so famous that, once his intention of travelling to Killarney was made public by the newspapers, it was virtually impossible for the group to travel without attracting a lot of attention in the towns and villages where they stopped en route.⁴⁵⁶ Edgeworth actually commented to Baillie that the small amount of rain which they encountered during their journey had not been unwelcome, especially as these showers often coincided with times when ‘we wanted neither to see or be seen’ (K, 253). Despite the respite from public scrutiny which the drizzly weather had afforded them, upon their arrival in Killarney, the travellers were once more surrounded by throngs of inquisitive locals, who appear to have followed Scott and Edgeworth wherever they went.

Describing their time at Killarney, where they stayed for three days and visited all the attractions it had to offer⁴⁵⁷, Edgeworth seems more concerned to dwell on Scott’s reaction to the locality rather than her own: ‘All I shall say is that it surpassed Scott’s expectations, satisfied and delighted him’ (K, 254). Strangely, Edgeworth refrained altogether from giving any visual description of Killarney, which, during the time of her stay there, was already well established as a famed Irish beauty spot.⁴⁵⁸ All she said to Baillie was: ‘you need not be afraid of my giving you a description of Killarney – As much out of my wish as out of my power to give you an idea of it’ (K, 254). Although Edgeworth, as mentioned before, was not usually given to provide either her correspondents or her readers with elaborate descriptions of landscapes, this total lack of any remark on the spectacular scenery which surrounded her in County Kerry, and which must have struck her as so very different from the relatively flat and featureless landscape she was used to seeing around Edgeworthstown, is somewhat surprising.

One reason for this may have been that Edgeworth simply did not think much of Killarney. The ironic tone of her comment in *Ennui*, where she ends her long footnoted description of a typical stag-hunt, which takes place along the shores of Killarney’s Upper Lake, with a stag, who actually has tears streaming down his face at the point of his agonising death, suggests that Edgeworth’s enthusiasm for this tourist trap in the South-West of Ireland

⁴⁵⁶ Part of the reason why Edgeworth’s account of her tour to Killarney is so brief and scant in detail is that she appears to have been unsure of what Baillie had heard reported of it. Afraid of dwelling on anything her friend may already have known, Edgeworth apologised in advance: ‘perhaps I am telling you things that have been in the newspapers but as I have not read them you must excuse me’ (K, 255).

⁴⁵⁷ Edgeworth describes in detail only their visit to nearby Mucross Abbey, where Anne Scott violated local custom by cutting out a piece of bark from an ancient yew tree which was regarded as sacred by the people of Killarney. Whereas Edgeworth refrains from commenting on what she made of Anne’s behaviour, she mentions that Scott was displeased with his daughter for having done so.

⁴⁵⁸ In fact, due to its picturesque lake-and mountain-setting Killarney had become so popular that it formed part of many an English visitor’s scenic tour through Ireland. Killarney and the Giant’s Causeway are also the only two places specifically mentioned by Edgeworth in her description of Lord Glenthorn’s tour of Ireland in *Ennui*.

was, at best, qualified. Reading Edgeworth's account of her time in Killarney, one gets the distinct impression that, for one reason or another, she was too distracted to quite take in the place. Her time in Killarney certainly appears to have remained as a slightly blurred image in Edgeworth's mind. In fact, she hardly comments on it at all, just saying to Baillie that Scott, due to the funeral of a local dignitary, did not, in the end, and as originally planned, take part in the stag-hunt, which had been planned in his honour. She mentions in passing that her half-brother William (1794-1829), at the time employed in County Kerry on his first road-building project as a civil engineer, made the journey from Valentia in order to join her and Scott for the duration of their short stay in Killarney.

As it turned out, Killarney was not the only location where Edgeworth and Scott appear to have had little chance of viewing anything with a degree of peace and quiet. In Cork, for instance, the lord mayor and a large public deputation was awaiting to welcome the 'illustrious visitor', as Scott had been termed by the Irish newspapers (*K*, 254). At Limerick the bishop even offered his palace for Scott's accommodation. As with her description of their time in Killarney, Edgeworth, however, does not go into specific detail as to how she and Scott spent their time together in either Cork or Limerick. Likewise, she is very sparse with her comments on the time they spent in Mallow and Cashel. She remembers one town as a place where Scott excited a great (and, to Edgeworth's mind) a somewhat indecorous interest on part of the local nuns and the other (i.e. Mallow) as the place where 'all come out on the public walk to take a gaze at Sir W[alter] Scott while he took a gaze at an old ivy-mantled tower' (*K*, 255).

Scott's interest in every building and structure of a remotely antique appearance, which they passed en route appears to have jarred with Edgeworth's sense of what was practical, and probably also with what could reasonably be expected of her (as a woman in her late fifties). Tellingly, she remarked to Baillie: 'Such climbing and scrambling as he made at all the ruins we went to see – up every staircase – whole or broken wherever the most active of the young would go or wherever tradition said human foot had been ventured' (*K*, 255). However, as if afraid lest she had accidentally let slip something more than she ought to have said, Edgeworth qualifies her above remark quickly by stressing to Baillie that Scott, as a travelling companion, really was 'the most good humoured-obliging-joyous-the most courteous in manner the most easy in conversation' (*K*, 255).

Edgeworth's reluctance to comment on Scott is indeed striking. In fact, her entire account of the tour to Killarney compares strangely to the natural tone and the effervescent

quality of the letters which she penned from France. The impression which her letter to Baillie conveys is that Edgeworth felt oddly self-conscious, if not decidedly uncomfortable during her tour to Killarney, when she, alongside Scott, was exposed to so much public scrutiny. By way of contrast, the reports⁴⁵⁹ of Scott and his family, which Edgeworth had sent home to Edgeworthstown during her visit to his home Abbotsford, show her in her normal, humorous if not slightly mocking frame of mind. They paint the Scottish poet and novelist as a kind man, and a generous host, but also as someone with slightly dotty notions and habits. Harriet remarks, for instance, on his habit of talking incessantly at dinner-time, when Edgeworth was placed by his side.⁴⁶⁰ For some days of their visit, Scott appears to have suffered from a cold. In any case, he sniffled a lot, yawned frequently and Harriet could not refrain from commenting that he stuck them, at times, as somewhat 'dull'.⁴⁶¹

As Harriet's above comments already hint at, their time at Abbotsford was perhaps not quite so enjoyable or harmonious as first appearances might lead one to believe. Tellingly, Scott's son-in-law Lockhart, upon observing Edgeworth during this visit, said of her: 'Miss Edgeworth is at Abbotsford, and has been for some time; a little, dark, bearded, sharp, withered, active, laughing, talking, impudent, fearless, outspoken, honest, whiggish, unchristian, good-tempered, kindly ultra-Irish body. I like her one day, and damn her to perdition the next'.⁴⁶² Although not all of Lockhart's above epithets for Edgeworth, as Butler points out, were meant to be unkind, his critical remarks outweigh anything positive which he has to say. Significantly, Lockhart's comments on Edgeworth also remind one that, as far as the Abbotsford circle was concerned, she was an 'ultra-Irish body'.⁴⁶³ Although all concerned appear to have striven to maintain cordial relationships for the duration of Edgeworth's stay at Abbotsford, Lockhart's above description shows that her visit there was not free from considerable underlying tensions.

Commenting on how they spent their time at Abbotsford, Harriet explains that they were taken by Scott on a number of day excursions. Her further observations on these reveal

⁴⁵⁹ Edgeworth delegated the task of passing on her observations and comments about the Scotts to Harriet, who had accompanied her to Abbotsford. See Christina Colvin's "A visit to Abbotsford", in *Review of English Literature*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares, Volume V, January 1964.

⁴⁶⁰ See "A visit to Abbotsford", 58.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63; 64.

⁴⁶² Quoted in Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 3.

⁴⁶³ Lockhart's description of her as an 'ultra-Irish body' reminds one of the need to tread carefully, when making assumptions about Edgeworth's cultural roots and affiliations. His comments on Edgeworth also suggest that a view of her as simply 'Anglo-Irish' (as Julian Moynahan, for instance, proposes) fails to do justice to the complex relationship between the concept of identity as such and the cultural context in which this identity is viewed.

that the Edgeworth sisters could not see the point in being dragged around the neighbourhood by Scott, in his desire to show them places and sites, which he deemed to be of interest because of their historical associations. Clearly, Edgeworth and Harriet did not share his particular interest in local Scottish lore and legend, and would have preferred to have spent more of their time in Abbotsford itself, discussing broader subjects, including that of new and old literary publications. On that score, Harriet was piqued to say that, despite being shown the library of the house⁴⁶⁴, she had not been able to discover the whereabouts of her sister's 'Inimitables' since their arrival. 'Inimitables', as Colvin explains, was the Edgeworth 'family nickname for Maria Edgeworth's books'.⁴⁶⁵ It seems that Scott, on a previous occasion, had been presented by Edgeworth with a complete set of her works to date.

Harriet's mentioning of this small circumstance helps to remind one that, at the time of Edgeworth's visit to Abbotsford, she — of the two writers — was the one with the longer and most established literary career to her name.⁴⁶⁶ Whereas Scott had only achieved enduring popular success with *Waverley* (1814), and was now, less than a decade later, still riding on the crest of a wave of success which had begun with his first historical novel, Edgeworth — although having many more titles to her name — had, by now, already passed the highpoint of the popularity she had enjoyed with the British reading public.

What Edgeworth's comments on her time in Abbotsford also illustrate is that she was not, in any way, intimidated by either Scott, his family⁴⁶⁷ or his sprawling new country pile in Scotland.⁴⁶⁸ In fact, as Harriet told her mother, they had considerably more to tell of their stay at Abbotsford but would reserve their further comments until they had a chance to do so 'in

⁴⁶⁴ At the time of the Edgeworths' visit to Abbotsford, Scott's ambitiously planned new home was still unfinished. This meant that although Harriet could see that it might one day amount to a 'delightful house', there was at present no drawing room available, making it necessary for the visitors to sit in 'a little book room till the gentlemen have discussed their wine after dinner'. Ibid, 59.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 62.

⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, as Scott had told Edgeworth, it had been his reading of *Castle Rackrent*, which had inspired him to write *Waverley* in the first place.

⁴⁶⁷ In fact, the Edgeworth sisters actively disliked some members of Scott's family. Of his son, Walter junior, dubbed by them 'the Cornet', Harriet said: 'The Cornet said he would not fail to go to Etown [sic] if the 15th go to Ireland — he is very amiable & though not very bright he is very anxious to do his best'. She also remarked about his taking leave of Abbotsford: 'The next morning they all seemed to feel just as we do after the noble scion has departed — they are all very nice together & understand trap particularly well as they are all very much afeared [sic] of Sir Walter'. Ibid, 59. As Colvin explains, the expression 'trap' was a code word among the Edgeworth women for situations which required them to hold their tongues. It is likely that the 'noble scion' Harriet refers to in relation to Edgeworthstown was Lovell, who had inherited the estate upon his father's death but proved so incompetent in handling affairs that Edgeworth eventually intervened and persuaded him to sell his share to Sneyd, as the next male Edgeworth in line to him.

⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, Edgeworth would have had little reason to feel over-awed by Scott. At least compared to her genteel origins, Scott was very much a self-made man. She would also have been aware that the building of Abbotsford itself had only been made possible by the monies *Waverley* had earned him.

the Cab'. Colvin explains that this expression was commonly employed by the Edgeworth women to refer to their private family circle at Edgeworthstown.

When one takes Edgeworth's stay in Abbotsford into account, what she has to say about Scott in her letter to Baillie, also takes on a different meaning. Edgeworth, who, after all, had been lionised in London little over a decade ago, in 1813⁴⁶⁹, must have been startled by the incredible amount of public attention which Scott attracted in Ireland (and some of which he evidently courted). The fact that his appearance in Ireland attracted so much more notice than even she was accustomed to must have come as a surprise and a revelation to Edgeworth.

Crucially, it can also be seen as evidence that the transfer of literary prestige from the kind of novel Edgeworth customarily produced (i.e. the national tale) to Scott's new kind of historical novel was already well on the way. In *The Achievement of Literary Authority* — her insightful study of this period in the development of the novel — Ina Ferris reminds us that Edgeworth's and Scott's novels were, at the time of their joint visit to Killarney, still being read side by side by readers and some critics alike. Edgeworth's *Ormond*, for instance, was regularly placed alongside — and, indeed, often paired with — Scott's books.⁴⁷⁰ Writing for the *Edinburgh Review*, the opinion-making critic Francis Jeffrey, who had been so influential in the promotion of Edgeworth's works to date, had remarked of her Irish novels that 'the tales [were] as works of more serious importance than much of the true history and solemn philosophy that comes daily under our inspection' and praised them for being such 'true and solemn discourses'.⁴⁷¹ As recently as 1820, the *New Monthly Magazine* had said of Edgeworth's works that 'in extent and accuracy of observation [in her novels] Miss Edgeworth has no rival'.⁴⁷²

Scott's *Waverley* novels, in contrast, had, at their first appearance on the literary scene in 1814, not been received so favourably. Ferris, quoting from Jeffrey's initial response to *Waverley*, even observes that Scott's novel, at its inception, was criticised for its 'hasty and clumsy writing; extensive use of a dialect "unintelligible" to the majority of readers' and its 'historical setting in a period lacking the conventional interest of either remoteness or

⁴⁶⁹ For Edgeworth 1813 reception in London, see *Letters from England*.

⁴⁷⁰ See Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 67.

⁴⁷¹ Quoted in *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 62.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 63.

contemporaneity'.⁴⁷³ However, as time passed, and *Waverley*, which fitted neither the generic category of 'high romance' nor that of the 'proper novel' came to be seen as exhibiting something new, 'wild and extraordinary',⁴⁷⁴ Scott's kind of nostalgic celebration of a part in Scotland's long history of conflict with England, came — as Ferris points out — to be regarded in terms of providing a 'release from 'the disciplinary virtues of an Edgeworth'.⁴⁷⁵

Significantly, when Edgeworth was asked, shortly before her death, by her English publisher if she would write a new preface, along the lines of Scott's, in *Waverly*, to some of her best known works, she declined the offer, telling him:

I cannot believe that anything I could write as prefaces or notes to my stories could add to their value or interest with the public in any proportion to those of the *Waverly* novels; and I have too honest a pride to degrade myself by servile imitation ... Sir Walter Scott, skilful beyond all other writers in the art of gracefully speaking of himself, possesses in those prefaces and notes peculiar advantages which protect him from the offensive appearance of egotism: it is not of himself as an individual that he speaks, but of his country – of its historical traditions and romantic legends ... The history of each of his fictitious narratives ... has raised Sir Walter Scott to a pre-eminence never before attained by any writer in his life time ... After this view, how can I speak of myself and my works? ... As a woman, my life, wholly domestic, cannot afford anything interesting to the public: I am like the knife grinder⁴⁷⁶ - I have no story to tell. (*MME*, 3:258-259)

On one level, Edgeworth's above response indicates her genuine and profound respect for Scott's achievement with regard to *Waverley*. However, as is so often the case with Edgeworth, one has to read between the lines in order to recover something of the full extent of her meaning. For Edgeworth, even whilst singing his praises, is also commenting (albeit indirectly) on an important transformation, which has taken place at the heart of the novel-genre as such, and which she had occasion to witness over the course of her own career as a writer. For it was during Edgeworth's life-time that the novel turned from a literary form,

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 81.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 86. Ferris points out that — ironically — these were the very qualities for which women writers like Sidney Owenson had been explicitly criticised.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁷⁶ With her reference to the knife-grinder Edgeworth alludes to a poem written by the Tory politician George Canning (1770-1827), which had originally been published in *The Anti-Jacobin* (Issue no. 2, 1797), a weekly publication founded and edited by him. In reply to his interrogator's request for his story, Canning's knife-grinder replies: 'Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, Sir'.

which, since its inception, had been associated with, and dominated by, woman writers, into a form adopted and taken over by (male) authors of Scott's school of writing.⁴⁷⁷

Moreover, Edgeworth's observations on the characteristic features of Scott's particular kind of historical novel are evidence that she regarded *Waverley* as belonging to a different category of regional novel to that in which she classes her own Irish tales. In this respect, her refusal to comply with her publisher's request to write a preface along the format used in *Waverley*, can be understood as an indication on Edgeworth's part that she felt unable and, indeed, unwilling to produce new literary pieces along Scott's format of regional novel. Scott's literary regionalism, as Edgeworth endeavours to explain, is so different in conception, style and aim to the kind which defines her Irish tales that she considers it nonsensical to even compare their respective approaches to fiction-writing.

Interestingly, Edgeworth's estimation of her regional novels as differing quintessentially from Scott's type of regional historical novel corresponds with the view of her works to which some modern scholars have also come. Brian Caraher, for instance, in the course of describing three distinct types of literary regionalism, which can be identified in the period, classes Scott's works, alongside those of John Banim, Gerald Griffin and William Carlton, as belonging to the 'sentimentalist and folkloric mode of regionalism'. He argues that Edgeworth's uniquely 'ironic mode of literary regionalism' should be understood as belonging to a category of its own, as it is distinctly different, both from the sort of regionalism practised by Scott and the 'anti-modern, conservative and reactionary mode' of regionalism which can be found in the novels of Samuel Lover, Charles Lever, and those of Somerville and Ross.⁴⁷⁸

To return briefly to her journey to Killarney, what is interesting is that, although Edgeworth, in her letter to Baillie, is very sparse with her comments on her famous travelling companion and the journey itself, both Scott and Lockhart later claimed that she had, in fact, been 'writing all the time' during their joint sojourn to the South-West of Ireland (*K*, 252). Unfortunately, the only surviving account of Edgeworth's tour to Killarney, as Colvin explains, is to be found in the letter she wrote to Baillie. The fact that the addressee of Edgeworth's account was somebody other than a close family member is reflected in the

⁴⁷⁷ This development also explains Edgeworth's defensive and yet revealing statement that as a woman writer her 'life, wholly domestic, cannot afford anything interesting to the public'. In contrast to someone like Scott, who liked to cloak himself with the mantle of being a professional writer, Edgeworth, as I have argued in Chapter 3, regarded her writing not divorced from, but an integral part of, her normal domestic existence as a woman.

⁴⁷⁸ See Brian Caraher's "Edgeworth, Wilde and Joyce: Reading Irish Regionalism through 'the cracked lookingglass' of a Servant's Art", in *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century: Regional Identity*, ed. Leon Livtack and Glenn Hooper (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 135.

careful, if not constrained, tone of her letter. It seems likely that Edgeworth was more cautious in what she said of the journey in general, and of Scott and his family in particular, because there was always a possibility that her letter might be read aloud by Baillie, or even, that sections of it might be reported back to Scott.⁴⁷⁹

What is certainly noticeable is that Edgeworth's letters to her own family are less composed, considerably more spontaneous and filled with many more detailed observations and comments than the one about Killarney, which she wrote to Baillie.⁴⁸⁰ Edgeworth wrote an account of her next journey in Ireland — this time to sparsely populated Connemara⁴⁸¹, in the West of Ireland — to her half-brother Michael Pakenham (1812-81). It is probably fair to say that he became one of Edgeworth's most important correspondents within the family-circle during her latter years. When Edgeworth made her famous remark about feeling unable to draw a fictional portrait of Ireland 'as she is now', it was addressed to Pakenham. At the time of receiving Edgeworth's letter about her time in Connemara, Pakenham was living and working in India.

Despite the fact that Pakenham was Edgeworth's youngest half-brother and had left Edgeworthstown as an adolescent in the 1820s in order to qualify himself for a future serving in India, a special relationship seems to have united them. Upon leaving Edgeworthstown, Pakenham had initially attended school at Charterhouse (1823-28) and subsequently Haileybury College, Hertford (1829-30), for further studies.⁴⁸² Throughout the period of his further education Edgeworth corresponded with Pakenham, at first supporting and encouraging him in his studies⁴⁸³ and, once, he was in India, keeping him abreast of events

⁴⁷⁹ Letters, as is well known, were often regarded as a form of entertainment in the period. Even Edgeworth, who always dreaded the idea that some of her private letters might be read by people other than those for whom they were intended, was, on occasion, known to pass around letters which had been lent to her alone. In her dealings with the Moore family, for instance, Edgeworth excited the displeasure of Mrs. Moore by holding on to a parcel of letters (written by George Moore) in order to read them out to her bed-ridden cousin Sophy.

⁴⁸⁰ This point is made by Colvin in her short introduction to Edgeworth's tour to Killarney (*K*, 253).

⁴⁸¹ Both Hare's *Life and Letters* and Frances Edgeworth's *Memoir of Maria Edgeworth* contain accounts of this tour. However, as both these accounts have been heavily edited and abridged, I will, for the purpose of my discussion of Edgeworth's tour to Connemara refer throughout to H. E. Butler's *Maria Edgeworth's Tour in Connemara and the Martins of Ballinahinch*, ed. H. E. Butler (London: Constable & Company, 1950). All subsequent references are to this edition, will be abbreviated as *TiC* and included parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

⁴⁸² Haileybury College specialised in the training of civil servants intended mainly for India. Pakenham, for instance, learnt Bengali and Hindustani as part of his educational preparations prior to leaving for the Subcontinent.

⁴⁸³ Edgeworth's early letters to Pakenham are very affectionate, often expressing appreciation of his taking the time to write letters, and encouraging him to continue writing home: 'My dear little fellow whatever trouble it may have cost you to write such a quantity as you have I am convinced you would feel well paid if you could know the pleasure your letters have given us – so entertaining – so natural- so kind & considering ... It is worth while to write letters or notes for you my bonny boy because you use them all & enjoy all they procure you'. In

and news from Edgeworthstown by writing to him often very extended letters. Sending a letter from Ireland to India could take six months or more, and reading their letters, one gets a sense that the physical distance alone sometimes made it easier for Edgeworth to tell Pakenham things which she would be unlikely to tell to somebody closer to home. Edgeworth clearly thought of her brother frequently and they shared many interests, including a love of plants and botany.⁴⁸⁴

She knew that Pakenham, whilst in India, looked forward to receiving letters from Edgeworthstown and her account of her journey through Connemara is all the more interesting because, unlike her description of the Killarney tour, Edgeworth was not anxious to skip over details. Probably with the letter's long journey in mind, Edgeworth appears to have scribbled away, not concerned with the number of pages she was writing. As a result Edgeworth's one-hundred and fifty-five page account of Connemara enables unprecedented insight into her thoughts and feelings upon exploring the West of Ireland.

To begin with, she tells Pakenham something about the personalities of her travelling companions and her own motives for deciding to accompany them on their further travels. As Edgeworth explains in her letter, she had only got to know Sir Culling Smith and his wife, Lady Isabella, one week prior to their setting out for Connemara.⁴⁸⁵ It is certainly odd that she

the same letter Edgeworth inquires: 'when do your holidays begin & what is to become of you – Have you any guess? – Has anybody invited you to spend any of theirs with them? Please do answer – Indeed I know you will for you are a dear old bachelor'. See ME to MPE, Edgeworthstown, 9 May 1828, Reel 11. As this letter shows, Pakenham, despite being supported by his family in Edgeworthstown, was expected from a young age to be independent. One gets a sense that Edgeworth and her step-mother were actively encouraging him to behave manly. Edgeworth also often referred to his future life in India. She wrote, for instance: 'On the 24th May we drank health & happiness to you and as much wealth as is consistent with the first and can contribute to the last – More I never wish you to have – So pray do not when you go to India toil & fret yourself into a liver complaint for the sake of a few hundred or even thousand guineas more. Don't come home as yellow as the gold you bring in your pocket – bring less & keep your own – the colour of a good Christian – But you will not be gone to India these 2 years so that I am a little premature in talking about your return'. ME to MPE, Edgeworthstown, 10 June 1828. Reel 11.

⁴⁸⁴ She regularly told Pakenham how his plants were doing at Edgeworthstown: 'My peonies and yours are in charming blow- There never was any thing so beautiful as my double scarlet Turkey anemones this year...'. See *Ibid.* During his time in India, Pakenham became an accomplished botanist and actually had a plant named after the family. In 1842, Hugh Falconer, Superintendent of the Hon. East India Company's Botanic Gardens at Saharanpore sent Edgeworth word that 'Edgeworthia' was henceforth to be included in a new comprehensive plant encyclopaedia. See Hugh Falconer to ME, 15 March 1842, Reel 13. Edgeworth and Pakenham also shared a love of books and reading. For instance, in the midst of recounting her adventures in Connemara to Pakenham, Edgeworth paused, in order to draw his attention to Samuel Lover's book *Legends and Stories of Ireland* (1831), which she had just read. She suggests that Pakenham buy this book in Calcutta: 'you will pay five shillings for it and it will give you five guineas worth of amusement' (*TiC*, 20) and goes on to say 'whenever you have seen Lover's book, give me the satisfaction of knowing how you like them. Don't forget' (*TiC*, 22).

⁴⁸⁵ In fact, Edgeworth would probably never have met with the Smiths had it not been for Fanny. She had written home from Dublin, telling Edgeworth about the couple and expressing her apprehension at their plan to take their young infant with them on their planned tour of Ireland. As a result of this intelligence Edgeworth and her step-mother decided to invite them to Edgeworthstown and offered to accommodate the child and its nurse whilst Sir

decided to travel with them, as there was, from the very outset, an element of tension between her and Sir Culling, whom she describes to Pakenham as a man 'of old family, large fortune and great philanthropy, extending to poor little Ireland and her bogs, and her Connemara' (*TiC*, 1). Edgeworth, as her above description makes plain, suspects even whilst they are still in Edgeworthstown that Sir Culling, with his preconceived notions of Ireland, will prove to be an inadequate traveller.

Worse than even Sir Culling's preconceptions, was that he had arrived in Ireland full of misinformation and totally unprepared for his further travels. Indeed, reading Edgeworth's description of him, one gets the distinct impression that Sir Culling takes neither the preparations for his travels to Connemara nor Ireland itself quite seriously.⁴⁸⁶ In a manner distinctly reminiscent of Edgeworth's character Lord Craiglethorpe in *Ennui*, Sir Culling has come to Ireland without proper maps, realistic ideas of achievable daily travelling distances and with no idea about either Ireland's topography or climate. Edgeworth tells Pakenham that she observed him, sitting up one evening in Edgeworthstown, 'studying the map of Ireland and roadworks' and heard him declare aloud that 'he could easily get to Connemara, Westport, and the Barony of Erris, see all in a week and come back to Edgeworthstown, take up Bambino and proceed on a northern or southern tour' (*TiC*, 3).

Although Edgeworth goes on to say that she herself possessed only a limited amount of 'local knowledge' in these matters, this is somewhat of an understatement as she knew through William's reports just how still unfinished many of the supposedly completed new roads in Connemara were.⁴⁸⁷ One can already begin to see how Edgeworth's position as the only member of the travelling party with insider knowledge of Ireland meant that she would often see things in a different light to the Smiths.⁴⁸⁸

Culling and his wife travelled onwards, into the West of Ireland. It seems likely that the Smiths asked Edgeworth to accompany them on their tour out of a sense of obligation to their hosts at Edgeworthstown.

⁴⁸⁶ In their study of travel writing, Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon identify the individual who fails to properly acknowledge the foreign locality he encounters by reacting to all he sees 'with an air of nonchalance' as a distinct type of inadequate traveller. See Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon (eds.), *Transports: Travel, Pleasure, and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

⁴⁸⁷ It was well-known that many roads in Connemara, for the building of which money had been allocated and handed out by the British Administration, remained only partially completed. Remarking on this, one contemporary observer expostulated: 'Would it be believed in England, George, that this atrocious system of speculation has been carried to such an extent, that roads have been passed, as completed, when their lines have been but roughly marked out – and bridges have actually been paid for, the necessary accounting affidavits having been sworn to it in open court, when not a stone was ever laid, and to this day the stream run without a solitary arch to span its flood from the source to the debouchement?'. See William Hamilton Maxwell, *Wild Sports of the West of Ireland* (1832; Southampton: Ashford Press Publishing, 1986), 32.

⁴⁸⁸ What appears to have irritated Edgeworth especially was Sir Culling's annoying habit of proffering unsolicited and simplistic solutions to complex Irish problems. Edgeworth, for instance, tells Pakenham that she

Given Edgeworth's above sentiments it is indeed surprising that she decided to travel with Sir Culling in the first place. She was aware that, in doing so she was perhaps acting against her better judgement and certainly behaving out-of-character: 'I confess it was imprudent and very unlike my usual dislike to leave home without any of my people with me'. However, as Edgeworth explains to Pakenham, she considered this opportunity to visit Connemara as too precious to be missed: 'to see all I wanted to see of the wonderful ways of going on and manners of the natives'⁴⁸⁹ I was perhaps better for not being with my own family, and especially for its not being suspected that I was an authoress and might put them in a book' (*TiC*, 3). As becomes apparent from her comment to Pakenham, Edgeworth, in order to maximise her chance of really taking in the people and atmosphere of Connemara, wanted to travel with as little fuss as possible. Indeed, for her purposes of close observation it would have suited her well to have remained incognito for the duration of her journey.

Expanding on her reasons for wishing to see Connemara, she tells him that she had been curious about the West of Ireland since she 'first came to Ireland fifty years ago'. Edgeworth explains that since then, Connemara had been associated in her imagination with 'talk of the King of Connemara', with 'smugglers and caves', 'murders and mermaids', 'duels and banshees', 'fairies' and colourful characters like 'Humanity Dick Martin' (*TiC*, 3-4). Her comments to Pakenham make clear that Edgeworth has retained, if not nurtured, the romantic image of the West of Ireland, which she has had since her earliest days in Edgeworthstown.⁴⁹⁰ Edgeworth, even at this late stage in her life, shows herself open to the possibility of encountering extraordinary people, spectacles and adventures in Connemara. These, in a sense, come with the territory into which she is about to venture.

The extent to which Connemara was still very much a terra incognita — not only for Edgeworth, but for many a visitor from further a field (whether Irish or English) — even in the Ireland of the 1830s is nowadays perhaps hard to appreciate. In Daniel Augustus Beaufort's

and the rest of the family 'found Sir Culling very full of schemes of improvements for Ireland, especially planting turnips and introducing the English rotation of crops, which would make a paradise of this country in a trice ... between ourselves, though he talks for ever of political economy and improving the world in every direction, his belief in his own power of making an angel out of every Paddy he met led me to doubt whether his head was quite as good as his heart' (*TiC*, 3).

⁴⁸⁹ Edgeworth's usage here of the term 'natives' is significant. When referring to the villagers and tenants around Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth usually describes them as 'the local people' in her correspondence. In *Ennui* Edgeworth has Lady Geraldine criticise English visitors specifically for their tendency to view and judge all the people they encounter in Ireland as 'the natives'. Edgeworth's usage of the term in the above context registers her awareness that the inhabitants of Connemara were beyond her sphere of personal knowledge.

⁴⁹⁰ For the importance of romance generally in Edgeworth's oeuvre see Sharon Murphy's *Maria Edgeworth and Romance* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

Memoir of a Map Of Ireland, for instance, — one of the four authoritative works on Ireland recommended by Edgeworth to Lord Colambre (and her readers alike) — Connemara is represented as a shaded area, which is left almost entirely blank. In fact, on Beaufort's map not even a single road into, or out of, Connemara is marked.

Writing about the 'perception of isolation and archaism', which clung to this remote region of Ireland persistently until well into the nineteenth-century, Kevin Whelan remarks: 'The absence of roads, the stormy, inaccessible coastline, the mountain heart of Connemara, the ubiquity of the Irish language — all combined to render the region a cultural island. This reinforced its physically insular character, as Connemara is virtually an island, surrounded by an almost unbroken chain of water from Galway Bay, Lough Corrib, Lough Nafoeoy, Killary Harbour, to the Atlantic Ocean. ... Thus Connemara's regional name proclaimed its age old distinctiveness — an Irish example of a French-style 'pays' — a region both physically and culturally distinctive through time, and so acknowledged by its inhabitants'.⁴⁹¹ Whelan's above description conveys something of the rugged and isolated character of the region into which Edgeworth was about to travel. Given the reputation which adhered to Connemara one begins to see just what an adventurous undertaking it must have appeared to Edgeworth.

Adventures were indeed part of Edgeworth's journey to the West of Ireland but perhaps not entirely in the shape or manner she had envisaged. It was already September by the time Edgeworth and the Smiths finally set out for the West from Edgeworthstown. From Edgeworth's account it appears that the 'half open German Britchka', in which she was travelling with Lady Isabella⁴⁹², gave trouble from the very beginning. Being of an old-fashioned design and a very heavy type Sir Culling's carriage was, as Edgeworth could not help to notice, ill-suited to their travelling purposes. There was the added problem that nothing in the carriage worked as it ought to have done. Edgeworth tells Pakenham that the little foldable tables (which she might have used to write her observations on the stretch of countryside through which they were travelling) were permanently stuck in the luggage holding

⁴⁹¹ See Kevin Whelan's introduction to *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Connemara; By the Blake Family of Renvyle House 1823/1824* (1825; Clifden: Gibbons Publications, 1995), vii. In her letter to Pakenham Edgeworth tells him that she and the Smiths stopped for an overnight stay at Renvyle House on their journey out of Connemara. She further remarked that Renvyle, with its comfortable rooms and furnishings, symbolised to her the return to normal 'civilisation' (*TiC*, 73). Edgeworth did not, on this occasion, meet the Blake family as they were not residing at Renvyle at the time of her visit.

⁴⁹² It seems from Edgeworth's account that Sir Culling did not travel with the two women in the carriage but accompanied the carriage on horseback.

'wells' of the carriage, and could not be freed without the help of some able-bodied men.⁴⁹³ The unpleasant task of putting up the unwieldy 'fairy-board windows' during rainy or windy weather also fell to Edgeworth, as Lady Isabella, who was still not fully recovered from her recent confinement, felt physically too weak to do so. Edgeworth explains that, once the fairy board windows were in place, 'so little light [came in] from the side panels' (*TiC*, 6) that she could neither see much of the outside world nor make out much inside the carriage itself.

That she was effectively prevented from catching any glimpse of the surrounding scenery for long stretches of their journey must have been highly frustrating to Edgeworth, especially as she suffered from the added disadvantage of being naturally short-sighted. The fact that Edgeworth was unable to properly view the country-side en route may be one reason why she failed to give Pakenham a visual account of her gradual progression into the West of Ireland.

As Chard and Langdon remark, the arrival at the final destination of a journey often 'entails the crossing of a symbolic threshold'.⁴⁹⁴ However, in the case of Edgeworth's journey into the West it was not the landscape as such which provided her with a sense of anticipatory excitement but her arrival in the prosperous market town of Ballinasloe. During the nineteenth-century, Ballinasloe was known, above all, as the venue for Ireland's (and, in fact, Europe's) largest annual live-stock fair. Unfortunately, Edgeworth and the Smiths narrowly missed seeing the fair itself but on their approach to Ballinasloe, Edgeworth notices that the sheep and cattle drovers which are coming their way are cursing not just in English but also 'in Irish' (*TiC*, 10). Edgeworth's taking cognisance of the fact that she is now entering into a region where Gaelic will be the language which is most widely used and spoken registers her sense that she is moving further away from her own region of Ireland, where the wide-spread usage of Gaelic had ceased long before her arrival in Edgeworthstown. At Ballinasloe, Edgeworth also had the opportunity to witness, for the first time, a typical West-of Ireland style horse-jumping contest. Surprised at the high passions which this aroused in the many of the onlookers, Edgeworth remarks to Pakenham that that she had never heard such wild 'shouting and such laughing and such hurraing [sic]' (*TiC*, 13) before. Her comment

⁴⁹³ One imagines that this uncomfortable way of travelling must have grated with Edgeworth, particularly as she had insisted prior to their setting out together that she would pay her share of the travelling expenses (*TiC*, 10). Moreover, as her account books for her journey to France and Switzerland show, Edgeworth, although always careful in how she laid out her money, was not in the habit of stinting on the payment for a well-equipped and comfortable coach when going on her own travels.

⁴⁹⁴ See introduction to *Transports: Travel, Pleasure and Imaginative Geography*, 7.

reinforces the impression that the people she encountered on her way to the West were, to Edgeworth, quite a different set of people to the Edgeworthstown locals.

Leaving Ballinasloe⁴⁹⁵, Edgeworth and the Smiths travelled onwards, to Loughrea, Clonmacnoise and Galway, which Edgeworth describes but little apart from calling it a 'desolate' place and the 'dirtiest town' in Ireland (*TiC*, 16). After Galway there were no more post horses available for hire, so that both the matter of transport and the problem of finding acceptable overnight accommodation became increasingly difficult. One can almost picture Edgeworth shaking her head in silent frustration at Sir Culling's unfortunate propensity to react to the challenges thrown at them in a manner equally incompetent and arrogant. Matters between them came to a head, not, as one might expect, when they entered the little hill-side spa town of Oughterard, in which a Cholera-victim had just died, necessitating their spending the night in a sparsely equipped, simple cottage,⁴⁹⁶ but, once this crisis was over, next day, whilst they went on a pleasure excursion to a cavern situated on the shores of Lough Corrib.

A boy guide from Oughterard brings the travelling party via boat to the cavern, in which Edgeworth catches sight of a woman, who is standing high above them, on the edge of a rocky ledge and whom, in the dim light of the cave, she first takes to be a witch. For the purpose of illuminating the cave little bundles of burning straw are thrown down by this woman. For some time Edgeworth and the Smiths look upon this strange spectacle in spellbound amazement. Upon leaving the cave the bright outside sunshine reveals the former 'witch' of the cave as nothing more than an old, raggedly attired local woman called Madgy Burke, who is intent upon exacting payment from the visitors for her lighting services in the cave.

⁴⁹⁵ Travelling with the Smiths turned out to be more of a hindrance and less than a help in more than one respect. Whilst still in Ballinasloe the Smiths were mistakenly thought to be a different English couple (of the same name) by the resident Anglo-Irish gentry. As a result, contact with the Smiths and, consequently, with Edgeworth was deliberately avoided by the important local families. Edgeworth, who had heard Lady Cloncarty being described 'the most intellectual lady in the world' (*TiC*, 13) and particularly wished to visit her at her nearby seat 'Garbally' could now not do so, as this would have necessitated Lady Cloncarty's inviting the Smiths as well. An apologetic Lady Cloncarty let it be known to Edgeworth that her husband, who was prone to epileptic fits, 'could not bear to see any strangers' at home but that if she could come on her own she would gladly receive her. Lady Cloncarty's comment is interesting, as it confirms Edgeworth's special position as belonging to a privileged inner (Anglo-)Irish circle, from which the Smiths are excluded by definition of being strangers from England.

⁴⁹⁶ During this night in Oughterard Edgeworth even agreed to sample a small glass of locally produced poteen. Although the illegally distilled whiskey was evidently not to her personal taste she observes rather sarcastically about the Smiths, who had originally not wanted to try poteen: 'I can tell you that with our knight and the fair Isabella it went down quite natural and with glee' (*TiC*, 20). Interestingly, one contemporary observer remarked that poteen-making was often the only means of earning the inhabitants of Connemara some money for their oats. The price paid for grain generally in the West of Ireland was below that paid in the rest of Ireland and the process of conveying the oats to market, through a mountainous terrain without proper roads proved a difficult if not an impossible undertaking for many a cottier. See Maxwell, *Wild Sports of the West of Ireland*, 218.

Madgy Burke walks the visitors back to their boat, all the time, as Edgeworth tells Pakenham, pleading with them for ‘a sixpence more’ (*TiC*, 24). Although Edgeworth is quite certain that the old peasant woman greatly exaggerates the extent of her poverty; that she may indeed be telling ‘heaps of lies about her high rent and cruel landlord’ (*TiC*, 24), she hesitates about refusing her outright. Sir Culling, however, upon briefly considering the woman’s assertions, quickly makes up his mind and decides that she must be lying. This, as Edgeworth comments critically, ‘surprised him, being an Englishman born and bred, and never could he in the least comprehend how people can tell so many lies’ (*TiC*, 24). Sir Culling takes one last disapproving look at Madgy Burke before climbing into the boat with the intention of getting away from her and this ugly scene as fast as possible. Edgeworth, on the other hand, feels unable to simply ignore the woman’s pleas. Compelled to do something, she puts her hands in her pocket and ends up by giving Madgy Burke the asked for sixpence.

This incident illustrates not only the difference between Edgeworth’s and Sir Culling’s respective treatment of the Connemara people but something more fundamental than that. In his position as an English tourist to Ireland, Sir Culling — unlike Edgeworth — can afford to walk away from any situation which demands too much of his attention, his financial resources, or one which merely causes him embarrassment. Clearly, Edgeworth, as somebody who resides permanently in Ireland, has quite a different perspective on a woman like Madgy Burke.⁴⁹⁷ In a sense, Edgeworth could, of course, like Sir Culling, have chosen to walk away from this situation. What she cannot walk away from, however, is what Madgy Burke stands for in the broader context of mid-nineteenth century Ireland. For, in view of a veritable explosion in population-numbers, there is a noticeable increase of Madgy Burkes across all of Ireland, not just in Oughterard⁴⁹⁸ but also in places like Edgeworthstown. Telling Pakenham about the incident with Madgy Burke, Edgeworth observes caustically:

Sir Culling slipped into the boat with all the consciousness of being worthy, no doubt, of all Miss Martineau’s political economy admiration. And may be,

⁴⁹⁷ In fact, both Edgeworth and her father, in their jointly written review of Carr’s *Stranger in Ireland*, had expressed the belief that only persons, who permanently resided in Ireland, were in a position to come to valid conclusions on certain aspects of Irish life. They had remarked: ‘Those who make a tour through a country, see objects in a new, and often in a more entertaining point of view, than persons whose long residence in the country have rendered most objects familiar; but, on certain points, we can hope to obtain accurate information from those only who have lived in the country; and who, in their political and economical observations, have taken time into account’. See the *Edinburgh Review*, Volume X, 1807, 56.

⁴⁹⁸ Whelan points out that even the formerly sparsely populated Connemara region ‘sustained a huge population by the 1840s’ and estimates the population density to have amounted to approximately ‘500 per square mile’. See introduction to *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Connemara*, vii.

Mr. Pakenham, you don't know who Miss Martineau is though all of London has been ringing many months with her fame and her political economy stories exemplifying the mischief of charity etc. I have not time to explain. But in time the waft of her perfume of her fame will reach Indy and you, no doubt at Amballah, perhaps by the time that there is no whiff of it left in these countries. (*TiC*, 24-5)

Edgeworth comes across as unusually vehement in her above remarks to Pakenham. Her outburst conveys powerfully not just her sense of deep indignation at Sir Culling's method of side-stepping this difficult situation but her deep antipathy towards Harriet Martineau's approach⁴⁹⁹ to solving the growing problem of the impoverishment among large sections of the British population. Moreover, Edgeworth's striking imagery and embittered tone indicate that, in an Irish context, charity is already a highly controversial subject in 1833.

Significantly, her response to Madgy Burke foreshadows some of the difficult decisions Edgeworth would be faced with during the years of the Great Famine, when Edgeworthstown, like any other location in Ireland, was affected by repeated failures to successfully grow and harvest potato and grain crops.⁵⁰⁰ Her strong reaction to Martineau is all the more interesting as Edgeworth herself was a life-long advocate of the principle that the poor in Ireland should only be helped to the degree of enabling them to help themselves. The solution to poverty, as Edgeworth saw it, was to provide work for the poor, not charity. This, indeed, was still Edgeworth's approach at the very beginning of the Famine.⁵⁰¹

However, as her encounter with Madgy Burke already shows, Edgeworth — when placed in a position which put a human face on the problem of poverty — found it impossible to maintain her hard line with regard to charity. This was also the case with regard to the Famine. Faced with the appalling want suffered by the population around Edgeworthstown,

⁴⁹⁹ Harriet Martineau had recently published *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833) and was working on *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-34) whilst Edgeworth was touring Connemara.

⁵⁰⁰ Margaret Kelleher cites evidence which shows that, on a national scale, Longford was not as badly affected by famine-related deaths as other counties. However, as Kelleher also points out, Edgeworth herself believed that statistics were too general and failed to account for great variations in localities. See Margaret Kelleher, "'Philosophic Views'": Maria Edgeworth and the Great Famine", in *Éire-Ireland* 32(1); Spring 1997, 45.

⁵⁰¹ In a letter to Mrs. Moore, for instance, in which Edgeworth commented on conditions in Edgeworthstown, she remarked: 'At Longford and Edgeworthstown last markets potatoes were in abundance sold at 6 d a stone. As to the other crops, the oats are very good — the wheat tolerably good — the turnips failed. As to ourselves I can only say that we are in tolerably good health. And we try to do all the little we can. Mrs. E. does a great deal that's certain. Her time is spent almost from morning till night for the poor not giving them food gratis ... she who thinks more wisely for her kind employs them — pays them — excites them to industry makes them independent and grateful. I cannot tell you how many dozen dozen dozens of shirts and stockings and scarfs and Polkas innumerable she and Mrs. Francis E. have caused to be made these 2 years'. See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 31 October 1848. Reel 19.

Edgeworth felt unable to adhere to her previously held position.⁵⁰² Apart from her activities as an indefatigable fundraiser and formidable lobbyist, who collected monies from England and the United States of America — in addition to the funds she lobbied for at the Central Relief Committee in Dublin — Edgeworth began to distribute money given to her by family and friends in private acts of charity. To do otherwise and follow Martineau's system, she felt, would result in the creation of 'a race of political philosophical Thugs'.⁵⁰³

To return to her tour in Connemara, her comments to Pakenham make clear that the incident involving Madgy Burke made Edgeworth lose any last vestige of respect for Sir Culling. Edgeworth's subsequent description of their torturous journey towards Clifden over a road pitted with potholes is one of her best and most comical pieces of writing.⁵⁰⁴ When the bad roads and Lady Isabella's increasingly feverish condition made it impossible for the travelling party to proceed any further, it was Edgeworth's name and reputation, which saved the day and gained them admittance to near-by Ballinahinch Castle. Looking back on the weeks during which Lady Isabella's illness meant that they were effectively marooned in the home of the Martins, Edgeworth describes to Pakenham the sense of isolation she experienced whilst being there. She tells him, that no doctors were to be had 'in these lone regions' (*TiC*, 40) and, what was worse, not even a regular postal service, making it impossible for Edgeworth to communicate with her family back in Edgeworthstown. Recounting her feelings, she writes: 'I cannot give you an idea of my loneliness of feeling, my utter helplessness, from the impossibility of having the advantage of sympathy and sense of my own family' (*TiC*, 50).

Clearly, Ballinahinch was experienced by Edgeworth as different to any other location in Ireland she had ever visited. The landscape around Ballinahinch was one factor which

⁵⁰² Kelleher maintains that Edgeworth did not personally witness the worst extremes of the famine. (It has to be remembered that Edgeworth was approaching the age of eighty at the time.) Even so, she heard about the drastic consequences of the Famine on a daily basis, and was kept informed by her step-mother and Vicar Powell, both of whom visited the worst affected families in the neighbourhood. Although Edgeworth was once removed from the scene, the reports still affected her profoundly. In May 1847, for instance, she told Honora of Mr. Tuite who, on his way to Edgeworthstown, had come across a woman so shaken by hunger, cold, illness and despair that she seemed unaware of the fact that the child she was carrying in her arms was already dead. Quoted in "Philosophic Views", 54.

⁵⁰³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁰⁴ During this arduous part of their journey Edgeworth and Sir Culling come once more into conflict with each other. This time it is over the payment of the local men, without whose help they could not have managed to make it even as far as Ballinahinch. Sir Culling wants to dismiss and pay them off as soon as they have passed the most difficult stretches of the pot-holed road on which they are travelling. Commenting on the small amount of money he intends to give the men, Edgeworth describes him to Pakenham sarcastically as 'the resolute political economist'. Upon noticing the terrified look of Lady Isabella, who expresses her great fear about what 'these wild Irish' [Connemara men] may do to them, if they feel ill-treated, Edgeworth, in order to calm her nervous travelling companion, decides to throw out of her carriage window 'shillings and sixpence ... in spite of Sir Culling' (*TiC*, 34).

appears to have reinforced Edgeworth's sense of isolation. As she tells Pakenham, she perceives the scenery which surrounds her at Ballinahinch as a 'desert' (*TiC*, 34). When she endeavours to explain to him what Connemara looks like she compares it to other regions on the Celtic peripheries of Britain, such as Wales or Scotland: 'the country like the Isle of Anglesea, as if stones and fragments of rock had showered down on the earth and tracts of bog-heath such as England never saw and Scotland seldom sees, except in the Highlands' (26). Describing to him the view from her bedroom window at Ballinahinch, Edgeworth says that all she could see was the 'desolate prospect of an immense lake and mountains bare of prodigious height' (*TiC*, 43).

The complete absence of human reference points in this landscape makes Edgeworth not only feel decidedly uncomfortable but actually fosters a sense of disorientation in her. There were no tilled fields, winding roads, or distant villages to be glimpsed anywhere in the scenery which surrounds her at Ballinahinch. Edgeworth's impression that she finds herself in a moonscape, rather than an earthscape, must have been further strengthened by the circumstance that the Connemara landscape lacked not only the kind of field enclosures, to which she was accustomed to view from Edgeworthstown, but that there were not even any mature trees⁵⁰⁵ or shrubs to be seen anywhere (the only vegetation around Ballinahinch consisting of a low-growing cover of heather and other acid-loving plants). It appears that Edgeworth's problem with the Connemara landscape was that it yielded no objects which allowed one to judge the real scale of anything, or approximate distances to anywhere.⁵⁰⁶

In the end Edgeworth spent three weeks at Ballinahinch, during which time she was necessarily thrown almost exclusively into the company of the Martins. Much has been made by some critics of Edgeworth's fascination with Mary Martin, daughter of her hosts at Ballinahinch. Julian Moynahan, for example, stresses the extent to which Edgeworth was drawn to this most striking adolescent Irish girl.⁵⁰⁷ In his reading of the *Tour to Connemara*, Mary becomes the wild Irish girl of Edgeworth's own youthful and romantic fantasies about

⁵⁰⁵ Commenting on the symbolic importance of trees in the Irish landscape Malcolm Kelsall argues that they 'signify plantations and plantations security'. See Malcolm Kelsall's "Civilization, Savagery and Ireland: Maria Edgeworth's *Tour in Connemara*", in *European Journal of English Studies*, Volume 6 (2002), 179.

⁵⁰⁶ Interestingly, this is an observation which was also made by Martha Blake, an English woman who, having married into the Blake family, decided to reside permanently at her husband's estate Renvyle in Connemara. Writing about the Connemara landscape she remarked: 'Where everything is on so grand a scale, the apparent height and distance of many objects are diminished for want of some points by which the eye may be guided in forming an estimate'. See *Letters from the Irish Highlands of Connemara*, 78.

⁵⁰⁷ See Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 79-83.

the mysterious West of Ireland. However, although such a view of Edgeworth's relationship with the young woman from Connemara makes for a very attractive reading, and may even be tempting, in view of the really tragic future course of Mary's life⁵⁰⁸, and the many literary reverberations of her life-story in Ireland⁵⁰⁹, it does not, as I want to suggest, reflect accurately how things stood between them during the time of Edgeworth's stay at Ballinahinch.

As her account to Pakenham shows, Edgeworth was indeed intrigued with Mary, whom she described later as 'one of the most extraordinary persons' she had ever met (*TiC*, 57). However, what her remarks on Mary also demonstrate is that Edgeworth could not arrive at a definite and final opinion about her. Initially, when Mary refuses to speak to her, during the course of Edgeworth's first dinner with the Martins, she even began to doubt whether the girl was quite sane. When Mary does eventually begin to speak Edgeworth feels still 'unable to make out whether she was bashful only or proud' (*TiC*, 41). Never having left her native Connemara, Mary is more at home speaking Irish than English, and her accent is so full of the lilting cadences of Connaught Gaelic that Edgeworth, at first, finds it rather difficult to understand her. As Edgeworth gets to know her better over the course of her extended stay at Ballinahinch, she acquires a sense of Mary's 'prodigious' (*TiC*, 57) learning. Unusually, for a girl in her situation and of her age, Mary speaks good French, knows Latin, Greek and even Hebrew. What is more, she is evidently interested in everything from heraldry, metaphysics, painting to battle tactics and poetry. Edgeworth soon realises that Mary is in fact a very well-read and, in some respects, a highly talented young woman.

Nonetheless there were aspects to Mary's personality which made it impossible for Edgeworth to really warm to her. To her credit, Edgeworth excuses Mary's habit of talking about herself and her own opinions constantly, whether asked or not, which (ironically) had offended Sir Culling early on and made him declare her 'the most intolerably egotistic he ever met with' (*TiC*, 60).⁵¹⁰ What really concerns her with regard to Mary were not her 'oddities' (*TiC*, 69) or even her gaucheness but her distinctly and, as Edgeworth thinks, entirely misplaced, feudalistic attitude towards the throngs of local people who follow her every step whenever she leaves Ballinahinch. As Edgeworth tells Pakenham, Mary describes these

⁵⁰⁸ She was left penniless after her father's death. The highly encumbered estate had to be sold, and Mary married the former estate agent before emigrating to the United States of America. She died shortly after her arrival there, in 1850, having given birth on board ship to a child which did not survive the long sea-voyage.

⁵⁰⁹ Charles Lever used Mary's life as an inspiration for his *The Martins of Cro-Martin* (1853). The heroine in Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) owes something to the legends, which began to be told of Mary Martin in Connemara after the demise of her family.

⁵¹⁰ Edgeworth observes to Pakenham that intolerance is to be expected of a man like Sir Culling 'with all his English – I will not say Cockney- notions tight about him' (*TiC*, 62).

followers as 'her tail' (*TiC*, 61) and looks on them in terms of being vassals, rather than tenants, to her family.⁵¹¹ Despite attempting to joke with her about her inflated notions of self-importance, Edgeworth feels that she did not manage to get through to her. 'She has not the least sense of wit or humour, and I think she regards them as foolish superfluities in the world, quite unphilosophical and only a perverse use or abuse of human faculty' (*TiC*, 62).

Interestingly, Edgeworth even goes so far as to claim that the Connemara landscape itself may be partly responsible for Mary's inflated notions of power and influence. She remarks: 'there is a sort of original, though dreary grandeur in the place, which I can well imagine early association must admire above all things. Everything round her is on a grand scale. Look at the sketch of the mountains and the lake, the seven pins of Benbola, and then her father's estates, measured by sea, reach, as she informed me, about three hundred mile' (*TiC*, 63). Edgeworth's above remark testifies that she tried to take local and environmental factors into account in her estimation of Mary. At the same time her remark is also an indication that Edgeworth experienced Mary in terms of being so different (to any other young woman she had ever met) that she found it difficult, not to say, impossible, to devise a system which would allow her to compare and judge her. Aware that she may be doing Mary an injustice with her present opinion of her, Edgeworth readily admits to Pakenham: 'I love genius better than judgement, and manners make more impression on me than matter' (*TiC*, 67).

However, Edgeworth's involvement with Mary did not end with her stay in Ballinahinch and her opinion of her, likewise, continued to shift. On their way back from England, in the spring of 1834, the Martins took up Edgeworth's invitation to stop off at Edgeworthstown before proceeding on their home-ward journey to Ballinahinch. Edgeworth could not resist telling Pakenham what she thought of the newly made-over Mary. She starts off by commenting that 'a greater change' than the one which has taken place in Mary since they last saw each other could 'hardly be conceived'.⁵¹² According to Edgeworth, the "new" Mary has shed all her old 'Bedouin habits' and has an 'appearance and manners [which are] much improved'. Edgeworth goes on to say that Mary 'had learned at last to suppress her high

⁵¹¹ In *Ennui*, Edgeworth had touched upon the dangers involved in indulging in feudalistic fantasies. Lord Glenthorn's brief taste of absolute power proves so seductive that it almost amounts to his undoing. No longer capable of seeing through the flattery of those who surround him he becomes unable to discern friend from foe.

⁵¹² See ME to MPE, Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1834, Reel 20.

opinion of herself and not to talk so much of what concerned herself exclusively – Books⁵¹³ had come out and men had come into her head’.

Dry as Edgeworth’s above words ring, she actually launches into praising Mary, when picturing the young Irish woman in the midst of fashionable London. Imagining her in the English Capital, in a world which must have seemed equally new and confusing to her, Edgeworth now commends Mary for showing the ‘strength of character and nobleness of mind in being still herself and despising the little Town jealousies’ to which every young debutante is exposed. In fact, Edgeworth’s tone becomes one of solidarity when she recounts to Pakenham how Mary was quickly announced all over London as the recently arrived ‘Irish heiress’. In a total inversion of her previous judgement of Mary (as being so ‘odd’ that she would find it difficult to even fit into upper-class society in Ireland), Edgeworth now accounts for her success in London by stating her opinion that it was Mary’s ‘Irish frankness & untutored [sic] freedom of manner’, which made her appear so different and special. In fact, Edgeworth puts Mary’s successful coming out in London down to the circumstance that this young Irish woman represents ‘something new and something odd perhaps but not the less attractive for that’.

As her above comments illustrate, it is only when Edgeworth begins to envisage the young Irish woman attempting to negotiate her way on the slippery stage of the London marriage market that she changes her former (critical) opinion of her and begins to view her sympathetically. In fact, Edgeworth’s attitude changes to one of real empathy when Mary, during the course of her brief afternoon in Edgeworthstown, reveals to her that she has been aware since childhood that it would be incumbent upon her to save her father’s estate from ruin by making a marriage which will bring in a considerable account of money for the Martins. Whilst they were walking arm in arm around the garden in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth, who is clearly touched by the difficult decisions ahead of Mary, even decides to counsel her on the dangers of marrying for convenience rather than love. She cautions Mary: ‘it might be safe for some girls to make one of these establishment marriages but it would never do for you’, and leaves her absorbed in deep thought before Mr. Martin’s appearance puts a stop to their confidential tête à tête. As Edgeworth tells Pakenham, subsequent to the Martins’ departure from Edgeworthstown, she now considers to have been too harsh and ‘unjust’ in the opinion of Mary she had formerly expressed to him.

⁵¹³ In fact, the only book Mary comments upon having read whilst in London was Edgeworth’s own *Helen* (1834).

What Edgeworth's above comments on Mary illustrate is that she views her much more sympathetically once she transposes her from her native Connemara into metropolitan London. The act of doing so even has the effect of making Edgeworth discount all those aspects of Mary's personality which previously disquieted her. Suddenly Mary is no longer the slightly odd girl from Connemara but viewed by Edgeworth in terms of being a fellow Irish woman, and somebody, who, by virtue of sounding and being different is exposed to a considerable amount of critical attention in London. One almost suspects that Edgeworth's second meeting with Mary may have reminded her of some of her own experiences, when, upon spending her adolescence in Edgeworthstown, she returned as a woman for the first time to England in the 1790s, and found herself looked upon as a stranger from Ireland.

Edgeworth's reconsideration of Mary also had the effect of making her look back on the entire experience of her tour in Connemara, about which she observes to Pakenham that she had indeed been fortunate to have been 'bogged in the sloughs of Connemara' as this had provided her with the opportunity of 'begging my way into Ballinahinch castle just at the commencement of their [i.e. the Martins'] adventurous period' after their 'fifteen years of stationary and isolated life'. Her above observation clarifies that Edgeworth, although admitting to having felt, at times, both lonely and disorientated in Connemara, viewed her journey to the West of Ireland as an experience she would not like to have missed on any account.

Her next travels in Ireland took Edgeworth once more into Connaught. This time she left Edgeworthstown to visit the Moores at their home Moore Hall, which was situated adjacent to the shore of Lough Carra, at Ballyglass, in County Mayo. Edgeworth had known of George Moore (1770-1840) for quite some years before actually meeting him. He was the author of an historical work on Britain, of which she thought highly, and he was also known to Sir James Mackintosh, one of her regular correspondents in England since 1813. Quite spontaneously, Edgeworth appears to have decided to invite the Moores to Edgeworthstown and she worked hard in order to prepare this first meeting well.

The correspondence which preceded the Moores' visit to Edgeworthstown is in itself significant, as it illustrates the extent to which the household in Edgeworthstown had, by the 1830s, become not only a place which was jointly run by Edgeworth and her step-mother but was now a small community made up entirely of women.⁵¹⁴ Indeed, reading Edgeworth's

⁵¹⁴ As Edgeworth published her last major work on Ireland in 1817, her latter years in Edgeworthstown are often entirely overlooked by scholars. Indeed, it is only very recently that some critics have begun to point to the

letters of this period one very much gets the impression that she is now the prime organising force within the family. Certainly, where visitors to Edgeworthstown generally are concerned, Edgeworth decides on everything, from issuing initial invitations, to fixing on the actual date of the visit and deciding about her and her family's return visits.

The Moores had two sons and Edgeworth invited the them to 'bring any of their family' along to Edgeworthstown, explaining that as the group of women, who now made up the household were so 'fond of young people and accustomed to them so much that this house now feels bereft without them'.⁵¹⁵ Despite Edgeworthstown now being peopled by female occupants only she assured George Moore that the company would, for the purpose of his visit, also include some men: 'we should be particularly glad if Tuesday ... could suit ... because we should then have one or two gentlemen from our family: two of the Mr. Foxes our cousins: who would save you from the desperation of a female party ... As resident gentlemen in Ireland they deserve to be made acquainted with those whose acquirements and reputation among the celebrated do honor [sic] to their country – being themselves not of the class of Irish aristocracy who are content merely to consume the fruits of the earth and not pay the tithe'.⁵¹⁶

In her above comment Edgeworth's touches on two important points. Firstly, her joking aside to George Moore about 'the desperation of a[an all] female party' at Edgeworthstown shows just how relaxed Edgeworth felt about the present domestic set-up at Edgeworthstown. Of course, in a sense, her remark also reveals Edgeworthstown as a household where men are present by invitation only.

Further, with her remark about the interests which 'resident gentleman in Ireland' must necessarily have in common Edgeworth establishes a common link between her family and Moore's. Both the Edgeworths and the Moores were land-owning families and it had been George Moore's published exhortation to the sons of landowning families in Ireland to 'reside on their estates and improve them' which had endeared him initially to Edgeworth.⁵¹⁷ Indeed, the theme of landlordism in Ireland is one to which Edgeworth alludes frequently in the letters, which they exchanged prior to their first face-to-face meeting.

central importance of her sisters with regard to both Edgeworth's life and career as a writer. In this respect, Frances R. Botkin's insightful essay "Finding her own Voice or 'Being her own Bottom': A Community of Women in Maria Edgeworth's *Helen*" is a most welcome contribution to modern Edgeworth studies. Botkin's essay is contained in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (England and USA: Ashgate, 2006).

⁵¹⁵ See ME to George Moore, Edgeworthstown, 23 September 1835, Reel 19.

⁵¹⁶ See ME to George Moore, Edgeworthstown, 9 October 1835, Reel 19.

⁵¹⁷ See ME to George Moore, Edgeworthstown, 3 February 1835, Reel 19.

One can already begin to see that Edgeworth was eager to emphasise shared interests in her contact with the Moores. She must have felt almost instinctively that this was crucial as the Moores, with their estate being situated in Connaught, were not only from a different region of Ireland but also practicing Catholics. This being the case, Edgeworth went out of her way to assure them that religion did not play a major role in Edgeworthstown, and that even her Anglican brother-in-law, (Dean) Richard Butler, whom she hoped to introduce to them, was a most enlightened and tolerant man. She wrote to George Moore: 'Mr Butler will be in Edgeworthstown, a person whose literary tastes and pursuits and whose habits of enjoying conversation and books whole mornings and evenings unwearied sitting in library arm chair would we think be peculiarly suitable to you'.⁵¹⁸

Finally, early in 1836, Edgeworth got her way and entertained George Moore and his wife Louisa in Edgeworthstown. Their visit appears to have gone well; sufficiently well, in any case, for Edgeworth to decide that she would accept their invitation to visit them at their home in County Mayo. Considering the denominational and cultural differences which divided them, Edgeworth's friendliness towards the Moores in the first place shows a remarkably open mind. For, whilst they had some interests, such as landlordism, for instance, in common, there was probably a lot more which could have had the effect of dividing them. Apart from being Catholics, the Moores were also a family who — unlike the Edgeworths — had accumulated its fortune by trade. In fact, generations of the Moores had resided in the Spanish port-town of Alicante prior to the relatively recent purchase of their estate in County Mayo.⁵¹⁹ What is more, they had fought under General Humbert and alongside the French army during the 1798 rising.⁵²⁰

Edgeworth's ready acceptance of the return invitation extended to her by the Moores can be seen as an indication that she was indeed willing to move from a position of toleration to a situation which brought her into direct and prolonged social contact with somebody of their notably different background. She appears to have decided that, notwithstanding the very

⁵¹⁸ See ME to George Moore, Edgeworthstown, 29 October 1835, Reel 19. Richard Butler had been to Oxford and appears to have been a tolerant man with regard to religion, believing that 'a reformation not *from*, nor *in*, but *of* the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland might be possible'. Quoted in Joseph Hone, *The Moores of Moore Hall* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1934), 80.

⁵¹⁹ They belonged to the small number of catholic families who — subsequent to the 1782 relaxation of the property laws in relation to catholic ownership — were able to purchase their estate as a freehold in County Mayo. See Louis M. Cullen's "Catholic Classes under the Penal Laws", in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 57.

⁵²⁰ See Hone, *The Moores of Moore Hall*, 39.

real potential of some sort of an ideological clash between them, she liked to visit them. Having fixed a date for her visit Edgeworth, accompanied by her step-mother, half-sister Harriet and Harriet's husband Richard Butler, set out for Mayo in the September of 1836, and later gave an account of her visit there to her sister-in-law Mrs. Charles Sneyd Edgeworth. As Moore Hall was in excess of one day's travel, Edgeworth had arranged that they would overnight at Lord and Lady Dillon's seat Loughglynn, in County Roscommon.

It is ironic that the only quarrel about religion, into which both Edgeworth and Butler get drawn during their absence from Edgeworthstown, takes place at Loughglynn, and was provoked not by Moore or his devout wife Louisa but by Lord Dillon, who — although a Protestant — inveighs passionately against the Church (of Ireland) and declares himself an O'Connellite before he realises that Mr Butler is a man of the cloth.⁵²¹

This was not the only strange incident which occurred at Loughglynn. In the middle of the night Edgeworth finds herself waking up to 'the rejoicings from a crowd of hundreds of ragged subjects' (C, 476), who are gathered in front of the big house, bearing torches, dancing and shouting. She looks at this surreal spectacle in total amazement, not knowing whether to trust her eyes or not: 'A strong light cast on wild figures and strange gaunt, savage, comic, flattering, expecting, craving, grinning pathetic cunning faces ... as far as eye could reach ... It was one of the most striking sights I ever beheld' (C, 476-77).

Edgeworth's repeated emphasis of the savageness of the scene, which is playing out in front of her, and her recourse to vocabulary, which is more conventionally associated with wild animals, rather than humans, gives an indication of how deeply this incident burnt itself into Edgeworth's psyche. It also denotes the extent to which she begins to see County Roscommon in terms of being radically different to her own County Longford. In more than one sense what she witnesses at Loughglynn is, as far as Edgeworth is concerned, "beyond the pale". She tells Sneyd's wife that the 'barbarous rejoicings' she has observed in County Roscommon, were, to her mind, unimaginable at Edgeworthstown.⁵²²

⁵²¹ See Colvin, "Maria Edgeworth's Tours in Ireland. III: Connaught", in *Studia Neophilologica*, Volume 43 (1971), 476. All subsequent references are to this article, will be abbreviated as *C* and cited parenthetically in the main body of the chapter.

⁵²² Before closing her letter, Edgeworth returns once more to Loughglynn, where she had had the opportunity of seeing the peasants of the evening before in the broad light of day. If anything, she found it even harder to take in their appearance: 'they looked like spectres or corpses in grave clothes of wretches risen from their tombs after having been just starved to death' (C, 482). The sight of these miserable looking peasants made Edgeworth feel physically sick: 'I never saw a more dreadfully odious sight' (C, 483) and she declares to her sister in law that she would not for any money in the world want to live at Loughglynn.

After this unsettling experience a noticeably shaken Edgeworth is equally surprised and relieved to discover upon her arrival at Moore Hall 'a most excellent house, beautifully furnished in the best taste and with all the comforts and luxuries of life' (C, 478). Edgeworth paints George Moore as one of 'the most gentle and gentlemanlike amiable benevolent creatures living' (C, 478) but was slightly less sure of his overbearing wife. Reading between the lines one gets the distinct impression that Louisa Moore's brand of devout Catholicism grated with Edgeworth. However, if it did, Edgeworth did not betray the fact in any way. On her part, Louisa appears to have felt sufficiently at ease in Edgeworth's company to joke about their denominational differences. In front of her visitors she declares to her son: 'we must have this room purified after these heretics and their prayers' (C, 481). Looking back upon her visit, Edgeworth concluded that, considering their many differences, she had got on remarkably well with the Moores: 'We have all cleared out of this visit admirably prudently and well and very entertaining and pleasant it was at the time and full as much in recollection and talking over in the carriage and at home afterwards' (C, 481).

Edgeworth continued to correspond with the Moores for many years after her visit to Moore Hall. In fact, she took steps to facilitate George Moore's historical researches by putting him in touch with those of her international contacts which might be of use to him. She forwarded, for instance, letters of his to her English friend, Lord Palmerstone and sent a paper of George Moore's queries to Baron Delepest, a former acquaintance of Edgeworth's in Paris.⁵²³ Through Lord Dillon's agent Mr Strickland, who regularly travelled through Edgeworthstown on his way to and from Dublin, Edgeworth also opened up the Edgeworthstown library to George Moore, regularly loaning him books which might be of interest.⁵²⁴

Moreover, Edgeworth began to express a lively interest in the education and progress of the Moores' talented two sons, George and Augustus. In fact, she endeavoured to actively promote their careers, procuring, for Augustus, introductions to both French society⁵²⁵ and an

⁵²³ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 2 November 1836, Reel 19.

⁵²⁴ When illness prevented Mr Strickland for a period from travelling, Edgeworth even offered to have some books George Moore had desired to see via conveyed by coach from Edgeworthstown. She told Louisa Moore that she would arrange to have 'the three volumes of Mirabeau' left for collection at the Westport post-office. See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 10 August 1838, Reel 19.

⁵²⁵ For instance, introducing Augustus Moore to one of her French contacts, Edgeworth described him in the following manner: 'Miss Edgeworth ... ventures to present to the Prince E. de Beauveau one of her countrymen Mr. Augustus Moore. Not of the poets race of Moores. But of the more antient [sic] and aristocratic Moores – son of a gentleman of fortune in the County of Mayo in Ireland'. See ME to Prince de B., Edgeworthstown, not dated, 1836, Reel 19.

influential Cambridge Professor⁵²⁶, and encouraging George to publish accounts of his travels in the Far East.

Having read accounts of George's far-ranging travels, which she circulated to Sophy and her step-mother's brother, Captain Beaufort, Edgeworth expressed her unqualified admiration for his 'enlarged views' and 'powers of generalising without precipitation or mistakes of date, tiresome of detail or want of proportion'.⁵²⁷ As a writer and somebody intimately familiar with the genre of travel writing Edgeworth had a good idea of what would be marketable and likely to sell well. Indeed, she thought so highly of his travel accounts that she even grew impatient when George did not show himself eager to publish. As she observed to his mother: 'I think he ought to write without being prodded or flattered by any one living. He who could write these letters I have read ... can write anything he pleases and might be sure of gaining a hundred aye hundred of guineas for any Book of Travels he might write and well due for pleasure and profit to the public ... Either he does desire to make himself famous, or he does not. If he does not he is a poorer minded boy than I think and I have nothing to say'.⁵²⁸

In view of Edgeworth's decision not to put any of her own travelling experiences to commercial purposes her above sentiments are interesting. They also register her belief that the publication of travel accounts generally would be a good deal more straightforward for a young male writer like George.

As time went on Louisa, rather than her husband George, became the recipient of Edgeworth's letters. Often Edgeworth and Louisa just exchanged news, discussing domestic matters, including staff-problems or the health of respective family members. What is noticeable is that Edgeworth felt sufficiently relaxed to treat Louisa as the member of her intimate circle of friends in Ireland. Edgeworth, for instance, told her at the very outset of their correspondence: 'Do not be surprised at not hearing from me for I make it a rule never to write except when I have something to say and even with my best friends and nearest relations I never keep up what is called a regular correspondence which I consider to be a regular bore to both parties – if they could and would speak the truth'.⁵²⁹

As her above words indicate, Edgeworth would write to Louisa, but only when she felt that they had something to say to each other. Being in contact with each other also enabled

⁵²⁶ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 23 November 1836, Reel 19.

⁵²⁷ Quoted in Hone, *The Moores of Moore Hall*, 85.

⁵²⁸ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 10 August 1838, Reel 19.

⁵²⁹ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 18 December 1835, Reel 19.

these women to keep abreast of recent social and political developments in their respective regions of Ireland. Edgeworth, for instance, told Louisa: 'I am glad to hear of Balls and Races [in Mayo] as symptoms of peace and good fellowship and good humour and I hope it has all been as pleasant as social meetings should be'.⁵³⁰ In another letter, upon commenting on the elections, which had recently taken place in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth wrote in a philosophical frame of mind: 'The newspapers on one side or other perhaps on both have told you that Charles Fox has stood for the County of Longford and that he has been defeated. And as you cannot tell me that you are either glad or sorry for that – he being on one hand a Conservative and on the other my dearly beloved cousin – the only thing that can be done is to say nothing about it'.⁵³¹

As Edgeworth's above remark testifies, her correspondence with Louisa was one in which both parties felt at liberty to be quite open and outspoken in the opinions which they exchanged. In fact, the overwhelming impression one is left with upon reading the letters which these two women exchanged over the years is one of a broadly shared sense of female solidarity.

To conclude, I have argued that Edgeworth's travelling as an emancipated woman differed notably from the travels she shared with her father. With regard to Edgeworth's journey to Killarney with Walter Scott, I have suggested that her account — although perhaps not very insightful compared with her reaction to the South-West of Ireland — charts the gradual transfer of literary prestige from female novelists of Edgeworth's school to professional novelists of Scott's type. Relating her Tour in Connemara, I have argued that Edgeworth regarded it — despite admitting to a temporary sense of loneliness and disorientation — as a very worthwhile adventure and experience. Moreover, her reaction to both Madgy Burke and Mary Martin can be seen to reflect Edgeworth's perspective as a person with insider Irish interests and affiliations. Lastly, her contact and correspondence with the Moores, who differed greatly from her in terms of ideological orientation, shows that Edgeworth, during her latter years in Edgeworthstown, consciously endeavoured to broaden her social contact base in Ireland.

⁵³⁰ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 31 January 1838, Reel 19.

⁵³¹ See ME to Mrs. Moore, Edgeworthstown, 4 January 1838, Reel 19.

Conclusion

This thesis started out with my going in search of Edgeworth's region and has moved on from there to explore the nature of her attachment to the place she called home. Taking its cue from insightful studies such as Carole Fabricant's *Swift's Landscape*, my principle aim was to locate Edgeworth's writing more specifically in her home-region of the Irish midlands and, in doing so, to point to the importance of her life in Edgeworthstown, not just in relation to the Irish tales but also in relation to her remaining oeuvre; all of which can be seen to have evolved in response to the particular environment in which she lived. In this sense, my thesis could be described as an attempt to make visible — in topographical and cultural but also in psychological, intellectual and ideological terms — the landscape in which Edgeworth found herself on a day-to-day basis. I have argued that Edgeworth's perception of this landscape and her own position within it — that is to say, her sense of place — had a profound impact on her thinking as well as on her writing.

The attentive reader of her works will come across many references which point to Edgeworthstown — albeit in a somewhat idealised version — as the model used by Edgeworth for the numerous homes which she depicted over the course of her writing career in her fictions. Whether it be the family home portrayed by Edgeworth in her short stories for children, such as the one in which her young heroes and heroines live in *Early Lessons*, the home of the Percy girls in *Patronage*, or the small community of women which people the pages of her late novel *Helen*, what all of these fictional homes have in common is that they owe much of their ethos to the home actually inhabited by Edgeworth. Whilst subtle changes in her fictional representation of the family home can be discerned here and there — over time, for instance, her fictional homes become domains which are not only run by but increasingly controlled by strong female characters — the strong attachment to home which Edgeworth articulated time and again in her fictions, remained a constant throughout her life.

Apart from her works there is Edgeworth's correspondence which, as I have shown, abounds with statements which testify to the immense importance which she attached to her life in Edgeworthstown. Although it is perhaps impossible to ever fully capture the complex set of associations and attractions which her existence in Edgeworthstown held for her I have sought to identify in my thesis some of those key moments in Edgeworth's life when she expanded on the special bonds which tied her lastingly to her home. Furthermore, three main

elements, each of which help to explain the special importance which (life in) her Irish midlands home assumed in Edgeworth's own imagination, can be identified from some of those intimate family letters, which she wrote from Edgeworthstown, and in which she expanded on her feelings regarding same. I have touched on all of these elements in Chapter One but would sum them up as follows:

One of the elements which attracted Edgeworth to Edgeworthstown was that she experienced her new home in Ireland in terms of being quite an exciting — even exotic — locale. Edgeworthstown fascinated Edgeworth from the day of her arrival there, in 1782. With its setting in a landscape (of large stretches of bog-land) which was so different to the English country-side to which she was accustomed, its distinctive Hiberno-English culture, expressed in the unfamiliar ways in which the local people dressed, spoke, gestured, negotiated and argued, Edgeworthstown was a place at once so new and foreign to her that it appears to have implanted itself deeply within Edgeworth's psyche.

Edgeworthstown also became the place in which Edgeworth managed to create a special role for herself, not just in relation to her father — a man whose affection and approval she had sought to win since childhood — but in relation to the family in general, which gradually came to see and invest her with the authority of a third parent within the household. I would suggest that Edgeworth derived from her position as a highly respected senior member of the family much of the emotional security which, in turn, gave her the confidence and space which would allow her to develop her creative potential.

Clearly, Edgeworth found the set-up in Edgeworthstown an immense advantage; surrounded as she was by a trusted audience, which afforded her the critical feedback which she always needed when working on a new piece of writing. She remarked on more than one occasion that she could not imagine proceeding with her work as a writer without the support and help given to her by what she humorously referred to as 'the family editing committee'. What Edgeworth's comment indicates is that she found Edgeworthstown — as a working environment — a place which was singularly conducive to the pursuance of her various and ongoing literary projects.

In this context it has to be remembered that Edgeworthstown's geographical location contributed in no small measure to making it a home which Edgeworth found particularly amenable to her own taste for close-knit family life. One consequence of living at a considerable distance from England — a circumstance which made it more difficult for her father to keep up regular contact with his former Lunar Circle friends there — and even from

Dublin was that the Edgeworths as a family were largely thrown into their own company for almost the first two decades of their residence in Edgeworthstown. The comparative isolation in which they found themselves was further compounded by her father's liberal political views which made easy social intercourse with other local Anglo-Irish families difficult if not impossible. Although these circumstances made some aspects of her early life in Edgeworthstown difficult for Edgeworth they nonetheless helped to foster a sense of closeness and cooperation among the occupants of Edgeworthstown.

For one thing, her father had much more time in Edgeworthstown than he had had previously to concern himself with his eldest daughter and her education. The sense of indebtedness to her home, which Edgeworth later expressed time and again in her letters, may not least stem from the fact that Edgeworthstown was the place where she came of age, not just as a person but also intellectually. Paradoxically, it was her very isolation in Edgeworthstown which led her through reading to acquire a cosmopolitan education and outlook. What is beyond any doubt is that the atmosphere of rigorous scientific and intellectual inquiry which pervaded her family home contributed immensely to the shaping of Edgeworth's values as well as her adult tastes and preferences in the field of literature. Crucially, growing up in such an environment, as I have argued in Chapter Two, opened Edgeworth up to some of the most influential thinkers and writers, which the Enlightenment had produced in eighteenth-century Europe. Her critical engagement with French writers such as Genlis, Rousseau, Marmontel, for instance, provided much of the motivation which eventually propelled her to launch into print with her own thoughts on the key-subjects of education and Ireland, which thread their way through all of Edgeworth's oeuvre.

Occasionally the easy and chatty tone which Edgeworth customarily strikes in those of her letters to family and friends which she wrote from Edgeworthstown conspire to give the impression that her life there was largely self-contained, largely uneventful and, at times, even sedate. In her letters, for instance, Edgeworth often dwells at great length on matters pertaining to the domestic, such as the present occupations, state of health and happiness of individual family members, and she also liked to draw a picture of her own existence in Edgeworthstown which emphasised the order, peace and quiet which she associated with living there. It would be wrong to conclude from this, however, that the happenings and concerns of the outside world did not intrude themselves into Edgeworth's consciousness and her day-to-day existence. Indeed, as the observant daughter of an estate-owning gentleman in Ireland Edgeworth could not help but notice the wide-spread effect which a reform in current

landlordism practises could have on the local population. Further, a general observation which Jonathan Swift had made on eighteenth-century life in Ireland applied also to Edgeworth's own life in Edgeworthstown. Swift had stated that 'as the World now is turned, no Cloyster [sic] is retired enough to keep Politicks [sic] out'.⁵³²

Although politics as such is a subject discussed at length only in her early correspondence with Fanny Robinson, and features later more obliquely in the letters she wrote to the Ruxtons, the rural location of her family home, for all its apparent seclusion and its distance from the centre of government (whether it was Dublin Castle or Westminster) — paradoxically — made Edgeworth more, rather than less, alert to the politics of her period. The location, in which Edgeworth lived and from where she wrote her works, thus had a direct bearing on the perspective with which she came to view the Anglo-Irish political scene which characterised the Ireland of her period. What is more, as time went on (during the Famine, for instance,) it was Edgeworth's first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in Edgeworthstown which convinced her of the need to take an active part in national politics.

Location was one aspect which contributed to Edgeworth's emerging sense of place. Another important aspect consisted in the day-to-day routines which characterised her home-life in Edgeworthstown. For Edgeworthstown was a home in which learning was seen as part and parcel of everyday existence. As I have shown in Chapters One and Two, discussion of the latest books and other publications formed one of the mainstays of all of her letters. Even by the standards of her own period, in which most gentlemen's daughters would occupy a considerable portion of their day with reading, the home in which Edgeworth grew up stood out in terms of the sheer range of print material with which she came into daily contact from her adolescence onwards. Like many a genteel girl of her own age throughout the British isles Edgeworth, as I have shown, did read some new novels, as well as volumes of poetry and travelogues but, unlike most of her contemporaries, she began also to engage critically with high-brow monthly magazines, literary periodicals, papers on education and new scientific discoveries, political pamphlets and speeches by MPs (besides, as already mentioned, all the major works belonging to the French Classic tradition).

One consequence of growing up in a household where learning was seen as an open-ended process and where, to borrow from Claire Connolly, 'education and not gender was seen as the ultimate marker of ability', was that her experience of life in Edgeworthstown

⁵³² Quoted in Carole Fabricant's *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 147.

lastingly influenced Edgeworth's (self-)perception of female domesticity. Not only was Edgeworth's existence as a private individual characterised by her perpetual engagement with the world of ideas but, increasingly, as delineated in Chapter Three, the heroines she portrayed in her fictions also became women who were openly and unashamedly intellectual in their tastes and daily pursuits.

However, despite this being the case, Edgeworth, when reflecting upon her career as a writer towards the end of her life, famously described herself as someone whose tastes were 'wholly domestic'. With her *Memoir of Maria Edgeworth* (1867), published after Edgeworth's death, Frances Edgeworth endeavoured to emphasise further still her step-daughter's credentials as a (conventional) domestic woman. Due to the interesting light which her comments shed on Edgeworth's daily domestic routine in Edgeworthstown it is worth quoting in full what Frances has to say. She begins by recounting how Edgeworth used to start an average day at home.

She rose, as I have said, early, and after taking a cup of coffee and reading her letters, walked out till breakfast-time, a meal she always enjoyed especially, (though she scarcely ate anything;) she delighted to read out and talk over her letters of the day, and listened to the newspapers, but *she was no female politician*. She came into the breakfast-room in summer-time with her hands full of roses, and always had some work or knitting to do while others ate. She generally sat down at her desk soon after breakfast and wrote till luncheon-time, - her chief meal of the day, - after which she did some needlework, often unwillingly, when eager about her letters or MS., but obediently, as she had found writing directly after eating lunch bad for her. Sometimes in the afternoon she drove out, always sitting with her back to the horses, and when quite at ease about them exceedingly enjoyed a short drive in an open carriage, not caring and often not knowing which road she went, talking and laughing all the time. She usually wrote all the rest of the afternoon, and in her latter years lay down and slept for an hour after dinner, coming down to tea and afterwards reading out herself, or working and listening to the reading out of some of the family. Her extreme enjoyment of a book made these evening hours delightful to her and to all the family. If her attention was turned to anything else, she always desired the reader to stop till she was able to attend, and even from the most apparently dull compositions she extracted knowledge or amusement. She often lingered after the usual bed-time to talk over what she had heard, full of bright or deep and solid observations, and gay anecdotes à propos to the work or its author. She had amazing power of control over her feelings when occasion demanded, but in general her tears or her smiles were called forth by every turn of joy and sorrow among those she lived with. When she met in a stranger a kindered mind, her conversations upon every subject poured forth, brilliant with wit and eloquence and a gaiety of heart which gave life to all she thought and said. *But*

the charms of society never altered her taste for domestic life; she was consistent from the beginning to the end. (MME, 3:267-268, my emphasis)

What is one to make of Frances Edgeworth's above description of Edgeworth? Firstly, I would suggest that her description of her step-daughter should be read against the cultural context of the Victorian period in which the *Memoir* was conceived and published. In a Britain which had grown increasingly conservative and prescriptive when it came to the activities and pursuits considered as appropriate for the female domestic sphere anything which smacked of intellectualism in women would have been regarded with suspicion. Frances Edgeworth had already had opportunity to witness how the frank account which her husband had given of the unconventional ideas and politics which had informed the course of his life in his *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (1817) — a work which Edgeworth, in accordance with her father's death-bed wishes, had completed on his behalf — had been liable to be misunderstood, and had, in fact, lead to the diminishment rather than the enhancement of his reputation. For this reason Frances Edgeworth's most important objective with regard to the *Memoir* for which she now was responsible must have been that it would, even if it could not enhance, at least safe-guard her step-daughters reputation; not just as a writer but, more importantly, as a private individual (i.e. Edgeworth as a woman).

For instance, her insistence, at the opening of the passage, that her step-daughter had not been a 'female politician' betrays her anxiety lest the active role which Edgeworth took during the latter part of her life in national Irish politics should be misunderstood and cast the slur of unfeminine behaviour on her reputation. Whilst Frances Edgeworth's apprehensions with regard to her step-daughter's reputation are understandable her above description of her — motivated, as it was, by a desire to render her subject inoffensive — has the unfortunate effect of belying the spirit of rigorous and life-long intellectual inquiry which actually characterised Edgeworth's day-to-day existence in Edgeworthstown. The apolitical woman figure who emerges from Frances Edgeworth's *Memoir* certainly does not reflect the position which Edgeworth herself came to adopt in relation to women and politics. For Edgeworth had declared quite unequivocally in her last novel *Helen* (1834) that it behove all educated women to take an active interest in and, whenever possible, play a part in national politics. With Lady Davenant as her mouth-piece Edgeworth had explained to the young heroine of the novel:

... the position of women in society, is somewhat different from what it was a hundred years ago, or as it was sixty, or I will say thirty years since.

Women are now so highly cultivated, and political subjects are at present of so much importance, of such high interest, to all human creatures who live together in society, you can hardly expect, Helen, that you, as a rational being, can go through the world as it now is, without forming any opinions on points of political importance. You cannot, I conceive, satisfy yourself with the common namby-pamby little missy phrase, “ladies have nothing to do with politics”.⁵³³

Edgeworth’s above comment testifies to her conviction that women have a vitally important role to fulfil in modern life; that they not only can but, in fact, that they have a duty to express their opinions on political subject and thereby make their influence on society felt. Indeed, if anything, the stance which she takes in *Helen* would seem to indicate Edgeworth’s recognition that women, if they want to be taken seriously as intellectuals who are equal to, and just as able as, men, have to emerge out of the shadows of their husbands and homes.

However, leaving Frances Edgeworth’s description of her step-daughter aside, how are we to reconcile Edgeworth’s portrait of herself as a woman with ‘wholly domestic’ tastes? Are we to conclude that Edgeworth was disingenuous when she made this observation about herself? As already suggested in Chapter Three, I would suggest that this is not necessarily the case. For, to Edgeworth, her work as a writer was part and parcel of her everyday existence as a domestic woman. Rather than perceiving of her ‘authorship self’ as an element of her personality which is divorced from her normal daily life in Edgeworthstown, Edgeworth appears to have regarded it simply as part of her female domesticity. What makes her concept of female domesticity so refreshingly different and, in a sense, so thoroughly modern, is that Edgeworth regards her literary creativity as an integral and, indeed, a fully integrated part of her own femininity. Seen from this point of view she was simply being truthful when she described herself as a woman whose tastes were ‘wholly domestic’.

So far I have looked at some of the factors which explain Edgeworth’s attachment to her home(-life) in Edgeworthstown. However, she was, as previously mentioned, of course also attached to Edgeworthstown as a place which was situated at the centre of the region she came to love and depict in her fictions. As is to be expected over the course of such a long residence in one place, Edgeworth’s relationship to, and identification with Edgeworthstown as a locale evolved very gradually and was subject to some change. In Chapter Four I have explored some of those aspects in Edgeworth’s Irish tales which articulate her changing sense

⁵³³ See Maria Edgeworth, *Helen* (1834), Volume 9 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 214.

of place. Her last Irish tale *Ormond* (1817), for instance, apart from being noticeably more sympathetic to local customs and the indigenous classifications of people (i.e. half-gentleman, mounted gentleman, gentleman to the backbone etc.), is also the most pronounced expression of Edgeworth's deep emotional attachment to her home-region of Edgeworthstown.

Other indications of Edgeworth's steadily evolving sense of place can be found in her correspondence. For instance, in one of the letters she wrote home from Scotland whilst on tour there with Fanny and Sophy in 1823, she records an incident which sheds an interesting light on her shifting sense of national allegiance. Whilst being shown around a famed beauty spot by a local Scottish guide, Edgeworth is asked from where in England she and her sisters hail. She declares without hesitation that she and her sisters are 'Irish'. Her description of the change in demeanour which her declaration brought about in the Scottish guide is interesting as it reveals as much about his attitude as it does of Edgeworth's own. Recounting the scene, Edgeworth wrote home:

When he found that we were Irish, he turned to me, and all reserve vanished from his countenance, with brightening eyes he said, as he laid his hand on his breast, 'And you are Irish! Now I know that, I would do ten times as much for you if I could, then when I thought you were Southern[sic] or English. We think the Irish have, like ourselves, more spirit'. He talked of Ossian, and said the English could not give the force of the original Gaelic. He sang a Gaelic song for us, to a tune like St. Patrick's Day in the Morning. He called St. Patrick, Phaedrig, by which name I did not recognise him; and our Highlander exclaimed, 'Don't you know your own saints? Sophy sang the tune for him, with which he was charmed; and when he heard William⁵³⁴ call her Sophy, he said to himself, 'Sophia Western'. (*MME*, 2:227)

For all the confusion (and the comic potential) which is apparent from the above encounter between Edgeworth and the Scotsman, the exchange which takes place in the Scottish Highlands registers a significant change in Edgeworth's attitude. For, up to then, Edgeworth had not been in the habit of describing herself as 'Irish'. Instead, the verbal formulation which she had used almost invariably in her letters when referring to either herself or her family had been 'we in Ireland'. Whilst this is an expression which indicates an attitude which is broadly sympathetic to problems and concerns peculiar to Ireland it serves to highlight, at the same

⁵³⁴ Edgeworth's half-brother William, who was in Scotland as part of his training to become a civil engineer, managed to meet up with his sisters on a small number of occasions during their tour.

time, the considerable distance in attitude and national allegiance which Edgeworth perceives between her family and the local population in Edgeworthstown.

What the above incident in Scotland indicates is that Edgeworth's identification with place and her sense of national allegiance must have shifted, at some stage, over the course of her long residence in Edgeworthstown. Further, it illustrates that the location and company in which Edgeworth found herself could have a bearing not only on how she saw and described herself but, importantly, on how others perceived her. In Chapter Five I have drawn attention to Edgeworth's visit to Abbotsford, in Scotland, during which Walter Scott's son-in-law and later biographer John Gibson Lockhart had described her as an 'ultra Irish body'. In turn, Edgeworth's own opinion of some of the Irish people she met could vary depending on the cultural context in which she encountered them initially. As discussed in Chapter Five, Edgeworth's opinion of Mary Martin, for instance, changed considerably when she transposed her from her native Connemara to the metropolitan scene of London.

Edgeworth's encounter with the Scottish guide also serves to underline the need to tread carefully when making pronouncements on Edgeworth's sense of national allegiance. In the light of all which has been said of Edgeworth and her complex relationship with the country to which her father brought her in 1782 it is perhaps all too easy to make (the wrong) assumptions. In this respect, as in so many others, Edgeworth is a writer who remains notoriously difficult to place. This then has also emerged as the consensus among critics — a rare phenomenon indeed — of two major recent collections of scholarly work on Edgeworth. Both Heidi Kaufmann and Chris Fauske's *An Uncomfortable Authority* (2004) and Julie Nash's *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth* (2006) stress the many aspects of Edgeworth's oeuvre which continue to challenge us as nowadays. Always complex, often ambiguous, sometimes vexingly slippery, at others positively cryptic but, at all times, demanding our active critical attention, Edgeworth, it seems, will continue to engage us for some time to come.

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