 # Claire Connolly, Useful Fictions: Morality and Empire in the Writings of Maria Edgeworth

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, contemporaries were more likely to praise the complex moral range of Maria Edgeworth's writing than admire its historical depth. Reviewing the first series of *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809), the Scottish critic Francis Jeffrey heaped compliments upon her dedication to 'the art of living' and 'the science of being happy', qualities that made her 'the great modern mistress in this school of true philosophy'. That 'school' was one that taught utility above all: taking a 'reluctant leave of Miss Edgeworth' at the end of the essay, Jeffrey remarked that 'her writings are, beyond all others, the most useful of any that have come before us since the commencement of our critical career'.[1]

For Edgeworth, Jeffrey's comments came towards the end of a decade or so of stylistic innovation that saw her publish *Castle Rackrent: an Hibernian Tale* (1800), *Belinda* (1801), *Early Lessons* (1801), *Moral Tales* (1802), *Popular Tales* (1804), *The Modern Griselda: A Tale* (1805), *Leonora* (1806) and the first series of *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809), including the Irish tale *Ennui.* With her father, she co-authored *Practical Education* (1798), *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1801) and *Essays on Professional Education* (1809). Each of these books launched its own particular experiment in literary form, meant to engage a range of audiences. All can be thought of as aiming at 'use', just as Jeffrey said. Part of that effort at utility was Edgeworth's adoption of the term 'tale' rather than 'novel' across these fictions. Even *Belinda,* a book with all the appearances of a three volume novel, was offered to the public as a 'moral tale', 'the author not wishing to acknowledge a novel'. Amelia Opie made a similar gesture in *The Father and Daughter* (1801) in an 'Address to the Reader' that announced 'a SIMPLE, MORAL TALE'.[2]

While that term 'moral' can be, as Marilyn Butler notes, 'an obstacle for modern readers', the subtitle 'tale' has often passed beneath critical notice, understood only as an early and inferior example of a short story mode yet to be born.[3] But when Edgeworth and Opie adopted the term in the first year of the new century, they made their own moment. A sense of shifting meanings emerges in a letter sent from Maria Edgeworth in London to her aunt in Ireland, recording an argument between Richard Lovell Edgeworth and William Godwin about the term. Both men dined with the publisher Joseph Johnson in

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[1] Francis Jeffrey, Review of *Tales of Fashionable Life*, *Edinburgh Review* 14, no. 28 (July 1809), 375–88, 379-388, 388.

[2] Amelia Opie, *The Father and Daughter* with *Dangers of Coquetry*, ed. Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 63.

[3] Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', in *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1992), 7. See, however, Tim Killick, *British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Tale* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008).

May 1805, in the company of Thomas Malthus. Richard Lovell Edgeworth was there to discuss the second edition of *Popular Tales* and to ensure that the short moral epigraphs written by Thomas Holcroft — they had appeared at the head of each chapter in the first edition — were to be removed for future editions. The Edgeworths did not like the 'mottoes' that Johnson had included, most likely unhappy with the association with a known radical and perhaps also finding the insertions too obvious in their simple morals.

At the dinner, the men discussed the assignation of the title 'moral tales' to fiction. Godwin said that for him 'the word moral tale is always associated in his mind with an indecent story', making his point via what Maria Edgeworth reports as 'a good deal of sophistical argument'. It is hard to disagree with her conclusion that Godwin spoke a 'nonsensical paradox'.[4] But it is also an inviting proposition to consider Popular Tales as playing its part in a wider cultural conversation about morality, shaped by the different views represented by Godwin and Malthus around 1805 — even if Edgeworth herself was not at the dinner table. Godwin's moral philosophy, resting on a belief in the human capacity for perfectibility, grasped the imagination of many writers in the 1790s. By 1800, a swell of loyal reaction to the French Revolution coupled with the shocked reaction to his Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798) meant Godwin was out in the cold (though Richard Lovell Edgeworth found him 'less impetuous and more agreeable than expected'). Malthus first published his Essay on the Principle of Human Population in 1798, but it was the influential expanded 1803 quarto edition that offered 'the most fundamental statement of his work on population'.[5] In 1803, Malthus explicitly called for 'moral restraint' including a recommendation for later marriages as a necessary check on population growth. By 1806, Maria Edgeworth knew Malthus's argument well enough to joke about it with her cousin Sophy Ruxton: on hearing the news of thirty-three year old Kitty Pakenham's long postponed marriage to the Duke of Wellington, she admired the former's 'merit & virtue & constancy' but hopes that she 'may be married before she is six and thirty —! Have you read Malthus? —'.[6]

Edgeworth had to wait until 1813 to meet Malthus herself. She sent her brother Henry to be educated at the East India college in Hereford, where the great man held the chair of Political Economy and she met Malthus again during a long visit to England in 1830. Her admiration for Malthus, she told her step mother, was in spite of his 'uncouth mouth', 'snuffly' speech and 'horrid voice' (he was born with a hare lip and a cleft palate).[7] By then, Malthus's theories had become inextricably bound up with

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[4] Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Maria Edgeworth, nd. National Library of Ireland (NLI) MS 10166/7/463.
[5] Shannon C Stimson, 'Introduction', *An Essay on the Principle of Population: The 1803 Edition* (Yale: Yale University Press), xvii.
[6] Maria Edgeworth to Sophy Ruxton, 13 April 1806, NLI MS 10166/7/511.
[7] Maria Edgeworth to Frances Edgeworth, 2 November 1830 in Christina Colvin ed., *Maria Edgeworth: Letters From England: 1813-1844* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 423.

literary plots involving individual lives shaped by necessary responses to harsh economic or social conditions, a process that can be traced in the tales that Edgeworth published from 1800 to 1812. The influence of Godwin is present also, especially as she brings into view a recent revolutionary past that continues to exert power in the era of reaction and reform. But across the first decade of the nineteenth century, Edgeworth made her own original experiments in a form of moral philosophy practised as fiction, writing numerous books that plotted problems of imperilled resources and proper sexual conduct in the context of place, time, gender and social class.

The key role played by the Irish fictions in the invention of the historical novel means that they have received more attention than the tales that preceded them. Not that there is a straight line that leads from useful fictions that illustrated social scenes to historical dramas that animated the inner workings of a culture. For one thing, the materials of the moral tales were arranged across a vast geographical canvas while the Irish fictions stayed close to home. Both kinds of writing are largely set in their contemporary moment, animated by a sense of changing times and often taking in events of the generation just gone. Despite these linkages, criticism has tended to pass over the survival of the 'tale' mode into texts that we now call novels. Neither have we fully considered the role of the tale within Edgeworth's distinctive version of literary realism, an aesthetic that exerted a significant role in wider debates about fiction in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Butler shows how the 'respectful attention' that Edgeworth received in the reviews from 1804 to around 1812 helped not only to establish an individual reputation but also to foster a new critical discourse about fiction.[8] Edgeworth's 'early reviewers began to draw certain conclusions about realism', Butler says, and the reviews of her work in the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* remain 'landmarks in the history of the novel'. Among those 'conclusions' was the special role of Edgeworth as observer of Irish life: Jeffrey heaped praise on *Ennui's* (1809) Irish characters as 'the most original' in the novel while Henry Crabb Robinson hailed *The Absentee* (1812) as 'a *moral* tale, calculated to do real good and have an operative and real effect on Irishmen'.[9]

The moral dimensions of Edgeworth's Irish novels remain a problem for many postcolonial critics, notably Seamus Deane who cannot forgive her 'sponsorship of utilitarianism' and 'middle-class seriousness'.[10] The wholesale reassessment of Edgeworth offered by Katie Trumpener and Ina Ferris did far more to enhance our understanding of the Irish novels but largely left the moral question to one side, whether understood in terms of the capacity of fiction to supply practical lessons or study human

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[8] Butler, *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui*, 339.
[9] Francis Jeffrey, Review of *Popular Tales*, *Edinburgh Review* 4, no. 8 (1809): 337; *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1938), 124.
[10] Seamus Deane, *Small World: Ireland, 1798–2018* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 137.

character.. Trumpener's account of the differences between national tales, with their accretion of culturally specific detail, and historical novels that stressed instead 'the fragility and malleability of cultures in the face of historical crisis' has been especially influential.[11] But such specificity comes at the cost of neglecting a much wider representational range, including Edgeworth's choice of 'popular' and 'moral' for a series of short tales published in 1801 and 1803. The interconnections between fictions at once national, historical and imperial might be better explored in the spirit proposed by Srinivas Aravamudan, who writes of 'the filiations and affiliations that crisscross the study of colonialist representations with multiple threads'.[12] Aravamudan's argument for a 'pluralization and fragmentation' of the European eighteenth century 'into manageable textual archipelagoes' opens up an understanding of the separate but interlocking works of Edgeworth's fiction, where a mixture of genres and geographies seek to represent non-European histories and racialised subjects even as the fictions come to converge upon Ireland.

Writing about *Popular Tales*, Clíona Ó Gallchoir has shown the political impact of plots of improvement that challenge realist modes. She identifies 'a tension between the stasis of domestic realism, which purports to describe things as they are, and a desire to propose models of change'.[13] In Ó Gallchoir's reading, that 'tension' passes through narratives of 'new social configurations' that involve both 'personal histories' and 'world histories'. In the case of 'Lame Jervas', in which a tin miner travels from Cornwall to Madras, it is impossible to contemplate this tale of 'the rewards of industry' without also grasping the global reach of the East India company, including its experiment in education. And in *Ennui,* social change can be imagined against the backdrop of revolutionary violence in France and Ireland only because of Edgeworth's willingness to allow Irish folklore to supply what Ó Gallchoir calls a 'native metaphor' of change.[14] *Ennui* also calls up an imperial framework that sees its frivolous hero order three dozen India shawls while later, reform and improvement underway, he helps a rival obtain a government appointment in India.

In order to further explore issues of use, empire and Ireland in Edgeworth's moral imagination, I focus on *Popular Tales* (1804) and analyse the rarely discussed final tale in that collection, 'To-Morrow', a narrative that illustrates the dangers of procrastination. In doing so, I show how the first decade or so of the nineteenth century forms a unit in an as yet uncharted genealogy of the historical novel, a line of

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[11] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 150.
[12] Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Duke: Duke University Press, 1999), 9.
[13] Clíona Ó Gallchoir, 'Maria Edgeworth's Revolutionary Morality and the Limits of Realism', *Colby Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2000): 89.
[14] Ó Gallchoir, 'Maria Edgeworth's Revolutionary Morality and the Limits of Realism', 97.

development characterised by blocks and resistances that shape themselves around empire. If eighteenth-century tales 'oppose the domestic yoke of the novel', as Srinivas Aravamudan shows,[15] then the *Popular Tales* follow in that Enlightenment tradition characterised by its global range. But they also can be seen to disrupt a march towards the historical novel in the making. Readers of Edgeworth habitually challenge a literary history that sees the historical novel emerging with Walter Scott's *Waverley* in 1814, pointing to the Irish writer's earlier historicist experiments in national culture. But neither should we smooth over the distinctive texture of her writing across a decade characterised by travel, shifting horizons and experiments in writing. As Edgeworth was finishing and then publishing *Popular Tales* in 1802-3, she spent an extended period of time in Paris and Edinburgh. Her interests in what Yoon Sun Lee calls 'the procedural achievements of factuality'[16] was sharpened by time spent in Longford, London and Edinburgh, all places where she encountered history on the move.

Popular morality

Heralded by Jeffrey as having 'rendered an invaluable service to the middling and lower orders of the people', *Popular Tales* was praised for its utility in a range of registers.[17] Edward Wakefield's *Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (1812) advised the government of the day to 'purchase the copy-right' of *Popular Tales* (alongside Elizabeth Hamilton's *Cottagers of Glenburnie* and Mary Leadbeater's *Cottage Dialogues*, with notes by Edgeworth) in order to 'sell them at a cheap rate' and 'save the sheriff the cost of many a halter'.[18] His belief in the public efficacy of Edgeworth's fiction finds a private echo in Mary Russell Mitford's praise for the good done by 'the homely pathos and plain morality' of *Popular Tales,* though Mitford despaired of reforming her own person in the model of Edgeworth's characters: ''To-morrow' made so deep an impression on my mind, that, if it were possible for any earthly power to reform a procrastinator, I really think that tale would have cured me of my evil habits.'[19] Edgeworth herself made a similar remark in her correspondence when she upbraided herself for 'too long delay' in writing a letter to her cousin and determined 'I will not put it off till tomorrow'.[20]

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[15] Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), 4.
[16] Yoon Sun Lee, 'Bad Plots and Objectivity in Maria Edgeworth', *Representations* 139, no. 1 (2017): 36.
[17] Jeffrey, Review of *Tales of Fashionable Life*, *Edinburgh Review* (1809): 380.
[18] Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*, vol. 2 (London: Longman & Co, 1812), 416.
[19] A. G. L'Estrange, ed., *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford: Related in a Selection from her Letters to her Friends*, vol. 1 (London: Bentley, 1870), 108–09.
[20] Maria Edgeworth to Sophy Ruxton, Aug 1803, NLI MSS MS 10166/7/375.

Though neither Mitford nor Edgeworth seem to think that fictional lessons worked for them, both believed in the uses of fiction for the popular good. In Butler's gloss, Jeffrey too thought that 'a literal, naturalistic treatment of the economic and social world' such as that provided by the *Popular Tales* 'induced the reader to accept the existing order of things'.[21] But Edgeworth arrives at that 'existing order' via a remarkable and interconnected set of explorations of literature, time and place. The stories mix real and imagined times and places realised on a sliding scale of cultural specificity. Of these, 'Lame Jervas' and 'The Grateful Negro', depicting an insurrection led by enslaved people on a Jamaican estate, have received the most notice. But the collection as a whole deserves attention. In the first volume, four tales comprise a range of locations including Cornwall and Madras for 'Lame Jervas', Lincolnshire in 'The Will', Hereford ('The Limerick Gloves') and London ('Out of Debt and Out of Danger'). In volume two, the characters in 'The Lottery' move from the countryside to Paddington in the west of London, while 'Rosanna' is a short Irish tale set within the Pale. With 'Murad the Unlucky', Edgeworth offers an oriental tale that draws on the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* but contains references to recent historical events in Egypt. 'The Manufacturers' moves the action to a loosely realised Northamptonshire. For the third and final volume of the *Tales* Edgeworth offers three tales: 'The Contrast' set in Monmouth, 'The Grateful Negro' which imagines neighbouring slave plantations in Jamaica and 'To-Morrow' whose extensive plot takes in London, China and Philadelphia, discussed in more detail below.

Presumably in anticipation of a popular taste for incident, the stories all depict extraordinary events, often piled one on top of another in series or sequence. Plots of transformation abound and tend to run on curious lines. Even where the tales seem to follow patterns from folklore or tradition, the results are surprising. 'The Will' sees three men —named Wright, Goodenough and Marvel — tested by the terms of a will that challenges them each to best the others as farmers in order to win ten thousand pounds. It ends with Goodenough 'precisely where he was when he began; neither richer nor poorer' while Wright and Marvel demonstrate a combination of wisdom and speculation that sees them together acquire the inheritance. Marvel's lack of 'steadiness and prudence' and his tendency towards projects and speculation lays a strange path to his success, however, as when he chooses to follow the agricultural advice of a migrant Irish haymaker (effectively, to chit or split seed potatoes before planting in a manner more fully described in Edgeworth's *Early Lessons*, 1801) and accordingly 'cleared *above two hundred* pounds by twenty acres of potatoes, set according to his friend the Irishman's instructions' (95).[22]

Across the tales, education only wins out via adjustments, disruptions and displacements. In 'The Limerick Gloves', an Irish glover named Brian O'Neill overcomes the distrust of an English merchant

[21] Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 157.
[22] Maria Edgeworth, *Popular Tales* (New York: AMS Press, 1967). Subsequent references in parentheses.

community who suspect him of trying to blow up Hereford Cathedral and is able to court Phoebe, the daughter of a tanner with pronounced anti-Irish prejudices. He proves his worth via the kindly intervention of another trustworthy Irish migrant haymaker who helps solve the mystery via the objects that he finds in the pocket of a large coat ('a frieze trusty') purchased from the pawnbroker. The improbable path leads to the wrongdoings of 'Bampfylde the second, king of the gipsies' who is making mischief by telling fortunes and whose story Edgeworth probably knew from a popular eighteenth-century life. Meanwhile, the suspected plot to destroy Hereford's cathedral by tunnelling underneath the wall turns out to be the work of a rat fed by local children. Though an explosion is averted in 'The Limerick Gloves', scenes of destruction by fire recur across the tales, featuring in 'Murad the Unlucky', 'The Grateful Negro' and 'To-Morrow'.

Even where prudence and understanding are given an apparently predictable treatment in 'Murad the Unlucky', Edgeworth uses a cultural vehicle against whose tendencies to fantasy she had previous warned readers — an oriental tale drawn from *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*— to deliver her message.[23] She also updates the orientalist framework to include references to Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign of 1797-1801 and has her 'lucky' (or rather prudent) character Saladin learn his most important lesson about the dangers of belief in fortune from a French military engineer. Edgeworth's North Africa is ready to benefit from European ideas, but these are not merely an abstract invocation of 'the negative values she wishes her readers to reject and purge from themselves'.[24] Rather, Edgeworth's imperial morality is shaped by an explicit invocation of military might combined with civil expertise: she bases the figure of the French engineer on Baron Tott, a civilian member of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition. It is also a world rife with plague, contagion and starvation and the tale ends with a vivid description of the effects of opium addiction on its unfortunate sufferers, among whom is Murad the Unlucky.

Counting on Morality

Jeffrey's 1804 review of *Popular Tales* puts Edgeworth in the company of Thomas Paine and William Wordsworth and finds that she improves on both. In Jeffrey's view, Edgeworth's useful fictions differ from Paine's efforts 'to bring disaffection and infidelity within the comprehension of the common people', as they also did from Wordsworth's more avowedly aesthetic ambitions 'to accommodate'

[23] Ros Ballaster, 'Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *A Companion to the Eighteenth- Century English Novel and Culture,* eds. Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 79.
[24] Alan Richardson, 'Introduction', in *Three Oriental Tales*, ed. Richardson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 6.

popular forces 'within an appropriate vein of poetry'.[25] Edgeworth might share with Paine and Wordsworth an address to a popular audience, Jeffrey said, but in doing so she sought to inculcate 'a relish for images of those things which must make up the happiness of their actual existence'.

It is hard to reconcile that account of the 'actual existence' of ordinary people with the sheer range of incidents and locations featured in the *Popular Tales*. And yet Jeffrey insisted once more on 'actual' happiness in 1806 when he noted the 'familiar and secular tone' of Edgeworth's novel of that year, *Leonora*. He addressed the usefulness of her morals for a non-elite audience and, feeling that concrete advances might be made, suggested that she do yet more: 'We do not know of any books that are more likely to be useful than most of those she has published; and while we willingly do all we can to promote their notoriety, we earnestly exhort her to multiply their number.' More books would influence more people and more books aimed at a wider audience will increase their usefulness exponentially: 'By works like Belinda or Leonora, she can only hope to correct the vices, or abate the follies of three or four persons of fashion: by improving the plan of the Moral Tales, she may promote the happiness and the respectability of many thousands in all ranks of society.'[26]

The request might seem a strange one — by 1806, Edgeworth was already the author of nine books and she had co-authored a further three with her father — but Jeffrey insists that moral power resides not only in such abstract secular values but also in the number of people to whom those values can be communicated. It is perhaps unsurprising that Jeffrey, described by Marilyn Butler as a 'humane, forward-looking but essentially philistine bourgeois',[27] goes so bluntly after the numbers. But his exhortation to multiply the numbers of books published in order to reach the 'many thousands' and 'the more numerous classes' may also respond to some of the Edgeworths' own interest in numbers.

Popular Tales opens with prefatory remarks by Richard Lovell Edgeworth that address questions of literacy and reading audiences. Quoting Edmund Burke, he imagines that there are now some eighty thousand potential readers in Britain. The tales though are addressed not to the upper 'ten thousand', consisting of 'nobility, clergy, or gentlemen of the learned professions', but rather to the remaining 'seventy thousand', the readers 'who might be amused and instructed by books which were not professedly adapted to the classes that have been enumerated.' This often quoted act of enumeration by Burke has never been tracked to a source though it echoes his account of the politically-minded 'British publick' in *Thoughts on a Regicide Peace* (1796): there, he calculates that the political nation to be about 'some four hundred thousand' in number, among whom were 'eighty thousand … pure Jacobins'.

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[25] Francis Jeffrey, Review of *Popular Tales*, *Edinburgh Review* 4, no. 8 (1804): 330.
[26] Francis Jeffrey, Review of *Leonora*, *Edinburgh Review* 8, no. 5 (1806): 213.
[27] Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 340.

These acts of numerical speculation situate *Popular Tales* amidst debates about revolution, reading and reform. And though the address to the British reading public makes no reference to Ireland, the focus on numbers and counting surely takes some of its charge from the intensity of debates about Irish demographics in the period. Jeffrey's call for 'more moral tales' to reach the 'many thousands in all ranks of society' also catches an echo of the case for the value of historical fiction made in the Preface to *Castle Rackrent.* There, a large body of readers are identified but found wanting in their responses: 'Of the numbers who study, or at least who read history, how few derive any advantage from their labours!' Rejecting such histories and with their numerous readers, the Preface invests value in the kinds of singular stories to be found within the interrelated forms of biography, gossip and anecdote; stories that yield the materials for a new definition of history as plain, proximate and impartial. And, natural as it is made to seem, the case for unadorned truth cannot do without numbers either: 'Probably we shall soon have it in our power, in a hundred instances, to verify the truth of these observations.'[28]

Castle Rackrent realises situated forms of expression that stay close to speech and expresses scepticism about print. The Preface to *Popular Tales*, on the other hand, adheres to an 'idea of literature founded in reading rather than creation'.[29] It concerns itself with a world of books and readers with imaginative work understood as a perilous and fragile exercise, as in the tale 'To-morrow', the last of the stories in *Popular Tales,* which turns on the world of books and bookmaking.

Things to Be Done

'To-morrow' opens with a quotation from Samuel Johnson, famous for his writings about procrastination — 'Oh! this detestable tomorrow, a thing always expected, yet never found'. The moral theme of the story can be summed up in a story told by Richard Lovell Edgeworth in his *Memoirs.* Recounting his own mother's dying words, Edgeworth recalled her worries for his 'vivacity of temper' : "'Your inventive faculty, said she, 'will lead you eagerly into new plans; and you may be dazzled by some new scheme, before you have finished, or fairly tried what you had begun — Resolve to finish, never procrastinate'". The same moral is found in one of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*: 'No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination: never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.'[30] Edgeworth's notes for her tale further spell out the moral (or what she termed 'the object of the story') in yet plainer terms: 'Things to be

[28] Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui,* 61.
[29] Kathryn Sutherland, 'British literature, 1774–1830', in *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 1665-1830*, eds Michael F. Suarez, S.J. and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 670.
[30] Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq., Vol. 1 of 2: Begun by Himself, and Concluded by His Daughter, Maria Edgeworth* (London, 1821), 99.

done' — 'to show that those who have the habit of procrastinating may lose fortune, fame, friends and happiness.'[31]

That heading – 'Things to be done' — reminds us that, in order to get to the moral, Edgeworth has quite a number of things to do, not least to move her reader through a sequence of events, places and predicaments in the hands of a narrator with an 'unfortunate habit of putting things off' (263). In narrative terms, Edgeworth's tale condenses the ability of third-person narrative to move both characters and concepts across time and space, at once accelerating the accumulation of events and experiences across oceans and sketching them out on a confined scale.

Basil, the narrator of 'To-Morrow' begins by announcing that 'It has long been my intention to write my own history.' Like Thady, who has 'voluntarily undertaken to publish the MEMOIRS OF THE RACKRENT FAMILY', Basil adverts to his years, writing from the point of view of 'advanced age' (421). Where Thady's whole life is bound up with two families (his own and the Rackrents), tied together by feudal ties in a single place, 'To-morrow' tracks Basil across a range of professions and locations. Basil is the son of a noted London bookseller who finds his name for his infant son while leafing through a biographical dictionary. His story is shaped by blocks and false starts, marred by the fickle promise of an endlessly expected future as Basil moves through a variety of roles including student, poet, travel writer, bookseller, publication, planter, clerk and would-be planter, always adjusting his ambitions for the occasion, temporising as he waits for events.

Procrastination itself is a concept that only gains meaning over time – the passage of time is what turns an ordinary delay into a chronic problem – and so is well fitted to narrative treatment at length. It also makes a very literary kind of trouble: Edgeworth draws readers' attention to Edward Young's poetic formulation — 'Procrastination is the thief of time' — a phrase that is already, the narrator tells us, 'a *stock* line among writing masters copies' (423). In 'Lame Jervas' Edgeworth already has her young Cornish miner turn his back on the modest literary success he achieves when he learns to read and write and pens 'some very bad lines in praise of a thistle' (15). His verses are celebrated by some local gentlemen as '*wonderful for me*' but cannot lead to a career. Basil's temptations are different. As a schoolboy, he fails to win a prize for poetry because he is too late in copying out his verses and does not enter the competition. Meanwhile he is made to learn a section of Young's *Night Thoughts* by heart, a reminder of the Edgeworths' dislike of rote learning. While a clever university student, Basil begins to prepare for the church under the patronage of 'a learned prelate' who commissions him to write a sermon, with the promise of a living. Instead, Basil stays up late with friends, invents excuses and loses the living.

[31] Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,), 236.

Basil's literary ambitions intact, he joins a '*famous* embassy', the first British diplomatic mission to China of 1792-4, led by the Anglo-Irish peer and former Chief Secretary for Ireland, George Macartney. As if to anticipate Fanny Price in Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), whose 'trip into China' involves reading the *Journal of an Embassy* published in 1807, Basil's plan is to write up a profitable account of the travels. His lingering reputation as 'a young man of talents and literature' and his ability to produce some botanical illustrations 'upon the spur of the occasion' persuades his father that 'a history of my voyage and journey, in two volumes octavo, or one quarto, with a folio of plates' will sell well (426, 427). Recently described as 'a crucial part of the processes of knowledge exchange and cultural translation between Britain and China and a major event in the formation of Romantic Sinology', the Macartney embassy saw the British entourage leave Portsmouth in September 1793 on three ships, the HMS Lion, the East Indiaman and the Hindostan, with the brig Jackall following behind. They journeyed overland to Beijing and onwards to the imperial palace of the late Quing emperor at Bishu Shanzhuang (Mountain Retreat for Avoiding the Heat) at Jehol (now Chengde).[32] In December they began their return journey, efforts to establish diplomatic relations, open new ports and shift the trade deficit in Britain's favour having utterly failed.

Edgeworth's narrative tracks these events with a good deal of care. Basil's poor preparations and chaotic plans mean that he arrives late for the fleet as it departs the docks and is able only to join the brig, the Jackal. Edgeworth names Macartney's actual ships, a mixture of naval and East India company vessels. Basil fails to board the Lion, which carries elite and learned members of the mission, and as result he does not share in the experience of discovering botanical curiosities and new gleanings in natural history along the route. He travels instead on the Jackal, and even when Basil eventually rejoins the Lion in the Dutch East Indies it is only to hear listed — with 'provoking fluency' (*Popular Tales*, 429) — the plants and natural wonders that the other passengers have witnessed. Edgeworth likely borrows the details from Erasmus Darwin's, *Loves of the Plants,* and Basil is especially sorry to miss the opportunity to sketch the famed upas tree which 'would have made a conspicuous figure in my quarto volume' (430).

Things get worse when, just as the ambassadorial retinue sets sail for China, Basil manages to leave his pencil and dozen notebooks behind. He writes his 'most important remarks on scraps of paper', meaning that the only record of all that he sees and learns are some scraps of paper 'stuffed' inside pockets and bags. En route to Jehol, Basil has the good fortune to fall into the company of a learned French Jesuit who helps him avoid the pitfalls common to travellers 'who, having put a partial view of things and persons, argue absurdly, and grossly misrepresent, while they intend to be accurate' (433). In

[32] Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China : Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 129.

her character of the knowledgeable priest, Edgeworth refers back to 'the early enthusiasm for Chinese social, political, economic arrangements' found among Jesuit observers from the seventeenth century onwards.[33]

Edgeworth's depiction of Basil's failed efforts to turn an encounter with a foreign culture into the stuff of profit derives from a Scottish Enlightenment suspicion of observations unfounded in facts and resonates with her criticism of Irish travels and tours. She and her father reviewed John Carr's 1806 *The Stranger in Ireland: or, A tour in the southern and western parts of that country in 1805* for the *Edinburgh*, finding it to be 'a book of stale jests, and fulsome compliments', characterised by a style 'both careless and affected, trivial and inflated'.[34] Carr was the target of widespread satire and Edgeworth later pilloried him via the character of Lord Craiglethorpe in *Ennui*. Washington Irving also took aim at Carr in his *Salamagundi*, in which one 'Jeremy Cockloft, the Younger', travels to the United States and prepares a manuscript entitled 'The Stranger in New Jersey', comprised of brief notes, scattered observations and unfinished thoughts. Cockloft's 'series of fragmentary notes about what he would write were he to finish his travel narrative' shares with Edgeworth's Basil earnest intentions that slide towards triviality and lazy cultural stereotypes.[35]

In Jehol, Basil prepares some portraits and accompanying 'poetical histories' of the British monarchs as a gift for the Qing emperor but in doing so inadvertently causes a fire: staying up late (again) in order to finish some lines about Queen Elizabeth I, he falls asleep and allows a spark from a candle to fall on gunpowder left on his table. The area in which he sleeps is 'built of light wood and cane, and communicated only with a cane-work gallery; otherwise the mischief would have been more serious. As it was, the explosion had alarmed not only all the ambassador's suite, who lodged in the palace, but many of the Chinese in the neighbourhood, who could not be made to comprehend how the accident had happened' (434). Suspicions abound as a result of the explosion, and Basil's carelessness soon brings the embassy to China to an end.

Contemporaries understood the failure of Macartney's mission in terms of the historical stagnation of the Chinese, in particular the emperor's lack of interest in items of British manufacturing advances including Birmingham brass, Wedgewood pottery, Irish linen, a diving bell, a planetarium, a balloon, lenses and scientific apparatus. But Britain's rising demands for tea, silk, porcelain, lacquer-ware and cane had resulted in a vulnerability to China, manifested in the Quing ability to insist that the

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[33] Jennifer Pitt, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

[34] Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Review of *Stranger in Ireland*, by John Carr, *The Edinburgh Revie*w 10, no. 19 (1 April 1807): 42, 43.

[35] William B. Mackintosh, *Selling the Sights: The Invention of the Tourist in American Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 122.

East India Company pay for tea in silver bullion. With its moral message about lazy literary carelessness, 'To-Morrow' seems to keep us at a distance from the consequences of a diplomatic failure that saw the British decision to finance the tea trade via India and opium. But Edgeworth's alternative fictional explanation for the end of the embassy stages a scene that brings together three key Chinese resources that were 'crucial in enabling European modernity': 'gunpowder, printing and paper-making'.[36] The moral illustrated by the explosion, then, allows Edgeworth to sketch in the contours of the shifting history of Sino-British relationships, including the growing British reliance on what Tim Fulford calls 'technology transfer, or bio-piracy'.[37]

The canvas bags containing Basil's observations are damaged by seawater on the return journey so that his pencilled notes become near impossible to decipher. A fortnight after his return to London, a new publication is announced: 'A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, containing the Various Circumstances of the Embassy; with Accounts of the Customs and Manners of the Chinese; and a Description of the Country, Towns, Cities &c.' (438). As Basil's effort to turn travel writer fails, he inherits his father's book business and marries, setting the plot in a direction that seems better aligned with Edgeworth's belief in the sociable and improving power of books and education. But Basil's interests quickly turn from books to finance and the invention of a new set of taxes for which he feels certain he will be liberally rewarded by 'those high in power' (450). Despising his work as publisher and bookseller, Basil comes to see literature as so much 'trash' (451). He is sued by an author who demands the return of a lost manuscript and ends up bankrupt in the King's Bench. There he devises a plan to emigrate, planning to take advantage of his wife's relatives in America.

Edgeworth next dispatches her protagonist to the other side of the world, as if to demonstrate to readers the reach of what Ashley Cohen calls the 'global-imperial present' of late eighteenth century Britain.[38] Cohen finds in Edgeworth's *Popular Tales* an unusually explicit effort to connect the East and West Indies in the Georgian literary imagination. In relation to 'Lame Jervas' and 'The Grateful Negro', Cohen makes the case that, because Edgeworth's fictions 'portray the implementation of the same techniques in Cornwall, India, and Jamaica, they prompt us to think across the usual divisions between the East and West Indies, and between chattel slavery and so-called free wage labor'.[39] In 'To-Morrow' that consideration of migration, labour and empire not only adds the case of China but also imagines the situation of Irish emigrants to the United States. En route to Philadelphia, Basil comes across a fellow

[36] Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 137.
[37] Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 137.
[38] Ashley L. Cohen, *The Global Indies: British Imperial Culture and the Reshaping of the World, 1756-1815* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2020), 2.
[39] Cohen, *The Global Indies*, 169.

emigrant named Barny, yet another Irish haymaker who has heard of high wages for labour in America and decided to make the journey with his wife and two sons. When Basil sees that the family are at risk of having their labour seized by the captain of the vessel in return for the fare, he pays their way and is effusively thanked in what is presented as an unwelcome and excessive display of Irish eloquence (459).

Basil's wife's relative, a cautious merchant, warns the recent arrivals of the dangers they might face should they travel further to the American frontier. The narrative quickly sketches in a vision of frontier life in a 'log house', sustained by squirrels and beset by Indians. The 1803 edition of Malthus's essay hovers in the background: his chapter on British North America cautioned against settler fantasies of empty lands and the idea of 'fresh starts for humanity' more generally.[40] Instead, Basil and family remain in Philadelphia where Edgeworth gives readers an enigmatic glimpse of what Cohen calls a 'British racial discourse' that was 'formed in circulation between colonial India and the colonial Atlantic world' (23). Basil's son experiences a start of terror at the sight of a negro servant (463). Though this is an isolated instance within 'To-Morrow', references to race are threaded through Edgeworth's writing up to about 1810. In 'Mademoiselle Panache' from *Moral Tales* (1801), a French governess cannot bear the sight of negroes and also fears the sight of a black horse. And in *Belinda*, the heroine chooses between two men, one an upright Englishman who has lost his way and the other a West Indian Creole planter named Mr Vincent and his black servant Juba (after whom he has also named his dog). When Juba, in the first edition of the novel, courts and marries an English country girl named Lucy, Lady Anne Percival playfully draws attention to Lucy's 'fear of poor Juba's black face' and is answered with reassurances: 'The girl reddened, smiled, and looked at her grandmother, who answered for her in an arch tone, "O, yes, my lady! We are not afraid of Juba's black face *now*; we are grown very great friends … our Lucy takes no offence at his black face now, my lady, I can assure you'.[41] The scene educates readers away from racist assumptions via a sentimental tableau of the silent, blushing white woman. Edgeworth removed the reference to inter-racial marriage in a revised edition published in 1810, reporting to Anna Letitia Barbauld that 'My father says that gentlemen have horrors upon this subject, and would draw conclusions very unfavorable to a female writer who appeared to recommend such unions; as I do not understand the subject, I trust to his better judgement.'[42]

The strange vignette found in 'To-Morrow' not only draws attention to the role of race in Edgeworth's writing of the 1800s but also involves a longer history of Irish American encounters with African Americans. David Roediger understands European immigrant fear of African Americans as a

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[40] Alison Bashford and Joyce E. Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus: Rereading the "Principle of Population"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.
[41] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Linda Bree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 223.
[42] Maria Edgeworth to Anna Letitia Barbauld, 1810, in *Belinda*, xvii.

body of traditional stories that, in the Irish American case, 'rises to the level of "myth"'.[43] Edgeworth plays her part in the circulation of that myth, expressed also in an 1804 poem by the Ulster weaver writer, James Orr. In 'The Passengers', written in Ulster Scots and describing a journey from the north of Ireland to the port of New Castle on the Delaware, Orr imagines arrival on the docks in terms of Irish passengers who run away at the sight of African Americans: 'Creatures wha' had ne'er seen a black / Fu' scar't took to their shankies'. Despite differences of genre and language, 'To-Morrow' has more in common with the world imagined by Orr than the reasonable position outlined by Lady Anne Percival.

In Philadelphia, Basil forges a foolish friendship with a young man who is the son of a plantation owner and who himself inherits a plantation in Jamaica: there is no mention of the enslaved people that create the prosperity in which Hudson and his father live. Rather, Edgeworth fills in some details of life in the southern states that she takes from William Priest's *Travels in the United States of America* (1802). The two men attend a 'frog concert', wishing to hear the evening amphibian chorus in a nearby swamp. But the occasion sees Basil once more run into trouble that is tied to literature, as he goes in search of a copy of the mock epic poem, *Battle of the Frogs and the Mice,* the pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*, a short satire on war and conflict which was often taught in schools. In searching for the book, Basil neglects an invoice for a departing ship and loses his job.

As Basil once more adjusts his ambitions and passes the time, Edgeworth introduces another major historical event on the horizon. Basil hears of the recently concluded Louisiana Purchase by which France agreed to sell a part of its North American territory to the United States and decides on a 'bold scheme' of obtaining tracts of the new land. Moving once more from the world of books to that of financial speculation, Basil plans to recruit servants from 'the next ships, which were expected to be full of emigrants from Ireland and Scotland'; in the meantime, he collects subscriptions for his venture. More 'promises, delays and disappointments' ensue and, while waiting about in Philadelphia, Basil notices a cook preparing some pheasant in leaves from a mountain laurel (*kalmia latifolia*) that he suspects might be poisonous. Basil intends to check on the leaves but then forgets, leading to an outbreak of severe food poisoning. The particular kind of danger posed by eating mountain laurel is authenticated by Edgeworth via a footnote that directs readers to an outbreak of poisoning in 1790-1: '*Vide* a paper by B. Smith Barton M.D., American Transactions, vol ii' (475). The reference leads to Benjamin Smith Barton's 'Some Account of the Poisonous and Injurious Honey of North America' published in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* in 1802.

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[43] David Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); cited in Julia Wright, *Representing the National Landscape in Irish Romanticism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 106.

'To-Morrow' was the last written of the *Popular Tales,* and the *Transactions* reference, along with details from Priest's book and the mention of the Louisiana Purchase, show us just how nearly she approaches her own moment in using the very recent past to fill out a historical horizon. Ireland plays a role on that horizon via the figure of the emigrant haymaker, Barny. When Basil has to quit Philadelphia he only manages to afford the crossing with help of Barny, whom he had first met on the crossing to America and who reappears in the narrative in order to solve Basil's financial woes and pay the family's fare back to Liverpool. As late the 1820s, Edgeworth was still developing ideas for another potential popular tale, to be titled 'Take for Granted' and to describe the experiences of Irish emigrants to US. In 1848, the year before she died, she published *Orlandino: A Moral Tale* (the profits destined for famine relief) and included in it a letter from an Irish emigrant in Philadelphia.

As two men talk about their economic prospects, the slender thread that connects Basil to Ireland once more passes via *Castle Rackrent:* Basil, ashamed and out of pocket on the docks of Philadelphia, wraps himself 'in an old surtout, and slouched my hat over my face' (476). It is only when Basil dons something very like Thady's greatcoat (recalling also the 'trusty frieze' worn by the haymaker in 'The Limerick Gloves') that he bumps into Barny and hears how an Irish peasant family have succeeded in America thanks to 'high wages and constant employ'. His two sons 'grew master-men' in their trades of blacksmithing and carpentry, not least because of their habits of hard work. As evidence of the latter, Barny explains to Basil that 'we never made Saint Monday … nor never put off till the morrow what we could do the day.' A footnote follows that once more echoes *Castle Rackrent*, the very first line of which — 'Monday Morning' — is accompanied by a footnote explaining Irish laziness:

> *Saint Monday*, or Saint Crispin. It is a custom in Ireland, among shoemakers, if they intoxicate themselves on Sunday, to do no work on Monday; and this they call making a Saint Monday, or keeping Saint Crispin's day. Many have adopted this good custom from the example of the shoemakers (478).

Despite the echoes of *Castle Rackrent*, it is Basil, the well-educated son of an English bookseller who behaves like a feckless Irish peasant, while the emigrant Barny works hard and prospers. Edgeworth further assigns to Barny (and not Basil, who repeatedly breaks or damages relationships that begin in kindness or good feeling) qualities of sympathy that seem to illustrate Adam Smith's case for the beneficial connections between empathy, society and commerce. Barny takes the trouble to excuse his English friend for economic failure, a gentleman 'not being used to bricklaying and slaving with his hands, and striving' while Basil himself is at pains to note the good manners and 'delicacy of sentiment' that characterises the Irishman's offer of financial help (478-9).

The 'melancholy feelings' that assail Basil upon arrival at Liverpool result in a second brief reference to race in 'To-morrow'. Reflecting on his hopeless situation, Basil aligns himself with 'the

negroes', who 'say of a fool who takes a voyage in vain, I am come back "*with little more than the hair upon my head*"' (479-480). Confined as it is, Edgeworth allots narrative space to the sounds of African-American speech crossed between Philadelphia and Liverpool, both cities that prospered as the trade in enslaved peoples grew. Such is the narrative restlessness of *Popular Tales* that yet one more piece of good fortune is put Basil's way as, tearfully reading the newspaper, he spots an advertisement that seeks him out with the promise of an inheritance. Settled in London as a wealthy man, Basil's final trial comes when he puts off vaccinating his son against small-pox. When his wife rings for the servants in order to call the surgeon to the house immediately, Basil explains that both are out, one having been sent to the library 'for the new Letters on Education' while the other has gone to 'the rational toy-shop for some things I want for the child' (483). The figure of the dead child makes for an odd and cruel reference to the family pedagogical commitments, including the kind of commerce in educational toys that she and her father proposed in *Practical Education*.

Basil's son dies of small-pox and readers arrive at an ending that seems to promise yet more by way of events: 'I am now coming to the most extraordinary and the most interesting part of my history. A new and surprising accident happened' (485). The sudden starts and frights that have punctuated the narrative to date prepare us for the fragmentary ending that follows:

> *Note by the Editor*.—What this accident was can never now be known; for Basil put off finishing his history till TO-MORROW.
> This fragment was found in an old escritoir, in an obscure lodging in Swallow-street.
> *August*, 1803.

Some ellipses appear above this note, followed by the line, 'Founded on fact'.

In and Out of Time

Capricious and peripatetic as it is, Basil's narrative is anchored by the weight of recent historical matter. Among the facts that helped Edgeworth to shape her tale are those that she encountered on a long journey that she took with her father, step-mother and sister Charlotte in 1802-3. It would be too simple to equate Basil's brushes with history with the events of those years, but it is true that her advanced version of the uses of literature emerged alongside the war with France, during an immersion in Paris and Edinburgh intellectual life and amidst rumours of Robert Emmet's rebellion of 1803.

Edgeworth finished the manuscript of *Popular Tales* in 1803, not long after her return from a trip that took in the north of France, Paris and Edinburgh, the family travelling to Paris via the Low Countries

and back home to Ireland via Scotland. Prompted by the Peace of Amiens, they went to Paris via England and crossed 'the little sea' from Dover to Calais in the early days of October 1802, a journey that left Charlotte Edgeworth sick and numb for three days.[44] Everywhere, they saw 'houses and churches in ruins the effects of English war and French Revolution'. These included the 'melancholy remains' and 'destroyed' gardens of the Palace at Chantilly[45] and the 'melancholy magnificence' of Versailles ('Le petit Trianon—elegant—poor Queen!'[46]). In an inn on a road in Northern France they heard 'various accounts of the reign of terror' while on their first night in Paris, they stayed in 'a magnificent hotel in a fine square' on the newly named Place de la Concorde: 'In this square the guillotine was once at work night and day'.

As well as touring scenes associated with the violence of the recent past, the Edgeworths mixed in scientific and literary company and relished French cultural life. During their time in the city, the three stories that comprised *Early Lessons* (1801) — 'Harry and Lucy', 'Rosamond', and 'Frank' — were translated and the book was published that same year. The company that the Edgeworths kept in Paris is described vividly in the family correspondence. In one letter, Edgeworth sent home her list of 'remarkables and agreeables'. They met, reported her step mother, a 'strange mélange of merchants and poets—philosophers and parvenus—English—French—Portuguese and Brasilian'.[47] Edgeworth remarked on the 'cheek-by-jowlism of power and literature' in everyday Parisian conversation and kept a 'Paris Notebook' in which she jotted down snippets of conversation including references to Bengal, Greece, Egypt and Switzerland.[48] In Paris too, they heard discussion of the Louisiana Purchase, signed in Paris on April 30, 1803, not long after the Edgeworths left, and Napoleon's recent failures in Saint Domingue. Unlike Wordsworth, whose sonnet 'To Toussaint Louverture' was published in the *Morning Post* in February 1803, Edgeworth never wrote about the Haitian leader. Nor does she mention the death of Toussaint Louverture in a French prison, though there is a reference in the correspondence to his two sons who were sent to Paris to be educated. Richard Lovell Edgeworth visited the Ecole de Médicine in 1803 and reported that there he 'saw the picture of two sons of Toussaint the negro general—fine young men with open countenances—blacks. They have been inoculated with the cow pox. The appearance on their

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[44] Charlotte Edgeworth to Mrs Emmeline King, 29 October 1802, in *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth Family Letters*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 18.
[45] Maria Edgeworth to Charlotte Sneyd, 15.
[46] Maria Edgeworth to Mary Sneyd, 31 October 1802, in Colvin, *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, 27.
[47] Frances Anne Beaufort [Edgeworth] to Mary Sneyd (21 November 1802), in Colvin, *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, 33.
[48] Maria Edgeworth to Sophy Ruxton, 8 December 1802, NLI MS 10166/7/321; 'Paris Notebook', NLI MS 10166/ 366A.

arms is different from what it is on white arms at the same stage of the disease'.[49] This long letter, from Edgeworth to her brother Henry in Edinburgh, marks its own historical moment via its date and a reference to the French mathematician and educationalist Gaspard Monge: *'*1803 dans *le siècle réparateur* as Monge has just named this century—16th January'.[50]

French politics mediates Edgeworth's understanding of procrastination, a moral problem made historical by every sudden turn in the plot. The intensity of her Paris experiences lend shape to the compressed narrative of 'To-Morrow', where a few years of Basil's life serve to condense a vast range of references. The spring of 1803 saw Edgeworth 'getting safe to free and happy England' only a short time before war was declared, but she worried for the fate of her half-brother Lovell, the only surviving child of Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his second wife Honora Sneyd.[51] Lovell was made a prisoner of war in 1803 and remained in exile for eleven years, six of them spent in the damp and boggy conditions of the fortified citadel of Verdun. As Lovell began his period of protracted confinement, the remainder of the family travelled home via Edinburgh where Henry Edgeworth, a pupil of Dugald Stewart, was unwell. The family as a whole were filled with admiration for the Scottish intellectual and must have known about his anti-Malthusian lectures of 1801-2, where he challenged the theory of constraint and argued that 'population growth was consistent with economic growth, social progress, and liberal political institutions'.[52] Maria Edgeworth did not hear Stewart lecture, though, just as she had missed out on the dinner with Godinw and Malthus: 'I have not heard his lecture – that is impossible – no woman can go to the public lectures here & I don't chuse to go in man's or boys cloaths or in the pocket of the Irish giant though he is here & well able to carry me'. An Irishman named Mr O'Brien was exhibited in Edinburgh society in 1803 and Edgeworth pitied his plight: 'this poor giant looks very sallow & unhealthy & he seemed not to like to sit or stand all day for people to stare at him'.[53]

The Edgeworths could not of course hope to see the latter day spectacle of the Author of Waverley, and it is notable how little they seem to think of Walter Scott at this time. In 1802, as Susan Manning reminds us, 'Scott's literary reputation rested on a handful of translations of German Gothic poetry and tales of terror' while 'he was known to be an obsessional if unmethodical collector of scraps of

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[49] Maria Edgeworth to Henry Edgeworth, 16 January 1803, Paris Rue de Lille in Colvin, *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland*, 84.
[50] Maria Edgeworth to Henry Edgeworth, 78.
[51] Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, 270.
[52] Karen O'Brien, 'The Cultural and Literary Significance of the 1803 Essay', in *An Essay on the Principle of Population: The 1803 Edition*, ed. Shannon C. Stimson (Yale: Yale University Press, 2018), 567.
[53] Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Ruxton, Edinburgh 30 March 1803, in *Life and Letters* ed. Augustus J.C. Hare, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 143

old balladry, tales and legends'.[54] If it is tempting to consider Scott as himself a kind of procrastinating professional at this period, all that was to change very soon. Scott's 1800 *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was reissued in 1803 in an expanded three volume edition and in his own account it was shortly after this, 'about the year 1805' when Scott 'threw together about one-third part of the first volume of "Waverley", the manuscript then 'laid aside in the drawers of an old writing-desk'. His account is often cited in the story of the emergence of the historical novel, in which Scott comes to believe that 'something might be attempted for my own country, of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland'. As Scott moved into the nineteenth century with a reputation as 'a novelist set apart from the general level of contemporary fiction',[55] Edgeworth, along with Scottish women writers including Elizabeth Hamilton and Jane and Anna Maria Porter, receded into the past. So too do did the role of moral tales and their involvement with empire.

Once back at home in county Longford in Ireland, Edgeworth began to read the works of Vivant Denon, diplomat and first director of the Louvre. She wore a new Paris gown and turban and watched as her father boarded up the library windows with books, fearful that Emmet's rebellion would spread from Dublin: 'we are walled and barricaded up to our ears & there are mines under our feet & you shall have music of drums wherever you go'. A letter characterises the family '*manner of going on'* (or '*manière d'etre*') as 'a mixture of military with civil & literary affairs – interludes of calling muster rolls – tying on sashes – "Order *arms*! – *stand at ease! - - 'tention!* &&&'.[56] Amidst this soundscape, with fresh rumours of French invasions in air, Edgeworth finished *Popular Tales* and sent the manuscript to Johnson for publication.

The *Popular Tales* as a whole are animated by a sense of history on the move, in Paris, Edinburgh and Edgeworthstown. 'To-morrow' can be read as a kind of fragment taken from the wider process by which moral tales, drawing as they did on an immediate factual record and the lived experience of history on the move, interfere with the emergence of the historical novel. The tale is concerned with the precariousness of ideas, the contingency of observation and the utility of the imagination; with literature itself imagined as a kind of movable machine powered by writing, bookmaking, capitalism and global travel. Among the actions of the machine is a winnowing of types of writing: across the narrative of 'To-Morrow', English literature, classical literature, travel writing and the print culture generated by new theories of education are all tested and found wanting. At home in Longford, Edgeworth read French

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[54] Susan Manning, 'Walter Scott, Antiquarianism and the Political Discourse of the *Edinburgh Review,* 1802-1811', in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review*, eds. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 102.
[55] Peter Garside, 'Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's Waverley'. *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, no. 1 (1991): 30.
[56] Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Ruxon, August 1802. NLI MS 10166/7/376.

histories, novels and philosophy and studied her French vocabulary. She moved from *Popular Tales* onto *Leonora*, her response to Madadme de Stael's *Delphine* (1803), the talk of the town during her Paris stay. By 1809 she was working to prepare *Belinda* for Mrs Barbauld's British Novelists series and had a draft of her great novel of English public life, *Patronage*. Her Irish novel of 1809, *Ennui* set a template for the Irish novels to come, *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817).

Reflecting on Edgeworth's work from the vantage point provided by this volume, it is notable how often the flow of her ideas across these first ten years of the nineteenth century passed through imperial contexts — and how infrequent and isolated are the references to empire in the books published after 1810. Francis Jeffrey might almost seem to redirect her efforts away from empire when he heaps praise on *Ennui's* Irish characters as 'the most original' in the novel.[57] Jeffrey wrote lengthy and detailed reviews of books by Edgeworth on six separate occasions and enthused about the writing in a mode characterised by Stuart Curran as 'fervent utilitarianism'. In Curran's view, Jeffrey's enthusiasm for the utility of Edgeworth's writing is curious and untimely, 'a quasi-Victorian ethos desiring to come to the fore a generation early'.[58] But because Edgeworth's romantic utilitarianism came early, it also fell out of favour quickly. The *Edinburgh* reviewer Sydney Smith had not 'much opinion of her powers of execution saving and excepting Irish characters'.[59] And when Susan Ferrier read *Tales of Fashionable Life* in 1809, she liked *Ennui* and *Almeria* but found the rest of the tales tedious: 'It is high time all *good ladies* and *grateful little girls* should be returned to their gilt boards, and as for sentimental weavers and moralising glovers, I recommend them as penny ware for the pedlar.'[60]

But Edgeworth's writing has an untimely quality that extends beyond its immediate use. The *Popular Tales* were published in the decade before the great settler migrations that began around 1815 – journeys that resulted in around twelve million British and Irish people emigrating across the century — but might be seen to precociously imagine and naturalize these global experiments in time and space. These migrations are, in Josephine McDonagh's account 'constitutive of nineteenth-century fiction's very being'. McDonagh's account of 'migration, emigration, and transnational mobility' as 'an entire environment' in which books are both written and read[61] reminds us that the meanings of Edgeworth's fictions cannot be confined to a decade or even a century. The fires in *Popular Tales* reverberated in the

[57] Francis Jeffrey, Review of *Popular Tales*, *Edinburgh Review* 4, no. 8 (1809): 337.
[58] Stuart Curran, 'Women and the *Edinburgh Review'* in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review*, eds. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 200.
[59] *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, ed. Nowell C. Smith, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 244.
[60] *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier. 1782–1854. Collected by her Grand-Nephew John Ferrier*, ed. John A. Doyle (London: Eveleigh, 1929), 65–66.
[61] Josephine McDonagh, *Literature and Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815-1876* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 6.

burning of close to three hundred big houses in the years of the Irish Revolution of 1919-21. Attacks on such houses as emblems of Anglo-Irish power came in the aftermath of the Great Famine, when Malthus's theories of providential checks on population found a terrible echo in the British state response to the Great Famine (1845-1852).

Across the *Popular Tales,* Edgeworth sought to develop an extended account of a shifting set of relations between utility, imagination and empire. She did so within short, condensed fictions, published together and addressed to an audience understood in terms of their numerousness. Those tales in turn help to inaugurate a nineteenth-century publishing trend to group original fictions together in a collection.[62] How to capture this paradoxical set of relations, already articulated by Jeffrey, between the size of the story, the role of the series and the scale of the audience? To step outside Edgeworth's own moment once more, Elizabeth Bowen's critical account of the short stories of Thomas Hardy and Henry James comes to mind: 'their shortness is not positive', Bowen writes, 'it is nonextension. They are great architects' fancies, little buildings on an august plan'.[63] The negative formulation resonates. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Edgeworth too practises a kind of 'nonextension' in which simple axioms are worked out in short fictions with a global scale. The results are often unsatisfactory, not least because imperial and racialised geographies, threaded into the very texture of the tales, strain against the confines of narrative space. Edgeworth did not sustain this effortful inscription of empire and from the 1810s onwards largely confined her attention to Ireland, Britain and Europe.

[62] Donald J. Newman, 'Short Prose Narratives of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in Dominic Head ed *The Cambridge History of the English Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 47.
[63] Elizabeth Bowen, 'Introduction, the Faber Book of Short Stories' in *Short Story Theories* ed. Charles E. May (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 153.