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CHAPTER THREE

Revolution and Memory in 'Madame De Fleury', 'Emilie De Coulanges' and 'Ennui'

Some time ago my dear Aunt Charlotte amongst some hints to the Chairman of the Committee of Education, you sent me one which I have pursued – you said that the Early Lessons for the poor should speak with detestation of the spirit of revenge – I have just finished a little story called Forgive & Forget upon this idea.

Maria Edgeworth to Charlotte Sneyd, 1799[1]

Memory – and forgetting – play important and highly controversial roles in Irish culture, especially in relation to the 1790s and in the accounts and interpretations of that period. The memory of past grievances, chiefly a conviction that those who were now tenants had been dispossessed of lands and estates, appeared to some commentators to be ineradicable in the lower-class Catholic population and was understandably considered dangerous by the ruling establishment, as an ever-present source of seditious unrest which could, and apparently did, give rise to recurrent episodes of violence and disorder.[2] The plot of Edgeworth's 1809 novel, *Ennui*, in which the village blacksmith discovers that he is in fact by birth the Earl of Glenthorn, and promptly takes up residence in Glenthorn Castle, clearly alludes to this undercurrent in Irish culture. It is, moreover, Edgeworth's only novel to incorporate the 1798 rebellion into its plot. *Ennui* therefore represents a creative and imaginative reworking of the elements of grievance, memory and revolutionary plots, an explosive mixture which continues to provoke sometimes bitter controversy.

The role played in the 1798 rebellion by popular memory and consciousness has been intensely debated and contested in the past decade. In the case of events in Wexford, in particular, some historians have argued that the rank-and-file participants had been 'politicised' (through newspapers, pamphlets, membership of clubs and so on) and that their involvement was expressive of their commitment to the radical, non-sectarian politics of the United Irish leadership.[3] Others argue, however, that the motivation of the rebels in

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Wexford was strongly marked by sectarianism, and far from being part of a new, radical moment in Irish history, the rebellion was based on atavistic loyalties and hatreds, nurtured by the kinds of folk-memory referred to above.[4] This is of course a simplified sketch of two polarised positions, but it does suggest the fault-lines of the dispute. The key question, for the purposes of this chapter, concerns the very different claims that are made as to the extent to which these memories are available for reorientation towards political radicalisation. Tom Dunne, basing his arguments on the evidence of Irish-language poetry, uses the term 'subaltern' to describe the lower-class combatants in 1798, which in his usage suggests that their mentality remains intractable from the point of view of official political ideologies.[5] Whelan, on the other hand, sees no serious obstacle to the process of politicisation, while Jim Smyth acknowledges the distance that separates the Catholic Defenders from the leadership of the United Irishmen, but describes the mentality of the Defenders in terms of a blend of the 'old and the new' – sectarian, anglophobic, millenarian, tapping into 'rich folkloric versions of Irish history' – but also 'revolutionary', drawing 'inspiration from the French and American experience'.[6] Joep Leerssen, however, a literary critic rather than a historian, goes further in making an explicit connection between 'unofficial' forms of memory and radical challenges to an inevitably conservative establishment:

> Harbouring grievances, wishing to 'pay back' the oppressor for past misdeeds, threatens the ideal of harmonious solidarity. Thus the conservative stance is often remarkably anti-historicist, and tends to stress the need to let bygones be bygones. One of the things that Burke hated most of all in the French revolution was precisely this tendency to settle old scores, which, Burke felt, threatened national cohesion in a historical sense as much as its class struggle threatened national cohesion in a societal sense. Since Burke's time, the refusal to 'forgive and forget' has been deplored by the paternalist elite as cramped intransigence and a mark of political immaturity.[7]

Leerssen compares the historical consciousness of 'Catholic Ireland' to that of other marginalised groups including gay men and women and ethnic minorities, using the term 'traumatised history'. In Leerssen's discussion, memory and unofficial forms of history, which he calls 'community remembering', thus have an implicitly radical edge, as they are in conflict with the desire of a paternalist elite to have people 'forgive and forget'.[8]

The focus on memory, whether claimed as radical or conservative, has tended to obscure the fact that the creation of the Society of United Irishmen was facilitated by a will to forget the past. Forgetting was an essential part of the unprecedented and short-lived union of 'Catholic, Protestant and

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Dissenter' that emerged from the United Irish movement. Theobald Wolfe Tone, the United Irishmen's most important propagandist and the most unequivocal voice in favour of admitting Catholics to the full rights and benefits of citizenship, wrote at the formation of the Society in Dublin:

> In thus associating, we have thought little about our ancestors – much of our posterity. Are we for ever to walk like beasts of prey over fields which these ancestors stained with blood? In looking back, we see nothing on the one part but savage force succeeded by savage policy; on the other, an unfortunate nation scattered and peeled, meted out and trodden down! We see a mutual intolerance, and a common carnage of the first moral emotions of the heart, which leads us to esteem and place confidence in our fellow creatures. We see this, and are silent. But we gladly look forward to brighter prospects [. . .] to a peace – not the gloomy and precarious stillness of men brooding over their wrongs, but that stable tranquillity which rests on the rights of human nature, and leans on the arms by which these rights are to be maintained.[9]

The rebellion itself, which brought the bloodstained fields of the past into the present, seemed to put an end to the project of forgetting a divisive past in favour of a shared and peaceful future. The political landscape had been fundamentally altered by the rebellion, which had apparently proved that divisions could not simply be buried in oblivion and that popular memory, on both sides of the sectarian divide, was a much more powerful force than any utopian political ideology.

The typical cultural products of the post-Union era, the novels of Lady Morgan and the poetry of Thomas Moore, are therefore concerned to contain the past in the interests of peace and reconciliation, rather than to harness or exploit its radical potential. The second half of the eighteenth century had seen an awakening of interest among the Anglo-Irish in the native culture and traditions of Ireland, a development which has been associated – wrongly, in the eyes of some historians – with the growth of what is variously termed 'Protestant patriotism' or 'colonial nationalism'.[10] According to Katie Trumpener, this interest in antiquarianism, which she terms 'bardic nationalism', underwent a transformation in the 1790s, a decade which witnessed the greatest convergence between cultural nationalism and political radicalism, but which also ultimately blurred the figure of the bard as a symbol of resistance to British cultural imperialism. According to Trumpener, the events of the 1790s 'transformed the meaning of cultural nationalism. Proto-Jacobin in many respects during the last decades of the eighteenth century, cultural nationalism often appears in the 1810s and 1820s as reactive or reactionary'.[11] *The Wild Irish Girl* is reactive rather than reactionary, and its politics are liberal, but it is

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notable that Morgan emphasises the role of the displaced Catholic gentry and nobility in transmitting cultural traditions: claims of past grievance are thus not associated with a resentful populace, but with the ailing Prince of Inismore, and are tempered by the mediating charms of his daughter Glorvina. Mary Jean Corbett argues consequently that Morgan is committed to 'the notion that aristocratic power, properly exercised, can be a force for good', a claim which, based on a reading of *The Wild Irish Girl*, seems justified.[12] The past can be accessed and rehabilitated, therefore, if channelled through proper authorities.

In contrast to Lady Morgan, Edgeworth displayed scepticism about antiquarianism and although, as we have seen in chapter 2, she was equally as critical of British claims to a monopoly on civilisation, she was far less likely to turn to the resources of Ireland's pre-colonial past in order to make this point. In spite of the fact that texts such as *The Wild Irish Girl* indicate that there is no necessary connection between radicalism and the 'romantic' deployment of the Irish past, there is a tendency nonetheless to regard Edgeworth's 'Enlightenment' lack of interest in Ireland's past as indicative of a concern to deny what Leerssen might call its 'traumatised' history and thus to validate the status quo. As my opening quotation indicates, Edgeworth was aware of the potential of memory to fuel resentment and thus resistance to power. In the context in which she was writing, 1799, the resentment that the 'poor people' would have been feeling would have been much more immediate than the kinds of folk-memory of dispossession which are assumed to create anxiety in the landlord class. It was widely recognised that the suppression of the rebellion had been unjust, brutal and excessive, and that many innocent people had suffered. Government action had made it all too easy to interpret 1798 as yet another instance of the ruling minority's abuse of power. The plot of *Ennui*, as I have suggested, is an acknowledgment rather than a repression of the currency and potency of popular memory and consciousness. There is no doubt, however, that Edgeworth saw memory as divisive rather than progressive, but what I want to propose here is the possibility that forgetting can continue to have something of the radical and even revolutionary meanings with which it was associated in the thought of the United Irishmen and in the French Revolution. The amnesia-inducing plot of the novel represents a rejection of the determining power of memory and the past over the present and the future. My argument is that the evident desire in *Ennui* to detach individuals from their remembered pasts is motivated by an attempt to map onto Irish circumstances the positive interpretations of the revolutionary process that one finds elsewhere in Edgeworth's fiction.

The novel's central plot twist, in which Christy O'Donoghoe, the village blacksmith, takes possession of Glenthorn Castle, which subsequently becomes 'a scene of riotous waste', is, according to Tom Dunne, a straightforward

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reflection of the paranoia engendered by the scare stories of the 1790s, in which the entitlements of Protestant landowners were challenged by dispossessed Catholics. *Ennui*'s plot, he argues, reflects the 'insecurity and ambivalence which characterised the [Edgeworth] family's perception of its colonialist role'.[13] There is another way of reading this, however, and that is in relation to Niall Ó Ciosáin's discussion of the 'ideology of status' in popular culture in Ireland. As Ó Ciosáin points out, popular genres such as chivalric romances, criminal biography and historical writing are all concerned with the vital question of 'social hierarchy and its legitimacy'.[14] These texts consistently affirm the nobility of blood and the legitimacy of inherited status. Although such texts have been interpreted as conservative in so far as they reinforce established power relations, Ó Ciosáin points out that 'the versions of nobility contained in the texts could equally be used as ideals against which to measure and criticise the actuality'.[15] The potential for such critical and subversive applications of an ideology of nobility in Ireland are immediately self-evident. *Ennui* is thus on an ideological level reactive to popular conceptions of status, whilst on a formal level it represents an instance of the penetration of the elite by the popular, by incorporating a plot which derives from folklore and popular literature. *Ennui*, however, overlays these local, popular myths of social and political subversion and restitution with alternative readings derived from the recent history of the French revolution. In doing so, Edgeworth combines the appeal of folk memory with a radical elite perspective which seeks to find new beginnings rather than revert to old forms. The radicalism of Edgeworth's position can be appreciated by contrasting it with that of her contemporary, Walter Scott, whose fame was soon to eclipse hers. According to John P. Farrell, Scott, like Edgeworth 'look[ed] back to the crises of social and political enmity [in Scotland] and imagined them in the light of modern revolution'.[16] Scott, however, unlike Edgeworth, 'looked back to Scotland's past and imagined its decline into the bourgeois present'; his work is moreover characterised by 'a historical imagination radically disturbed by the premonition of tragedy'.[17]

Certain aspects of *Ennui*, including the main protagonist's journey to and tour through Ireland as a wide-eyed, first-time traveller, alternately amazed and appalled, have prompted critics to discuss it in the context of the national tale. As I shall suggest below, however, Glenthorn's journey to Ireland bears a closer resemblance to revolutionary emigration than it does to the earnest progress of the enlightened travel narrative; thus I propose to read its revolutionary themes in relation to two tales which explicitly narrate the French Revolution, *Madame de Fleury* and *Emilie de Coulanges*, whose central characters undergo the extraordinary upheavals of the Revolution, losing everything but gaining something new in the process. In proposing to read *Emilie de Coulanges* and *Madame de Fleury* alongside *Ennui* it is important to note that although

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not published in the same series of *Tales of Fashionable Life*, all three tales were written after Edgeworth's trip to France and Switzerland in 1802–3; *Ennui* has been described as 'the intellectual first fruit' of that tour.[18] A comparison of *Ennui* with these two tales, however, reveals that when considered on 'home ground' in Ireland, the concept of revolution is pressed to the limits of meaning, in contrast with the containment of revolution within a model of progress in *Madame de Fleury* and *Emilie de Coulanges*. In the two latter tales, a sharp distinction is maintained between the external – the environment in which the individual finds him or herself – and the internal space of the mind. In *Ennui*, this stable core is swept away.

Madame de Fleury represents the revolution directly, making references to such notorious revolutionary institutions as the Committee for Public Safety. The context in which the revolution is located is, however, highly unusual, if also typically Edgeworthian. The tale opens with Madame de Fleury's realisation of the numbers of children who are neglected and uncared for because their mothers are forced to work outside the home and cannot afford either childcare or school fees, and her decision to open a school for the daughters of these women. The character of Mme de Fleury herself is based on that of the real-life Mme Pastoret, whom Edgeworth met while in Paris. Mme Pastoret charmed Edgeworth for her quality of combining Parisian grace and gaiety with a commitment to intellectual pursuits and charitable work.[19] The school on which Edgeworth based her tale was established in 1801, but Edgeworth relocates the school's founding to the pre-revolutionary era. This fictional manipulation of facts thus highlights the poverty which the school attempts to redress as one of the underlying causes for the revolution. It also, most importantly, enables Edgeworth to imagine how the very different social classes represented by Madame de Fleury and her pupils would experience the revolution.

The tale does not represent the revolution as a unprecedented catastrophe, but rather as a 'change of fortune' to which well-educated individuals should be able to adjust:

> In these times, no sensible person will venture to pronounce that a change of fortune and station may not await the highest and the lowest; whether we rise or fall in the scale of society, personal qualities and knowledge will be valuable. Those who fall, cannot be destitute; and those who rise, cannot be ridiculous or contemptible, if they have been prepared for their fortune by proper education. In shipwreck, those who carry their all in their minds are the most secure.[20]

The image of revolution presented here is a curious compound of instability and stability. On the one hand, the possibility of unprecedented change is admitted: the upper classes may fall and the lower classes may rise. On the

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other hand, the 'scale of society' seems to remain constant, so that there is some continuity in the external environment. Most importantly, the passage represents the mind, the self, as a stable entity which may adapt to external change but provides the vital thread of continuity ensuring that the individual is 'secure'. The image of the self-contained individual, a survivor of shipwreck, recalls of course the iconic subject of the British Enlightenment, Robinson Crusoe. As Christopher Hill first pointed out, Crusoe's survival depends not only on the goods salvaged from the ship but on his 'mental furniture' (the 'all' he carries in his mind) – his habits of hard work, self-discipline and his desire firstly to acquire territory and then secure and enlarge it.[21]

Like Crusoe's shipwreck, revolution is a kind of practical testing ground for Edgeworth's faith in her own ideal of education. But whereas *Robinson Crusoe* was a fantasy with roots in the social and economic philosophies of eighteenth-century Britain, the revolution was shockingly, bloodily real. It was one thing to be interested in the *theory* of an education which produced individuals who were not totally dependent on their social role, and could adapt and adopt new roles; it is quite another to respond to revolution as an actual event in these terms. *Madame de Fleury* thus represents a particular and rather arresting kind of post-revolutionary Enlightenment, one which assimilates massacres, executions, regicide, deportations, land confiscations, the dissolution of religious orders, the creation of new armies, institutions, a new language – and calmly insists that a proper education on sound Enlightenment principles will equip the individual to negotiate these extraordinary changes.[22]

There is, moreover, a suggestion that if the classes are already aware of their mutual dependence, the transformations brought about by a revolution will ultimately result in an acceleration of social progress. In the weeks and days immediately prior to the outbreak of revolution Mme de Fleury worries for the future of her pupils: she foresees 'the temptations, the dangers, to which they must be exposed, whether they abandoned, or whether they abided by, the principles their education had instilled' (229). But this paternalistic care for the fate of her pupils is, however, soon replaced by a dependence on their affection, their generosity and their willingness to take risks on her behalf.

As in 'Letter from a Gentleman' and *Belinda*, the concept of fashion features in *Madame de Fleury* as a way in which to approach the topic of revolution and social change. The more conventionally Enlightenment assumptions of this tale, in contrast with the texts dealt with in chapter 1, are evident in so far as Edgeworth seeks to distinguish change as a positive concept from negatively construed revolutionary 'fashions'. The key function of Edgeworth's ideal education seems in fact to be to create a subject who adapts to change without, however, falling victim to ephemeral fashion. This distinction is expressed by the introduction of the characters of Manon, a working-class girl, and the

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abbé Tracassier, both of whom look on the revolution as an opportunity for personal gain and power. Manon is a cousin of one of Mme de Fleury's pupils, Victoire, but she advises her cousin that 'she would be much happier if she *followed the fashion*', and adds scornfully that 'nuns, and schoolmistresses, and schools, and all that sort of things [*sic*], are out of fashion now – we have abolished all that' (230). Manon herself regards the revolution as a means of acquiring simply material possessions; she begins by looting milliners' shops and bakeries and then becomes the mistress of a revolutionary apparatchik. She invites Victoire to visit her in her new home, a splendid 'hôtel' that was formerly the property of an aristocrat.

Fashions change, however, and when Manon's lover loses his influence and thereby his wealth, she is left utterly destitute, dying alone in a hospital, as Edgeworth sombrely informs us. The 'abbé' Tracassier shows a similar willingness to embrace the new revolutionary fashions. Whereas in the pre-revolutionary period he had attempted to dictate both as a literary and religious despot in Mme de Fleury's salon (he had for instance objected to Mme de Fleury that Sister Frances, the nun in charge of her school, was not sufficiently orthodox), as soon as the revolution breaks out, he abandons his religious principles and becomes a member of the Committee for Public Safety. He now pursues Mme de Fleury on the grounds that she is a '*fosterer of a swarm of bad citizens*', who are being educated in '*detestable superstitions*' and the corrupt principles of the *ancien régime* (232). Tracassier is foiled by the efforts of Mme de Fleury's pupils, notably the resourceful Victoire, who helps her patroness to escape to England with a false passport. Meanwhile, the son of the steward to the Fleury estate, Basile, achieves influence with a general in the French army for whom he performs loyal and admirable service as a secretary, map-maker and military surveyor. The general's military success is founded on Basile's expertise, and he therefore generously offers to use his current popularity with the Directory to request a favour for his loyal secretary. Basile requests permission for the Fleurys to return to France and resume ownership of all their property. In the ensuing row, Tracassier finds himself siding with the wrong party: 'From being the rulers of France, they [Tracassier and his adherents] in a few hours became banished men, or, in the phrase of the times, *des déportés*' (254).

The return of M and Mme de Fleury to their château, to the delight of their loyal tenants and followers, suggests the reinstatement of pre-revolutionary relationships, but there are important qualifications to this 'restoration'. The scene has switched from deprived and urban Paris, where the tale opened, to the French countryside, and a festival: 'never was *fête du village* or *fête du Seigneur* more joyful than this' (254). This is the second festival to feature in the tale, the first being one held at Mme de Fleury's school to celebrate the

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achievements of her star pupil, Victoire. According to the editors of the tale, this alludes to a genre of countryside festival, the 'rosière' or rose festival, in which aristocratic women dispensed charity to the rural poor; the editors suggest that 'problems arose from telling such a story after the Revolution'.[23] Shifts in the relationship between the people and their rulers can be tracked in the changes to festivals and other aspects of popular culture over time. A feature of nations based on ideas of popular sovereignty is the replacement of local and regional customs, often sponsored by local gentry and nobility, with national holidays and rituals. The *rosière*, accordingly, in the revolutionary period, was transformed, and featured a young girl selected to symbolise Liberty. But the celebration of a festival of the estate of M and Mme de Fleury at the tale's conclusion suggests a desire to re-establish older forms of social leadership, retaining elements of deference and patronage, in spite of the changes of the revolutionary period.

The social convulsions of the revolution have, however, altered the relationship between the classes by providing a vivid illustration of their mutual interdependence:

> The proofs of integrity, attachment, and gratitude, which she received in these days of peril, from those whom she had obliged in her prosperity, touched her generous heart so much, that she has often since declared she could not regret having been reduced to distress. (239)

The revolution has also created a new middle class. Although Victoire marries her fiancé Basile in a ceremony presided over by Mme de Fleury, the pair owe their future not to her, but to the new institutions of a radically changed France. Through his experiences in the revolutionary army, Basile has become a well-connected professional, rather than succeeding his father as steward on the estate, as would surely have happened in the absence of revolution. Although as the tale closes we are invited to imagine a golden era of peace and harmony on the Fleury estate, it seems clear that Basile's and Victoire's future lies elsewhere, and not within the restricted social forms available in the structure of a landlord-led rural economy. Mitzi Myers has noted that *Madame de Fleury* is 'dense with covert allusions to Ireland's perilous situation [. . .] and its answers are home truths'.[24] One way of looking at the tale would be as a redescription of Irish social instability in terms of the French Revolution, a version in which Irish tenants are *best* imagined as French plebeians. Edgeworth's suggestion that revolution can bring about mutually beneficial effects on the classes brings to mind Staël's claim that the invasion of the 'barbarian' *sans-culottes* would ultimately improve the state of French civilisation. The narrative of the revolution in *Madame de Fleury* is essentially optimistic, charting a

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social, cultural and economic reformation of France. In his transformation from steward's son, presumably expected to inherit his father's position, to independent middle-class professional, Basile for instance could be regarded as a rose-tinted version of Jason Quirk.

Whereas *Madame de Fleury* narrates the revolution as a means towards the alteration of the class structure within France itself, *Emilie de Coulanges* provides a cross-cultural perspective, exploring the impact of the revolution on relationships between Britain and France. It declares its optimistic faith in progress in its opening paragraph when the young French émigrée, Emilie, comforts herself with the idea that 'things, which are always changing, and which cannot change for the worse, must soon infallibly change for the better'.[25] Here the suggestion is that the revolution, and in particular the associated phenomenon of emigration, will ultimately contribute to the growth of mutual understanding and respect between Britain and France. Positive portrayals of French émigrés are a recurrent feature of Edgeworth's fiction: examples include Madame de Rosier, 'the good French governess', and minor characters in *Angelina* and *Forester*. These and the characters in *Emilie de Coulanges* are clearly designed to act as correctives to crude anti-French stereotypes. Seamus Deane has, however, argued that proclaiming a welcome to refugees from revolutionary France was another way of expressing hostility to the revolution and was of a piece with the demonisation of French character, particularly in the case of the warm response received by exiled French clergy: 'the fleeing French clergy were no longer papists; they were Christian fugitives from an atheistic and revolutionary France – old enemies become new friends'. According to Deane, 'the contrast between the émigrés and the revolutionaries (already established by Burke) became part of the contrast between the old and the new France'.[26] Edgeworth was not alone, however, in proposing a progressive and liberal interpretation of revolutionary emigration. Both Charlotte Smith and Frances Burney, for instance, addressed the phenomenon of the Emigration by challenging the prevailing post-revolutionary tendency to condemn the French character. In the same year in which she married the penniless French émigré Alexandre D'Arblay, Burney, addressing specifically the 'Ladies of Great Britain and Ireland', remarked that 'we are too apt to consider ourselves rather as a distinct race of beings, than as merely the emulous inhabitants of two rival nations'.[27] Charlotte Smith, for her part, was acutely conscious that émigrés could potentially be used as tools in counter-revolutionary rhetoric, and her poem *The Emigrants* (1793), on the subject of the exiled French clergy, opens with a dedication to William Cowper in which she laments the use that has been made of revolutionary atrocities by reactionaries in Britain. She expresses the hope that, ultimately, 'this painful exile may finally lead to the extirpation of that reciprocal hatred so unworthy

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of great and enlightened nations'.[28] Both Smith and Burney acknowledge that the foundations on which the ideas of English and French national character have been built are deeply divisive, but their hope is that the phenomenon of the Emigration will contribute to the dismantling of those structures.

Emilie de Coulanges indicates that Edgeworth, in common with her liberal-minded contemporaries, saw the Emigration as, potentially at least, an enactment of the theory that apparently destructive circumstances could be conducive to progress. The Emigration, which forced thousands of French to seek refuge in what was technically a hostile state, was interpreted, by Chateaubriand for instance, as the source for a new cosmopolitan consciousness, a view which is not entirely without foundation: 'given the scale of the Emigration, it can hardly be disputed that those scattered to the four winds did, to varying degrees, discover new truths regarding the countries that offered them asylum'.[29] Emilie's thoughts on arrival in England articulate this apparently paradoxical situation:

> The English are such good people! – Cold, indeed, at first – that's their misfortune: but then the English coldness is of manner, not of heart. Time immemorial, they have been famous for making the best friends in the world; and even to us, who are their natural enemies, they are generous in our distress. (261)

Edgeworth dramatises her theme though the drawing-room enactment of national hostility in the figures of Emilie's mother, Mme de Coulanges, and her English hostess, Mrs Somers. The tale can be read as a comedy of manners; it has been described as 'an original psychological study of the problematics of charity and indeed of friendship in a competitive consumerist society', but the manners, the misunderstandings and the final resolution are all distinctly national.[30] The personality clashes between Mme de Coulanges and Mrs Somers are clearly intended to be read in the context of Anglo-French rivalry and antagonism, and to suggest that the revolution offers the possibility to reconfigure these relationships. In fact, *Emilie de Coulanges* can be regarded as plotting the idealised union between the North (England) and the South (France) that Germaine de Staël proposed in *De la littérature*.

The blissfully oblivious Mme de Coulanges frequently enrages her hostess by her insistence on the superiority of all things French:

> sometimes the English and French music were compared – sometimes the English and French painters; and every time the theatre was mentioned, Mad. de Coulanges pronounced an eulogium on her favourite French actors, and triumphed over the comparison between the elegance of the French, and the *grossièreté* of the English taste for comedy. (281)

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Mme de Coulanges denounces Shakespeare as a 'bloody-minded barbarian', to which Mrs Somers responds by dismissing this image as 'Voltaire's Shakespeare' (282) – a reference to Voltaire's *Letters on England*. Mrs Somers refers her guest to Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare*, and claims that English literature is superior to French by virtue of its unique humour (281–2). Mme de Coulanges displays what could be described as old-fashioned assumptions of French cultural superiority, while Mrs Somers displays that 'typically English' lack of interest in the cultural productions of other nations which was noted by Staël. Mme de Coulanges and Mrs Somers persist in characterising their respective nations by means of the oppositions of great canonical authors, and each struggles to assert the superiority of her own national author. This, it is implied, is an outmoded and sterile contest. While the older generation appear to be trapped in antagonistic patterns, Emilie reads Englishness as a set of values and customs that pertain directly to contemporary living and are, moreover, useful to her. 'Englishness' in *Emilie de Coulanges* is not represented by Shakespeare, but by a code of middle-class virtues, which, it is suggested, can be applied to post-revolutionary France. Whereas Mme de Coulanges is not only acutely aware of differences in manners and customs, but also assumes complacently that whatever is different in England is also deficient, Emilie calls England a 'charming country', and reflects that she and mother might never have known it, 'but for this terrible revolution' (261). She also privately acknowledges that the revolution has spared her the inevitable 'marriage de convenance' which was the lot of girls of her class. Emilie balances the losses she and her family have suffered as a result of the revolution against the new freedom and independence she experiences: when she and her mother leave Mrs Somers's house (relations having broken down completely), Emilie displays her new-found resourcefulness, earning money for their keep by copying music manuscripts and assuring her mother that she 'should infinitely prefer living by labour to becoming dependent' (268). In *Emilie de Coulanges*, revolutionary emigration is represented as a process of modernisation, in which members of the French aristocracy and gentry can be transformed into a professionalised middle class, a process that completes and also redeems the revolution. *Emilie de Coulanges* imagines the consequences of revolutionary emigration in terms of a progressive union along the lines of that proposed in *De la littérature*. In the manner of the national tale, therefore, this tale ends with a marriage that unites two nationalities when Emilie marries an Englishman – Mrs Somers's son, as it turns out, who helped Emilie and her mother to escape from captivity in Paris, but whose identity was unknown to her. The couple are set to return to Paris, thus completing the process of social and national reformation in France. Mme de Coulanges is initially less than delighted that her daughter is to marry an

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unpolished Englishman, but she is mollified by the suggestion that a dormant title in the Somers family might be revived to give the union some additional glamour. Thus not only does the experience of emigration to England direct the French gentry and upper classes towards the necessity of social responsibility, they are in fact 'restored' through their alliance with an English family.

Seamus Deane's suggestion that the welcome extended to French émigrés acted as a way of differentiating between 'old' France, which is supposedly to be preferred to 'new' revolutionary France, is thus certainly not borne out in the case of *Emilie de Coulanges*. The effect of the emigration here is a 'union' which contributes to the modernisation of France, although certainly not along revolutionary or jacobinical lines – the revolution, however, is central to the process whereby this modernisation occurs. The improvements associated with these changes are particularly important for women: Emilie's release from the prospect of a merely formal marriage of convenience is a direct consequence of their enforced emigration. The implication that archaic French practices are simply to be replaced by modern and improved English practices is, however, undermined by the fact that Emilie's freedom to chose her husband is actively opposed by Mrs Somers, who reacts with fury when Emilie refuses to marry her son, sight unseen. The very improbability of this episode, and its significance in prompting the émigrés to leave Mrs Somers's house, suggest that Edgeworth was at pains *not* to portray an undifferentiated Englishness as inevitably superior to French mores. Edgeworth's citation of a French authority as an intervention in the bitter, ostensibly literary, debate between Mme de Coulanges and Mrs Somers cuts across the sterile lines of opposition which their dispute has created. The 'pretensions of the English to the exclusive possession of humour' are 'attacked, with much ability' by Jean Baptiste Suard (281). This attack is cited at length, and in French. Like Mme Pastoret, whom Edgeworth so much admired and who was the model for Mme de Fleury, Suard and his wife were among those with whom the Edgeworths socialised whilst in Paris. Suard at the time was editor of a journal, *Le Publiciste*, and had been in former times a member of the *philosophe salon* hosted by Mme Geoffrin.[31] Suard's dismissal of the idea that 'humour' is an exclusively English gift displays an impressively cosmopolitan breadth of reference, referring to a wealth of authors including Aristophanes, Lucien, and Plautus, as examples of classical comic authors; Ariosto and Cervantes as examples of Italian and Spanish 'humour' respectively, and Rabelais and Molière, amongst others, as representative of French humour. One of the effects of Suard's comments is to suggest that national claims as to the 'exclusive' possession of any gift or quality may well be primarily indicative of ignorance of other cultures. If the French upper classes need a lesson in how to survive in the modern world, the English also need to learn the limitations of insularity. Through its

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inclusion of Suard's comments, *Emilie de Coulanges* itself acts as a means of such cosmopolitan education.

Emilie de Coulanges, therefore, in so far as it is concerned with the resolution of national cultural differences and enacts this resolution by means of a marriage, clearly bears some relationship to the national tale, while at the same time departing from its conventions in significant ways. Edgeworth upsets the apple-cart of the genre by presenting the narrative from the perspective of the 'foreign female' who is normally identified with the culture that is to be described. Above all, the destination in *Emilie de Coulanges* is not the exotic periphery, but the supposedly normative centre, whose claims to normativity are unsettled by being viewed through foreign eyes.

Both *Madame de Fleury* and *Emilie de Coulanges* read the French revolution as a catalyst for positive change. Although clearly unsupportive of the extremes of jacobinism, *Madame de Fleury* envisages the creation of an educated middle class as a lasting outcome of revolutionary upheaval; *Emilie de Coulanges*, meanwhile, using the phenomenon of revolutionary emigration, imagines the revolution as a route towards greater cross-cultural understanding. This optimism is, however, subject to a great deal of stress when Edgeworth attempts to read Ireland through the same revolutionary paradigm. *Ennui* is thick with references to the French revolution, and it is also of all Edgeworth's Irish texts the one which provides the most direct reference to the United Irishmen's rebellion, incorporating it within the plot. As we have seen, that rebellion has been read as signalling the re-emergence of socially divisive memories and the final defeat of radical attempts to overcome them. The socially progressive outcomes of revolution cannot therefore be realised in an Irish context unless the stable subject which is so much a feature of Edgeworth's other revolutionary tales is itself toppled.

The hero of *Ennui*, the Earl of Glenthorn, master of large estates in both England and Ireland, narrates his own history, describing himself as having been 'bred up in luxurious indolence'.[32] To drive the point home, he leads the reader through a headlong account of aristocratic vices, accompanied by references which introduce the spectre of the French *ancien régime* in all its excess. Lord Glenthorn's 'set' know no other occupation, it appears, than consumption. Having spent vast sums on carriages and jewels, Glenthorn then tries to escape his boredom by gambling, but soon tires of this and finds himself reduced to the most literal form of consumption: food. He becomes a 'connoisseur':

> After what I have beheld, to say nothing of what I have achieved, I can believe anything that is related of the capacity of the human stomach. I can credit even the account of the dinner which Madame de Bavière affirms she saw eaten by Lewis the Fourteenth. (169)

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Glenthorn goes so far as to remark that 'epicurism was scarcely more prevalent during the decline of the Roman empire than it is at this day amongst some of the wealthy and noble youths of Britain' (169). It need hardly be pointed out that references to the fall of the Roman empire and the notorious self-indulgence of Louis XIV align Glenthorn with a tradition of aristocratic degeneracy which was already diagnosed as being among the causes for the collapse of empires and monarchies. Later, in Ireland, Glenthorn muses that '*ennui* may have had a share in creating revolutions' (249), a thesis that seems to have been proven already with respect to his life in England. Glenthorn's ceaseless search for new diversions is both symptomatic of and productive of a fall into revolutionary disorder. Edgeworth sketches the consequences of Glenthorn's actions in the image of a failed marriage followed by a household insurrection:

> ruined by indulgence, and by my indolent, reckless temper, my servants were now my masters. In a large, ill-regulated establishment, domestics become, like spoiled children, discontented, capricious, and the tyrants over those who have not the sense or steadiness to command. (180)

It is at this point, in the midst of collapse, that Glenthorn finally determines to visit his Irish properties.

Glenthorn's journey to Ireland has usually been interpreted, in general terms, according to the protocols of the national tale, although specific readings provide varying interpretations. For critics such as Tom Dunne, his journey forms a part of a tradition of 'English' commentary on Ireland which dates back to Spenser and the period of Elizabethan colonisation and conquest.[33] Katie Trumpener, by contrast, has described the journey that is an invariable component of the national tale as 'at once traveller's tale and anti-colonial tract; it sets out to describe a long-colonised country "as it really is," attacking the tradition of imperial description from Spenser to [Samuel] Johnson and constructing an alternative picture.'[34] Joep Leerssen's account of the post-union phenomenon of the 'auto-exoticisation' of Ireland also provides a potential context for *Ennui*.[35] What all of these readings have in common is their insistence or assumption that the 'traveller' whose perspective on Ireland the reader is invited to share is 'normative'. This 'normative' quality is either assumed as a function of the protagonist's Englishness, or, in Leerssen's case, a deliberate device – the focaliser is to a large extent void of distinct features, the better to reflect back an image of the otherness encountered in Ireland. Thus most of the commentary on *Ennui* fails to register the insistence with which Edgeworth portrays her 'hero', the Earl of Glenthorn, as dangerously decadent, perhaps because an acknowledgement of the emphasis on

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Glenthorn's faults of character would conflict with the simplistic interpretation of the tale as a treatise on Irish flaws and the appropriate remedies. Thomas Flanagan informs us that Glenthorn decided to visit Ireland 'out of boredom with the life which he has been living' and complains that this 'is a slender reason for sending a man to a bog'.[36] Deane, although he recognises as a theme 'the benefits of educated responsibility', concludes that the tale's concern is to educate Glenthorn 'into the problems of Irish life'.[37] Tom Dunne's synopsis of the plot completely erases Edgeworth's vivid and often witty portrayal of Glenthorn's many faults, suggesting instead that the tale is designed to critique Irish character and customs: 'a languid young Anglo-Irish landlord comes to live on his Irish estate and learns how to cope with the manipulative cunning and bad habits of his Irish tenants in order to reform the estate on English lines'.[38] The description of Glenthorn as 'languid' brings a whole new meaning to understatement.

Not alone is Glenthorn, as the opening chapters of his narrative make perfectly plain, far from being neutral, normative or objective, his decision to travel to Ireland is represented as being of a piece with his psychological disorder – the need to seek new experience as a means of (temporarily) escaping ennui. Although he tells himself that he is visiting out of concern for his tenantry, in reality, as he admits, 'I was tired of England, and wanted to see something new, even if it were to be worse than what I had seen before' (182). Glenthorn's journey to Ireland is the second occasion on which he has attempted to divert himself through travel. Earlier in his life, in order to while away the time before he attained his majority, he embarked on a grand tour of Europe, and 'hurried from place to place as fast as horses and wheels, and curses and guineas' could carry him (162). It goes without saying that this type of travel did nothing to alleviate his sense of purposelessness. The difference between his earlier experience of travel and this latest decision to visit his Irish estates lies in the abject state to which he has been reduced by this point: his marriage has collapsed, and, living in isolation, surrounded by self-interested servants who have become like 'tyrants', he considers suicide as a way out of his misery. The sudden arrival of Ellinor coincides with this point of desperation, and instead of killing himself he decides to take a trip to Ireland.

Appearing out of nowhere on Glenthorn's English estate, Ellinor literally frightens the horses and causes an accident, but in doing so she prevents Glenthorn from carrying out his plan of suicide. By an ironic twist, this aversion of violent death is interpreted as if it were death: Glenthorn's fall renders him unconscious and his supposed corpse is carried to the house. By subsequently feigning death, and thus, like Condy Rackrent, managing to be present at his own 'wake', Glenthorn gains a painful insight into the self-interest which governs the behaviour of those with whom he has surrounded himself.

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This is just the first of many suggestions that Glenthorn needs to be 'reborn' in order to survive. Ellinor's grief at his apparent death provokes the first instance of intense emotion registered in the text:

> The voice came from the door which was opposite me; and whilst the footman turned his back, I raised my head, and beheld the figure of the old woman, who had been the cause of my accident. She was upon her knees on the threshold – her arms crossed over her breast. I shall never forget her face, it was so expressive of despair. (172)

Still a hapless victim to the plague of ennui, Glenthorn finds as he recovers from his injuries, that Ellinor's manner of speech and fund of folk-tales provide a satisfactory distraction from the burden of his existence. Ellinor's portrayal of Ireland as an archaic and exotic country fascinates Glenthorn: she 'impressed me with the idea of the sort of feudal power I should possess in my vast territory, over tenants who were almost vassals, and amongst a numerous train of dependants' (175). There is nothing unique in the idea of the traveller to Ireland having a set of preconceptions – in *The Wild Irish Girl*, Mortimer is equipped with a familiar bundle of prejudices as he leaves England for Ireland – but the fact that Glenthorn's preconceptions revolve around a fantasy of absolute power suggest that his trip to Ireland is an attempt to avoid confronting the ways in which he has proved his own unfitness to exercise power, choosing instead a regression into a feudal fantasy. Given the regressive nature of this vision, it is somewhat ironic that Glenthorn hopes to find in Ireland 'something new'. Glenthorn's recurrent desire to see and experience new things has up to this point resulted in gross overconsumption, dissipation and unhappiness, and, it appears, his motivation in visiting Ireland is of a piece with this unhealthy tendency. The extraordinary plot that unfolds in Ireland will on the one hand finally educate Glenthorn away from the meaningless search for 'something new', and on the other confront him with situations so 'new' that they turn reality upside down. Ireland, therefore, is not 'new' in the sense of being a new flavour to consume; its effect on Glenthorn gives a more revolutionary meaning to the word 'new'.

The various episodes that make up the Irish section of the narrative effectively present quite different and sometimes incompatible views of Ireland. Marilyn Butler and Tim McLoughlin have described the action as a 'thickly detailed, mannered *staging* – which is to be deliberately non-realistic – of recent Irish history against a deliberately typed backdrop of castles, villas and over-familiar tourist traps'.[39] One of the first Irish scenes is that of Glenthorn's coach journey with Paddy, the Irish postilion, a comic episode which tends to suggest that 'Ireland' is a source of endlessly amusing characters and situations.

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In contemporary reviews of the *Tales of Fashionable Life*, this scene was almost invariably excerpted as an outstanding example of Edgeworth's art – an indication that Edgeworth had calculated correctly what tickled the jaded metropolitan palate. But the Ireland of *Ennui* is both strange and familiar, exotic and humdrum. Glenthorn is greeted by his tenants with an overwhelming show of respect, deference and even affection, a display that inspires him to throw himself into a new role, that of magnanimous power. The enthusiasm of the tenants for their newly arrived lord is, however, patently no more than a piece of optimistic opportunism. When Glenthorn expresses fatigue and annoyance at the ceaseless and petty requests with which he is bombarded, his tenants reply, 'Sure the agent will do as well, and no more about it. Mr M'Leod will do every thing the same way as usual' (194). Glenthorn, however, is unwilling to give up his feudal fantasy of possessing power 'seemingly next to despotic' (193–4). Reluctant to cede control to his agent, M'Leod, a conscientious Scot to whom he has taken an instant dislike, he likens himself wryly to the King of Prussia, 'who was said to be so jealous of power, that he wanted to regulate all the mousetraps in his dominions' (195). A footnote within the text draws our attention to the source of this remark – Mirabeau's *Memoirs of the King of Prussia*, which was published in France in the year of the revolution and translated into English in 1798 – thus associating Glenthorn's memoir with a French revolutionary critique of monarchical power.

Instead of a delightfully backward feudal estate, remote from 'civilised society' (191), Glenthorn is confronted with the rather less glamorous figure of M'Leod, who handles the estate competently. M'Leod's determination to impress upon Glenthorn the principles of Adam Smith has generated a sometimes violent critical reaction. It has even been claimed that 'the novel is not fiction at all, but an exposition of Lovell Edgeworth's theories of politics, economics, social arrangements, education and morality, and an accompanying exposition of their peculiar appropriateness to Ireland. The vehicle of this instruction is [. . .] M'Leod'.[40] A more politicised response reads these passages as an overt statement of Edgeworth's overweening desire to anglicise Ireland, and therefore as an implicit denunciation of the Irish character. The fact that M'Leod's philosophies are dramatised in encounters with the agent from the neighbouring estate, Hardcastle, is very rarely acknowledged.[41] M'Leod's reliance on the principle of progress, the universal benefits of education and the value of theory is contrasted with Hardcastle's self-satisfied trumpeting of experience and common sense:

> he had nothing to do with books; he consulted only his own eyes and ears, and appealed only to common sense. As to theory, he had no opinion of theory; for his part, he only pretended to understand practice and experience – and his

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> practice was confined steadily to his own practice, and his experience uniformly to what he had tried at New-town-Hardcastle. (201)

It is Hardcastle, not M'Leod, who dismisses the Irish as incapable of progress. When M'Leod suggests that education is the most effective means of changing a society, Hardcastle objects that 'all this can never apply to the poor in Ireland', that they are 'not like men in Scotland', and that they 'cannot be taught' (203). Of the two scenarios proposed by the agents, one advocating gradual improvement by rational means, and one dismissing the bare possibility of change on the grounds of intractable Irish character, the former is clearly the most progressive, while the latter deals in blind prejudice. M'Leod's patient faith in education and progress fails, however, to persuade Glenthorn, and it should be remarked that this representative of the Scottish Enlightenment disappears from view in the narrative as Glenthorn pursues his own ambitious plans, which are themselves eclipsed first by rebellion and then by Glenthorn's sudden loss of title, property and identity.

Glenthorn's desire for the immediate transformation of his estate into something recognisably English, and therefore manifestly civilised, is symbolised by the cottage he is determined to build for Ellinor. The subsequent disaster is not, as has been sometimes claimed, laid solely at the door of Irish incapacity, as Glenthorn himself admits: 'it would have been difficult for a cool spectator to decide, whether I or my workmen were most in fault; they for their dilatory habits, or I for my impatient temper' (198). Glenthorn's impatient ambitions are, what's more, as much an expression of his own desire to be fashionable as they are focused on improving Ellinor's living conditions: 'I fitted it up in the most elegant style of English cottages; for I was determined that Ellinor's habitation should be such as had never been seen in this part of the world' (199). Glenthorn's treatment of the cottage as a fashion accessory in fact has echoes of Marie Antoinette's infamous dairy at Versailles. When the cottage gradually falls into disrepair and Ellinor refuses to adapt her lifestyle to the grandeur of her new accommodation, Glenthorn's anger and disappointment are such that he promptly abandons all his 'princely schemes' (208). The episode of Ellinor's cottage is crucial to Dunne's argument that Edgeworth's writing is indicative of her project of 'reshaping [. . .] every aspect of Irish life and society on English lines'.[42] Acknowledging Glenthorn's responsibility in the failure of the project, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace provides a more sophisticated argument, suggesting that Glenthorn's subsequent ability to critique his own mistakes 'redeems' him and thus legitimates his perspective: 'although he is initially as foolish as Ellinor, and therefore equally a satiric target, his position is validated in the end'.[43] Kowaleski-Wallace argues that in spite of Glenthorn's faults, the tale is concerned to imagine ways in which he

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can attain moral and intellectual superiority over his tenants and thus 'master' them.[44] 'In the end' is of course the key phrase: Glenthorn's position is not 'validated' until he has, for instance, discovered that Ellinor is more than a loyal and grateful retainer – she is in fact his mother. In order to become an effective leader, Glenthorn has to be dispossessed of his inherited wealth and status, and acquire the position of leader through effort and work. The tale thus represents political revolution in the form of a folktale or fable.

Ennui's evident interest in exploring the meanings of revolution in an Irish context has been somewhat obscured by its representation of the United Irishmen's rebellion. The most significant emphasis in this representation is on 'party spirit' as a key characteristic of public life at the time. Clearly drawing on her father's experiences of having been attacked for his suspected sympathies with the rebels, Edgeworth portrays Glenthorn as engaging unwillingly in efforts to quell the rising, primarily in order to avoid being branded a traitor: 'it was necessary to take an active part in public affairs to vindicate my loyalty, and to do away the prejudices that were entertained against me' (246). He ultimately derives a kind of stimulation from the enforced activity, but it is clear that he experiences the rebellion as simply another form of entertainment:

> the alarms of the rebels, and of the French, and of the loyalists; and the parading, and the galloping, and the quarrelling, and the continual agitation in which I was kept, whilst my character and life were at stake, relieved me effectually from the intolerable burden of ennui. (247–8)

Although the rebellion rouses Glenthorn temporarily from his 'state of apathy' (244), therefore, it is depicted by Edgeworth as having only transient consequences:

> *Unfortunately for me*, the rebellion in Ireland was soon quelled; the nightly scouring of our county ceased; the poor people returned to their duty and their homes; the occupation of upstart and ignorant *associators* ceased, and their consequence sunk at once. Things and persons settled to their natural level. The influence of men of property, and birth, and education, and character, once more prevailed. [. . .] My popularity, my power, and my prosperity were now at their zenith, *unfortunately for me*; because my adversity had not lasted long enough to form and season my character. (248)

The rebellion may be represented as being of no lasting consequence, but in this story, there is at least one 'poor person' who does not return to his duty and his home once the rebellion is over.

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When Glenthorn discovers that he is not a nobleman, but by birth an Irish peasant, changed at nurse by his mother, Ellinor, he insists on changing places with the real Earl, who has been living in ignorance of his true identity, as Christy O'Donoghoe, the village blacksmith. I suggested at the beginning of this chapter that this element in the novel's plot acts as an example of Edgeworth's absorption of popular beliefs about status in Ireland, and the incorporation into her work of popular cultural elements. The combination of these popular beliefs and motifs with allusions to the radical theories of the French revolutionaries and the United Irishmen produces a truly dizzying, destabilising vision as Edgeworth subverts the already subversive popular reading of status in Ireland.

The sudden ennobling of Christy, the former blacksmith, quite clearly reflects the belief among the lower classes in Ireland that they had been wrongfully dispossessed by the current holders of land and power, and that justice would involve the reversal of their respective positions. The idea that the village blacksmith is *really* an earl of noble blood represents this belief with poetic simplicity. But this incident is equally available for another, and very different reading, one which rejects the idea of status as an immutable quality, transmitted through blood. The earl, as he reflects on what action he should take following Ellinor's revelation, makes perfectly clear that his renunciation of wealth and title is voluntary: 'I was not compelled to make such sacrifices' (272). He is confident that Ellinor will keep his secret, and that even if it comes to a lawsuit, 'possession was nine-tenths of the law' (272). In spite of this, he goes ahead with the drastic determination to give up his title and wealth:

> After a severe conflict between my love of ease and my sense of right – between my tastes and my principles – I determined to act honestly and honourably, and to relinquish what I could no longer maintain without committing injustice, and feeling remorse. (272–3)

Having made this difficult decision, Glenthorn is exhilarated:

> My mind seemed suddenly relieved from an oppressive weight; my whole frame glowed with new life; and the consciousness of courageous integrity elevated me so much in my own opinion, that titles, and rank, and fortune, appeared as nothing in my estimation. (273)

This ecstatic description of the renunciation of title and rank and fortune, its association with being relieved of an oppressive weight and with courageous integrity, suggests the iconic figure of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the son of the Duke of Leinster, whose commitment to French revolutionary principles

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famously or notoriously lead him to renounce his title, and, subsequently, to join the United Irishmen. The reader may well detect some ironic detachment in the fact that 'titles, and rank, and fortune, appeared as nothing' in Glenthorn's estimation, given that he has never known life without these trifling advantages. But the fact remains that it is only with Glenthorn's loss of title, wealth and position that he becomes something other than the decadent aristocrat whose arrival in Ireland was precipitated by a form of revolution in his own household.

Glenthorn's initial journey to Ireland thus was, as I have suggested above, a form of revolutionary emigration, but the social hierarchy, despite all indications to the contrary, remained stagnantly stable until Glenthorn's core identity was itself subjected to revolutionary transformation. The former Earl then describes himself as being in the position of an 'abdicated monarch' whose subjects, the Glenthorn tenants, persist in bringing him homely gifts of rural produce (296). But 'O'Donoghoe', as he now calls himself, does not cling to his former identity: he begins to create a new identity for himself as a professional relying on application and merit, replicating the progressive paradigms of revolution we have already seen in *Madame de Fleury* and *Emilie de Coulanges*. The obstacles to the realisation of this vision in an Irish context are suggested by the peculiarities of the narrative, including its incorporation of the folkloric, which, at the time of its publication struck many readers as wildly incongruous, and also by the tendency of the plot to keep building to what seems like a climax or denouement, only to be trumped by yet another twist. The former earl's renunciation of his title is the third revolutionary moment in the narrative to that point, following his departure from England and the outbreak of rebellion in Ireland (which, incidentally, involves him as the subject of a failed rebel plot). With the loss of his inherited status, it seems as if revolution can now, finally, be written according to the optimistic vision that characterised Edgeworth's tales of the French Revolution. The force which disrupts this vision is clearly the power of the past, of memory, hence the radical severing of the subject from his past through the device of the child changed at nurse. What makes the tale particularly noteworthy is that it envisions the past being transcended by making use of plot elements and themes derived from Irish popular traditions, thus combining its radical agenda with an indigenous idiom.

Other commentators on this text have suggested that it is conservative, rather than radical, on the grounds that Edgeworth does not repeat the successful formula found in *The Wild Irish Girl*, published only three years before and evidently an influence on Edgeworth's text. The marriage between Glorvina and Mortimer which concludes *The Wild Irish Girl* is so compelling as a symbolic resolution that Robert Tracy dubbed it the 'Glorvina solution'.[45] The Glorvina solution, or the 'national marriage', symbolises the healing of

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Ireland's bitter divisions through the marriage of a Gaelic woman and an Anglo-Irish man. These divisions are overcome in part through an imagined reconciliation between past and present: the social hierarchy of the present is legitimated through its claimed affiliation with the past (this, in general terms is exactly how the nationalist state claims its legitimacy). In *Ennui*, Edgeworth raises the possibility of this form of legitimation by introducing the character of the fascinating Lady Geraldine, with whom Glenthorn falls in love – only to dismiss it as peremptorily as Geraldine herself dismisses Glenthorn's proposal. Robert Tracy's initial suggestion that Geraldine is a half-baked Glorvina involves a wider distinction between Edgeworth and Morgan, expressed in terms of Edgeworth's concern with 'legality' and Morgan's desire to establish the 'legitimacy' of the ruling class in Ireland. The distinction is valid in so far as it concerns very different attitudes to the role of the past in resolving real problems of popular alienation from the state in Ireland; what I question, however, is the conclusion that the disappearance of Lady Geraldine indicates a 'colonial' mentality on Edgeworth's part, and that the desire to break with the past is inevitably, as Leerssen and others have suggested, implicated in a conservative politics.[46]

If, as I proposed, Glenthorn's renunciation of his title recalls the dramatic decision of Lord Edward Fitzgerald to embrace democratic principles, Lady Geraldine, through her highly resonant name, makes another and more general reference to the Fitzgerald family, and by extension to the long history of conflict in Ireland. It is ironic that Edward Fitzgerald's revolutionary beliefs, which led him to renounce the position he had inherited as a member of one of Ireland's wealthiest and most influential families, has been interpreted as characteristic of that very family. Tracy for instance remarks that 'from the revolt of "Silken Thomas" Fitzgerald in 1534 to that of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1798, that family had often supplied leaders for Irish rebellions against the English'.[47] Tracy's comments are in a tradition established very soon after Fitzgerald's death, as we can see in the comments of Thomas Moore in his biography of Fitzgerald:

> There is, perhaps, no name in the ranks of the Irish peerage, that has been so frequently and prominently connected with the political destinies of Ireland as that of the illustrious race to which the subject of the following Memoir belonged; nor would it be too much to say that, in the annals of the Geraldines alone, – in the immediate consequences of the first landing of Maurice Fitzgerald in 1170, – the fierce struggles, through so many centuries, of the Desmonds and Kildares, by turns instruments and rebels to the cause of English ascendancy, – and, lastly, in the awful events connected with the death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1798, – a complete history of the fatal policy of

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> England towards Ireland, through a lapse of more than six centuries, may be found epitomized and illustrated.[48]

Fitzgerald's renunciation of his inherited position and his embrace of radical politics results in his posthumous placement firmly within the history of his family, his radicalism interpreted as some kind of tragic inheritance. Moore's claim that the 'complete history' of Ireland (in particular the 'traumatised history' of Irish grievances – the 'fatal policy of England towards Ireland') is contained within the history of a family suggests that if the future is to be different from the past, change must also occur at the level of family history. Glenthorn's loss of aristocratic status coupled with Lady Geraldine's rejection of his marriage proposal can be read as a refusal of the continuous narrative of tragedy. One further jolt to our hero's identity is apparently required to ensure an escape from this violent history, and it involves a renunciation not only of class privilege but of masculine power and authority.

The former earl's reinstatement as the lord of Glenthorn Castle is preceded not only by his marriage to Cecilia Delamere, the heir-at-law to the property, but by his abandonment of the name of O'Donoghoe in favour of his wife's name. He changes his name in order to appease the 'genteel' and arguably sectarian objections of his future mother in law, who balks at his ethnically marked name: 'What a horrid thing it will be to hear my girl called Mrs O'Donoghoe! Only conceive the sound of – Mrs O'Donoghoe's carriage there! – Mrs O'Donoghoe's carriage stops the way!' (306). The association between change of name and accession to property echoes the decision of Sir Patrick O'Shaughlin, who inherited the Rackrent estate on the condition that he 'take and bear the surname and arms of Rackrent',[49] and in both cases there is an allusion to the limitations enshrined in the Penal Laws on the rights of Catholics to own, inherit and bequeath property. The Penal Laws had the curious effect of making highly visible the connections between the public and the private spheres as they intervened in 'family matters' in the interests of state policy. For Edmund Burke, the best-known critic of these laws, the threat implied by this convergence of the political and the domestic, and the consequent unsettling of traditional relations of power between men and women, proved as disturbing as the injustices they visited on Catholics as a group.

As with almost every society in the known world, the holding and transmission of property in Ireland was at this period a system based on gender, and was originally introduced by the early English settlers, who regarded the absence of primogeniture in Ireland as a factor in its supposed developmental lag. The Penal Laws, however, created an entirely novel situation by making religion the most important qualification for property ownership, thus dealing an unintended blow to patriarchy. Burke dwells on this fact at great length,

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imagining all the ways in which the laws could possibly interfere with the traditional family structure, to the extent that the maintenance of 'proper' relationships of power between men, women and children emerges as the most important factor in maintaining social order. He first expresses horror at the way in which the laws, by allowing a child who conformed to the established church to assume legal rights over property, can undermine the authority of a father: 'the paternal power in all such families is so very much enervated, that it may well be considered as entirely taken away'.[50] A wife can also, according to these laws, similarly subvert her husband's power:

> If in any Marriage settlement the husband has reserved to him a power of making a Jointure, and if he dies without settling it, her conformity to the established religion executes his powers and executes them in as large an extent, as the Chancellor shall think convenient. [. . .] If, therefore, a Wife chuses to ballance [*sic*] any domestick misdemeanours to her husband, by the public merit of conformity to the protestant religion, the Law will suffer no proof of such misdemeanours to be brought to invalidate its presumption. She acquires a provision totally independent of the favour of her husband; and thus deprives him of that source of domestick Authority, which the common Law has left in families, that of rewarding, or punishing by a voluntary distribution of his Effects, what, in the opinion of the Husband, was the good or ill behaviour of his Wife.[51]

Part of the subversive effect of the laws, in Burke's view, is to give women a public identity which takes precedence over their domestic or private role: conformity to the protestant religion gives a woman 'public merit' against which her husband's desire to confirm her identity as merely or purely private is powerless. The measures taken to impose Anglicanism as the established religion in Ireland are thus interpreted by Burke as having destroyed what he regards as the natural relations between the sexes and their relation in turn to social order. The assumption in all these cases is that either women or children assume unnatural and illegitimate power by converting to Protestantism. The conversion of fathers and husbands and the consequences for their wives and children are thus implicitly regarded as unproblematic, because in these cases 'paternal power' and 'domestick Authority' are not compromised. It is thus very hard to avoid the conclusion that Burke's *primary* concern is with the maintenance of traditional, patriarchal systems of power.[52]

Beginning with Ellinor's substitution of one child for another, and ending with the creation of Mr Delamere, the plot of *Ennui* could be described as Burke's worst nightmare – a scenario in which 'paternal power' is utterly non-existent. Thomas Bartlett has written that in the period 1695–1730, given the wide range of restrictions and disabilities in place, 'to have ambition at all one

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had to conform to the Established Church'.[53] The fact that the Penal Laws were the source of injustice, hardship and oppression for Irish Catholics is not in question. The scarcity of gendered analyses of Irish culture in this period has made it possible to read the successive transformations visited on the Earl of Glenthorn simply as Edgeworth's plea for or endorsement of continued Protestant dominance in Ireland. Can it not be argued, however, that one function of the novel's extraordinary plot is to offer a challenge to a narrative of Irish history based on a roll call of fathers and sons?

In conclusion, *Ennui* represents Ireland as a country which is in need of the social restructuring that can be achieved through revolution, of the kind depicted in *Madame de Fleury* and *Emilie de Coulanges*. Ireland, however, is characterised by a habit of historical memory which threatens to overwhelm any move towards radical change. The events of 1798 and their aftermath suggested that even the most radical, forward-looking social theory could be appropriated for a narrative of endlessly recurring crisis and tragedy, as the treatment of the 'life and death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald' (to quote Thomas Moore) illustrates. The convoluted and controversial plot of *Ennui* is on the one hand an acknowledgment of the power of memory in Ireland, and on the other a means to overcome it. This Edgeworth does in the most radical way possible, by creating a narrator whose identity changes in the middle of his own narration. The message of *Ennui* seems to be that revolution in Ireland cannot be achieved without fundamental changes at the level of subjective consciousness, and these changes include new configurations of gender.