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Imaginative Rebellion:

Women Writers and the Irish Nation, 1798-1830

by

Catherine Margaret McCutcheon 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1998

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Degree: Master of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1998

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September 30, 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis Women Writers and the Irish Nation, 1798-1830 submitted by Margaret McCutcheon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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30 Sept. 1998

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine post-Union Irish nationalist literature written by women, focusing on Maria Edgeworth's and Sydney Morgan's fictional responses to the Rebellion of 1798. I explore the contesting forms of nationalism in circulation after the Union, and consider the relationship between nationalism and gender. Edgeworth and Morgan use the genre of the national tale to offer alternative interpretations of historical events and to analyze the contemporary political situation. I examine Maria Edgeworth's seemingly contradictory use of political economy and of fable to ground her critique of the Protestant Ascendancy in *Ennui*. I explore Sydney Morgan's use of contemporary Irish historical studies to question the authoritative status of historical narratives and to challenge the colonial relationship between England and Ireland in her novel *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys*. Finally, I consider the strategies Edgeworth and Morgan used to claim authority for their political and literary voices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Isobel Grundy for her extraordinary support and encouragement. Prof. Grundy fired my enthusiasm for early women's literature, and sharpened my research skills along the way. Without her guidance and support, I would not have embarked upon this degree, let alone finished it. I would also like to thank Prof. Heather Zwicker for much-needed theoretical rigour and for numerous cups of peppermint tea in the early stages. Thanks also to Kim Nicholson, who made up for my practical inadequacies in the crunch.

My deepest gratitude to my family, to my mother Isabell and my sisters Kim and Alana. They have repeatedly stepped into the breach for me and in fact have given me a new life; I owe the completion of this thesis to their emotional, financial, and childcare support. I can never repay them, but know they do not seek recompense. I would like to recognize the patience and support of my sons, Diarmuid, Rory and Colin Wickham, who grumbled only a little when "the thesis" had to come before games and stories.

Finally, I would like to thank the women who became my close and dear friends while I lived in Edmonton, who travelled the rocky thesis road with me, and who celebrated most heartily when I reached the end. Thank you to the women of my writing group: Beckie Garber-Conrad, Clara Hare, Cathy Hodgson, Terryl Miseck-Campbell, and special thanks to Lorie Miseck, whose poetry made my mind marvel at the beauty of words. Thank you to Catherine Gutwin, Jeanne Wood and Mary Elizabeth Leighton, real life-savers in the most practical sense. And last but certainly not least, an exultant cheer for Pippa Brush, who has gone to incredible lengths (as she well knows) to get me through this process; I owe what sanity I have left to her frolicsome friendship and endless emails.

Table of Contents

"Patrolling the Borders"[1]:

Women and the Rise of Nationalism in Ireland

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Irish writers Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan) achieved popular success and critical admiration at home and in England for their novels set in Ireland. These novels of Irish life (published between 1800 and 1827) helped to create a new literary genre, the National Tale. What could be considered a literary footnote is made interesting by the observation that on the face of it, post-Union Ireland was an unlikely place to foster the national tale. The violent suppression of the Rebellion of 1798 and the enacting of the Union between Ireland and Britain in 1800 apparently quashed both the burgeoning colonial nationalism of the Protestant Ascendancy and the separatist republican nationalism of the United Irishmen. Ireland's colonial relationship to England, always disputed from within Ireland, was now formalized by the loss of its parliament. Irish members constituted a minority within the newly combined parliament at Westminster. In the aftermath of the rebellion and the Union, Ireland seemed poised to become subsumed within an imperial "British" identity, while the sectarian and political schisms which divided the Irish population were more clearly demarcated than ever.

These political events appeared to derail the establishment of a homogeneous Irish nation expressed by an autonomous nation-state. Yet the rebellion itself became a topic around which Edgeworth and Morgan constructed novels in a new genre intended to present a unified Irish national identity. I would argue that the rebellion and the Union formed part of a confluence of political and cultural events which opened up a discursive space in which contesting and conflicting visions of the Irish nation could be created and debated. The national tale both developed out of and helped to create this discursive

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[1] I borrow this title from Bell Chevigny, Myra Jehlen and Judith Walkowitz, "Patrolling the Borders: Feminist Historiography and the New Historicism." *Radical History Review* 43 (1989): 23-43.

space. The tendency to read the national tale as a regional novel within the British literary canon elides the political potential of the genre. Edgeworth's and Morgan's national tales are not merely novels with dialect and scenery; rather, these texts function as political interventions, giving their authors a forum in which to articulate and disseminate their visions of the Irish nation.

It seems counter-intuitive that this literary genre devoted to nation was developed in a politically subdued Ireland by women writers, at a time when women ostensibly had little mainstream political influence. However, an interrogation of this apparently improbable phenomenon makes clear the link between culture and politics in the development of early modern nationalism, and allows for an exploration of the role of gender in this development. Focusing on Edgeworth's *Ennui* and Morgan's *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys*, novels in which these authors re-scripted the 1790s, the Rebellion and the Act of Union, I will examine the ways in which these literary productions functioned as political and cultural interventions, reflecting and constituting political and cultural realities with material results. These novels are not their authors' only or best-known works about Ireland, or their only national tales. Edgeworth's most popular novel about Ireland, *Castle Rackrent*, is a humorous satire on the foibles of the "Big House" families of the Protestant Ascendancy. Although it is sometimes cited alongside national tales, the novel does not follow the conventions of the genre. In *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth focuses on Irish social issues, such as land ownership and gender relations, without directly critiquing politics in the sense of policies or agendas put forward by government or by pressure groups, as she later does in *Ennui*. Morgan is better known for *The Wild Irish Girl*, which inaugurated the conventions of the national tale genre. In this early novel, she channels her political energies into a celebration of a romanticized version of traditional Gaelic culture. I have chosen to focus on *Ennui* and *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys* because they are politically astute and complex novels in which the

rebellion is central. Their authors designed them for examining issues of nationalism and gender, and they still have a lot to contribute to our thinking on these matters.

Every July 12th in Northern Ireland, Unionist supporters don bowler hats and sashes, and march to commemorate William of Orange's victories at the Battle of the Boyne (1690) and the Battle of Aughrim (1691). The tension, and at times violence, between Catholics and Protestants which marks these marches is a clear indication that the events of Ireland's distant past continue to resonate in its political present. Kevin Whelan's comment on the 1790s, that the events "have never passed from the heat of politics into the shadier groves of history" (*Tree* ix), may be applied equally well to events which occurred in Ireland both before and after that decade. The invocation of the island's history of invasion, colonisation and resistance to justify political and military agendas is by no means an innovation. In this time-honoured use of Irish history as a political instrument events separated by decades or centuries are telescoped, with an "elision of time" (Macdonagh 2) which grants long-ago battles the same currency as more recent conflicts. History becomes a dense accumulation. Unfortunately, in the effort to tailor history to suit political agendas, the complexities of individual events are flattened out, and those parts of the historical record which do not fit conveniently are often simply left out.

In the nationalist formulation of Irish history which developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the political events of the previous 700-800 years were structured to fit a masculinized narrative of national progress, as Éire's brave sons marched triumphantly towards the liberation and revivification of the Gaelic nation, long oppressed by the English invaders. This historical account served an important propaganda function during this period, as successive nationalist organisations worked to gain independence from Britain. The Rebellion of 1798 became one of the major touchstones in this narrative, with the most famous United Irishman, Wolfe Tone, serving as an iconic short-hand for the eighteenth-century version of Irish bravery in the face of

English oppression. By the turn of the twentieth century[2], Tone had been apotheosized in a pantheon of Irish nationalist heroes, soon to be joined by Padraic Pearse, James Connolly, and the other men who became martyrs in 1916. After the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, this nationalist version of history became a central strand in the ideology of the new nation-state, as it asserted its autonomy from Britain and worked to distance itself from its past colonial identity.

The origins of the modern nation reside in the late eighteenth century, rooted in the Enlightenment and the joint rise of print culture and capitalism, and influenced by the American and French Revolutions. Although most nationalisms sought to institute a state synonymous with the nation, a nation could flourish without a state, or could coexist with other nations within one state. This distinction between the "spiritual" quality of the nation and the "material" character of the state (Cronin 2) informs Benedict Anderson's oft-cited definition of the nation as "an imagined political community" (Anderson 6). National identity grows out of a twin impetus towards coalescence and differentiation. The nation is conceived as consisting of a people who share a defining characteristic or set of characteristics, such as religion, ethnicity, or language.[3] However, the concept of difference is equally if not more important to national cohesiveness as members define their nation against other nations. The national identity that defines the imagined

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[2] The 1898 celebrations marking the centenary of the Rebellion and of Tone's death signalled a resurgence of the nationalist cause, creating the opportunity for the Irish Republican Brotherhood to show its strength and to consolidate its position as the main physical-force nationalist group in Ireland. The celebrations also gave women like Maud Gonne their first taste of organising for the cause. See Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: A Life* (London: Pandora, 1990) 43-54.

[3] J. Hélie's entry on "Nation" in John J. Lalor's *Cyclopedia of Political Science* (1889), defines the nation as "an aggregate of men speaking the same language, having the same customs, and endowed with certain moral qualities which distinguish them from other groups of a like nature" (quoted in Hobsbawm 18n13).

community is presented as stable and continuous, yet "most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs, that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast" (Colley 5). The shared past which provides one of the focal points for the imagined community is also a construction. Members of nations "choose their past from many possible pasts and the choice itself is conditional" (O Corráin 25). Alternative versions of history co-exist and conflict with the accepted version, and thus the nation's official history necessarily requires constant negotiation and revision.

The homogenizing impetus of nineteenth and earlier twentieth century nationalism, which reduced Irish history to a struggle between (predominantly) Catholic Ireland and Protestant England, belied the existence of "varieties of Irishness" (Foster, *Paddy* 21), the expression and result of a complex history of power relations. In resisting such simplified polarities, (while noting their intense and lasting power), it becomes possible to create a more nuanced reading of the alliances and disjunctions which brought some historical "varieties of Irishness" together and set others in opposition.[4] Such a reading allows for a more complex analysis of the colonizing strategies of England (later Britain), and the role these strategies played in the creation of a sense of Irish national identity from the late eighteenth century. It also allows for the re-introduction of the complexities of gender in the formation of national identity and the expression of nationalism.

Competing visions of the Irish nation continued to exist in the early nineteenth century, even after a hundred years of Protestant "Ascendancy," in part because of the successive yet not wholly successful waves of colonization which left a variety of groups

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[4] In *Nationalism in Ireland*, D. George Boyce notes that the Norman invasion of Ireland was "not the beginning of a process of 'Irish' resistance to the English which lasted unbroken from 1171 to 1921: there never were two 'sides' in Ireland whose struggle can be reduced to such simple proportions" (30).

living together, often uneasily, within the island of Ireland. The period in which the national tale developed was one of rapidly shifting alliances and changing power structures which contrasted with the relative stability of the eighteenth century and echoed the political turbulence of the seventeenth century. An awareness of the competing conceptualizations of the Irish nation which circulated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is integral to an understanding of the political and cultural milieu which influenced and made possible the literary productions of Edgeworth and Morgan. Proponents of each of these nationalisms sought to legitimize their imaginative authority, and to naturalize a concurrent or future political authority, in part based in an awareness (and a partisan interpretation) of Ireland's past.[5]

The first of these possible nations found expression in the Protestant colonial nationalism which developed over the course of the eighteenth century and culminated in the Protestant Ascendancy.[6] The Protestant presence in Ireland originated with the adventurers and settlers who began arriving in the sixteenth century. These "New English" colonists distinguished themselves from the Gaelic Irish and from the "Old English," the descendants of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman invaders who had maintained their Catholic faith after the Reformation. The Anglo-Norman invaders had made few

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[5] Fergus O'Ferrall quotes Charles Grant, who observed in April 1822 that the Irish maintained "vivid recollections of past history" and that it was "astonishing indeed to observe the force and intensity of those mental associations" (O'Ferrall 25).

[6] The Protestant (Anglican) elite in Ireland used the phrase "Protestant interest" to describe themselves until the 1780s (Kelly, "Commentary" 175). The exact genesis of the term Protestant Ascendancy remains a point of contention but it seems that the term was first mentioned during the debate on the Catholic Relief Act in 1782 and came into popular use in 1792 (Kelly, "Commentary" 180, 185). In accordance with scholarly convention, I use the term Protestant Ascendancy to describe the ruling elite in Ireland after 1688; however, it is important to remember that the term had specific ideological connotations when used by members of the Protestant elite to defend their privileged economic and social position at the end of the eighteenth century.

inroads against Gaelic culture; many in fact had assimilated with the native Irish. The Tudor military campaigns, which included civilian massacres and scorched earth policies, were far more effective (Foster, *Modern* 34).[7] The English justified their expansionist strategies and marked their difference from the Gaelic Irish by portraying the natives as "a population of beasts and vermin" (Foster, *Modern* 34).[8] Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England used Irish land to cement loyalty to or raise funds for the Crown (and briefly, the Commonwealth). Large numbers of New English and Scottish colonists settled the plantations established on confiscated land.[9]

The eighteenth century Protestant imagination continued to be marked by the Catholic resistance of the seventeenth century, including Hugh O'Neill's Gaelic rising and

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[7] R.F. Foster quotes Spenser's description of the effects of the scorched earth policy in Munster: "out of every corner of the woods and glens they came, creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs would not bear them. They looked like anatomies of death; they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves" (*Modern* 34).

[8] Liz Curtis notes that Giraldus Cambrensis' *History and Topography of Ireland*, which portrayed the Irish as an uncivilized people inferior to the Normans, was first published in English during the Elizabethan era and served to justify Elizabethan strategies (11). The portrayal of the Catholic Irish as uncivilized and barbaric was ironic, given that the medieval Irish Church was "widely famed as a centre of learning and literacy" (Curtis 7).

[9] Over the course of the seventeenth century, the proportion of the population that could claim Scots or English descent grew from less than two per cent to twenty-seven percent (Foster, *Modern* 14). Catholic ownership of land had fallen to sixty per cent by 1641 and to nine per cent by 1660; after a brief upsurge to twenty per cent after the Restoration, Catholic ownership fell to fourteen per cent by 1703 and to five per cent by 1750 (Foster, *Modern* 115, 155). However, the plantation scheme changed ownership of the land but often did not alter the inhabitants. Plantation owners were supposed to replace native Irish with Protestant settlers; however, grants of land were often so generous that there were not enough settlers to work them. The native Irish were willing to pay higher rents; thus the land speculators, whose overriding priority was profit, were willing to lease the land back to the former owners (Foster, *Modern* 61, 78).

the decade-long rebellion begun in 1641.[10] Exaggerated stories of Catholic massacres of Protestants continued to circulate into the nineteenth century. The accession of the Catholic James II in 1685 provided the catalyst for renewed Catholic resistance with his promise of restored privileges and land. The English "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 saw James deposed in favour of the Protestant William of Orange; James's unsuccessful campaign to reclaim the throne was fought and definitively lost in Ireland.

The 1691 Treaty of Limerick marked the defeat of the Catholic interest in Ireland and the entrenchment of a Protestant ruling elite. This Protestant interest or Protestant Ascendancy as it later came to be known consisted solely of members of the Anglican Church of Ireland. The requirement of adherence to the Anglican church was at once a statement of affinity to the English establishment, and thus a denial or modification of Irishness, and also a means of concentrating economic and political power in the hands of a minority elite. Its privileges and power were fortified by the enactment of a series of Penal Laws which disenfranchised and dispossessed the Catholics of Ireland.[11] Dissenters were also excluded by the Sacramental Test Act, which required all public officials to adhere to, or at least make some show of adhering to, the sacraments of the established church.[12]

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[10] The Gaelic Irish and the Old English joined forces to form the Confederacy in 1642, an extension of the rebellion begun in 1641, to protest the loss of Catholic land and political power. Cromwell's troops brutally crushed the insurrection nearly a decade later.

[11] The Penal Laws were passed between 1697 and 1727. In addition to expelling Catholic bishops and clergymen, these laws deprived Catholics of the right to buy or inherit property, the right to bear arms, the right to hold political, military and civil offices, and finally, the right to the parliamentary vote (Boyce 96; Foster, *Modern* 602-3). They also restricted Catholics' access to formal education.

[12] This act prevented denominational tension within the Protestant elite, and ensured that the large Presbyterian population in Ulster could not replace the established church as had happened in Scotland (Bartlett, "Origins" 3). This distrust of the Ulster

The new balance of power established by the Glorious Revolution was never completely easy, as the "Protestant interest" sought to negotiate its position between the dispossessed and disenfranchised Catholics on one hand and the British government on the other. The idea of a Union between Ireland and England was developed in political pamphlets after 1691; however, stresses quickly appeared in the alliance between the ruling Protestant elite and the English administration. The English parliament imposed legislation including trade restrictions on Ireland.[13] In *The Case of Ireland Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England* (1698), William Molyneux revived and appropriated the seventeenth century Old English argument that Ireland was not a colony but a kingdom equal to England under the same crown. Throughout the eighteenth century writers from Jonathan Swift to Henry Grattan took up Molyneux's argument that the English parliament could not legislate for Ireland because the Protestant Irish had the same right as the English "to be bound only by laws to which one's consent had been given" (Bartlett, "Origins" 9).[14]

Presbyterian population with its strong ties to Scotland was not new. In 1639 Ulster Scots were forced to deny their covenant and to swear allegiance to the king by taking the Oath of Abjuration, or "Black Oath" (Foster, *Modern* 82).

[13] Sean Cronin suggests that the incipient protestant colonial nationalism of this period was "similar to what emerged in North America a half-century later, fuelled by the same commercial resentments" (14).

[14] The powers and limitations of the College Green parliament in Dublin had never been adequately defined. The passage of the Declaratory Act in 1720, when coupled with Poynings' Law (1494), made it clear that the Irish parliament was not independent: all legislation had to be approved by the King, his Irish deputy, *and* his council in England. As well, the Irish parliament could not meet without royal licence. However, in order to preserve the fiction of sister kingdoms, the government of Britain, through its administrative machinery located at Dublin Castle, concentrated in the person of the viceroy, was forced to find ways around coercion in directing the legislative agenda and decisions at College Green. Thus the practice of bribery and corruption became synonymous with College Green.

As the eighteenth century progressed and as members of the Protestant Ascendancy became more secure in their elite position, they began to develop a national identity which at once differentiated them from the Catholic and Dissenting Irish, and also asserted their difference from the English. As the immediate need for English military backing receded, the Ascendancy conviction that Ireland was not a colony but an equal (if less developed) kingdom increased. Their growing national pride found its expression in the spectacular development of Georgian Dublin, and in an increasing interest in antiquarian research, which valorized and claimed old Gaelic culture. The Ascendancy resented the English administration's constant reminders that Ireland was a colony, including the continued interference in trade and parliament, and nepotism which awarded plum administrative posts in Ireland to mediocre Englishmen. And English attitudes towards the Irish, including members of the Ascendancy, did not improve in step with the Ascendancy's new-found pride in their developing national identity. The higher levels of the Ascendancy maintained links to England through intermarriage with the English aristocracy, and many landowners held estates in England as well as Ireland (as does Glenthorn in *Ennui*). However, the relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the English was never an easy one: the Anglo-Irish took pride in their distinction from the native Irish, but, Protestant or not, English society viewed them as Irish. As Maria Edgeworth comically shows in *The Absentee*, members of the Irish aristocracy who attempted to enter London society were often dismissed as provincial and second-class.

The crowning accomplishments of this Protestant nationalism were the founding of the Volunteers in 1778 and the achievement of the independent parliament in 1782. The Irish gentry began to raise Volunteer corps in response to the threat of a French invasion of Ireland. Though originally a defensive militia, the Volunteering movement served as a lightning rod for Protestant nationalist energies; their demonstrations were instrumental in convincing the English administration to remove trade restrictions and to grant

parliamentary independence. However, these halcyon days were short-lived. The College Green parliament proved to be less representative and more corrupt than expected; the Volunteers were unsuccessful in their attempts to force parliamentary reform. Disagreements arose in the Volunteer movement between conservative and more radical elements; the Volunteers were suppressed in 1793 as the political situation in Ireland worsened. The English administration began gradually to repeal the penal laws, hoping that such concessions would ensure the loyalty of the Irish Catholics. The balance of power in Ireland was shifting once again, and the political and economic confidence that underpinned Protestant nationalism was shaken. Though some members of the Protestant elite favoured the relaxation of the penal laws, others continued to fear the potential power of the Catholics, and argued the necessity of increased English military support. Protestant colonial nationalism lost its momentum as members of the Ascendancy split over the Catholic question, and over the proper response to the rise of the United Irish movement in the 1790s. The exclusivity of the Protestant Ascendancy allowed for the development of a colonial national identity; its inability to establish hegemonic rule meant this elitism also guaranteed the failure of its national vision.

In its early years the United Irish movement took up many of the same concerns which served as rallying points for the Protestant colonial nationalists: the study and celebration of Irish culture; the right to legislate and to trade without English interference; the necessity of parliamentary reform. However, the United Irishmen transformed these issues from a framework for an exclusionary Protestant national identity into the basis for a radical politics of inclusion which held the promise of uniting Irishmen across class and religious barriers. The first society of United Irishmen was formed in Belfast in October 1791 (Tesch 46); the first Dublin society was formed a month later. In the early 1790s, the leadership of the United Irishmen was predominantly Protestant, though its members were both Protestant and Catholic. The Ulster United Irishmen came mainly from the

ranks of Presbyterian Dissenters strongly influenced by Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, in particular the work of Francis Hutcheson[15]. The movement drew its philosophical and political inspiration from the works of Hutcheson, Locke, and Thomas Paine[16], as well as from the American and the French Revolutions. In line with republican traditions, they emphasized the pursuit of civic virtue through the fulfillment of political duties. From the beginning, the United Irish had links to the Catholic Committee, particularly through Wolfe Tone; his *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* appeared in August 1791, and he became the Catholic Committee's secretary a year later. The United Irish movement also began to establish links with France from the early 1790s.

The United Irishmen first aimed their political campaign at the middle classes, but by January 1794, when it became apparent that this strategy could not force the reform of the legislature, the United Irish leadership turned their attention to the mainly Catholic lower classes, formed an alliance with the Catholic Defenders, and adopted a revolutionary, physical force, separatist platform. Influenced by Locke and Hutcheson, the United Irishmen argued that the people had the right to withdraw their consent to be governed and to demonstrate that withdrawal through rebellion. They called for the enactment of universal manhood suffrage (Curtin, *United* 25-26)[17], and promised that all Irishmen

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[15] Hutcheson held the chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University from 1729; Adam Smith was his pupil and successor. Hutcheson espoused the philosophy of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number," and argued that "[p]olitical institutions must therefore be designed to facilitate virtuous conduct, to enable the citizen to realise his moral potential " (McBride 56). "Hutcheson's espousal of the right of resistance was the most radical of the Scottish Enlightenment" (McBride 56). Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (2 vols, Glasgow & London 1755).

[16] The immense popularity of Paine's *Rights of Man* in Belfast led Wolfe Tone to call it "the Koran of Belfescu"' (McNeill 65).

[17] In January, 1794, the Dublin United Irishmen made public their plan to introduce universal manhood suffrage (Curtin, *United* 25-6). Their committee on parliamentary reform narrowly voted against maintaining property qualifications for the franchise (the

would benefit from their radical social and economic reforms.

Although the Ascendancy elite was often the target of United Irish criticisms, as its separatist agenda developed the movement traced the corrupting influence back to England and her colonial control over Ireland. As argued in "The Union Doctrine, or the Poor Man's Catechism," a successful revolution would effect "deliverance from the odious influence of England, and that domestic tyranny it generated, which is calculated to corrupt our morals, impoverish our people, and retard our industry" (quoted in Curtin, *United* 29). The threat to 'Irish morals' was effected through English control of trade, curtailing the commercial opportunities of the mercantile middle classes, whether Dissenter, Catholic, or Church of Ireland (Curtin, *United* 29).

Through its political activities the United Irish movement succeeded in initiating the first "public sphere" in Ireland (Eagleton 228), what Kevin Whelan refers to as "a culturally produced social sphere, in which public opinion acted as the arbiter of political rectitude, and in which the press could plausibly pretend to represent a diversified public" (*Tree* 62). The movement created a sense of the importance of a mass-based public opinion, arising out of an educated, literate population. Their propaganda linked literacy and knowledge with political power and economic advancement, as this excerpt from "The Union Doctrine or Poor Man's Catechism" (1798) shows:

> By being poor, we must be on the alert to procure the necessaries of life, which make true the old maxim 'they keep us poor and busy.' Our time will be spent studying to avoid want, instead of enquiring the cause of it, for inquiry is dangerous to tyranny (quoted in Whelan, *Tree* 65).

The movement used a variety of printed means to spread its message: in addition to pamphlets, songbooks, and broadsheets (Whelan, *Tree* 71), the movement published a number of radical newspapers including Samuel Neilson's *Northern Star*. The United Irish

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vote was 11 to 9) (Curtin, *United* 25).

movement harnessed popular culture to promote its political agenda, including sports such as hurling, "calendar custom, communal festivities" (Whelan, *Tree* 84). This strategy served to "diminish the authority of elite culture" (Whelan, *Tree* 71) at the very time when the gentry were adopting "metropolitan standards of taste, propriety and refinement" (Whelan, *Tree* 91-92) and thus losing touch with the popular culture of their tenants.

The United Irish movement succeeded in developing its republican nationalist vision to the point of instigating a rebellion which lasted from 23 March to 8 September 1798. The rebellion failed to achieve the United Irishmen's separatist aims. However, the seriousness of the republican threat was evidenced by the strength and scope of the uprising despite government infiltration of the organization, a military clampdown in Ulster in 1797, the arrest of the leaders in March 1798, and the delayed French landing. Later sectarian propaganda downplayed the integration of the Defenders and the United Irishmen, raising the age-old bogey of Catholic massacres of Protestants to conceal the extent of the alliance between Catholics and Protestants. Although the United Irishmen did not succeed in creating a revolutionary, republican nation-state, they left the vision of a possible non-sectarian Irish nation.

The lingering success of the United Irishmen was compromised by their failure to appeal to culture as a basis for national identity (Whelan, *Tree* 95). As Kevin Whelan points out, the "instrumental view of popular culture" held by the United Irishmen was inimical to such a grounding of the nation: "the United Irishmen wished to politicise popular culture, whereas cultural nationalists valorised it" (*Tree* 61). It was left to the Catholic Association and the O'Connellite campaigns to construct a sense of common cultural practice and history and thereby create a coherent national identity: an identity which was coded Catholic.

The penal laws were intended to strip the Catholic majority of their political rights and economic power while securing the privileged position of the Protestant minority.

There is no doubt that Catholics suffered extreme injustices under the penal laws: Catholic ownership of land dropped to an astounding seven per cent; previously eligible Catholics could not vote or hold public office; Catholic rights to education were severely restricted. However, recent scholarship has shown that the position of the Catholic Irish during the eighteenth century was not as unremittingly bleak as earlier nationalist historians have suggested. Many Catholics found ways to evade the full restrictions of the penal laws, pursuing education, amassing wealth, and building power relationships within an alternative social sphere. A strong Catholic middle class developed over the eighteenth century, composed of leaseholders (middlemen) and the big-farm group. The sons of these leaseholders and farmers attended colleges on the continent, creating a Catholic professional class as well. In the late eighteenth century, Catholics began to push for a reinstatement of their rights; though the relief acts seemed to promise equality, Catholics found that they were still effectively excluded from public offices even after the legal restrictions were removed. The campaign for full Catholic Emancipation led by Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Association mobilized the political aspirations of Irish Catholics and helped to create a sense of common cultural and national identity.

The national tale was created in the years following the defeat of the United Irishmen and preceding the consolidation of Catholic cultural nationalism. In this period the Enlightenment and Romanticism overlapped in Ireland. The national tale was bred from the cross-fertilization of the Enlightenment values of civic virtue and cosmopolitan benevolence espoused by republican nationalists and the values of the romantic or cultural nationalists, who looked to tradition and shared culture for the basis of their national identity. The genre in some ways may be read as an Anglo-Irish attempt to negotiate a new role for themselves in Ireland after the failure of colonial nationalism. At this time the revolutionary ideals of republican nationalism continued to challenge the Anglo-Irish position, and an incipient Catholic national identity threatened to marginalize them.

For the most part gender was not enunciated as an explicit issue during the development of these early nationalisms. In the sense that the nation was conceived to be an imagined community, a spiritual force (Cronin 2), it was assumed to include women, and women themselves indicated that they perceived themselves as belonging to and participating in the nation. In a discussion of nineteenth century Irish nationalism, Terry Eagleton makes the claim that "[n]ationalism is an androgynous affair -- a matter of feeling, to be sure, but feeling about the *patria*" (232). This statement echoes Sydney Morgan's assertion that "love of country is of no sex" (*O'Briens* xv). Eagleton is not alone among modern scholars in his untroubled acceptance of an equality of imagination in the nation. Most studies of nationalism,[18] including those dedicated to Irish nationalism, expose the underlying ideologies of nationalism yet do not interrogate the implications of gender, leaving a theoretical ellipsis. As such they replicate the (sometimes) tacit relegation of women to the margins of the nation, and ignore the fact that nations and nationalism are usually constructed in part on a gendered basis, with a subordinate role prescribed for women.[19]

The important distinction between the material nature of the state and the spiritual

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[18] I would include here theorists such as Benedict Anderson and E.J. Hobsbawm. Linda Colley does develop a useful analysis of women's role(s) in the rise of British nationalism between 1707 and 1837 in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1701-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992).

[19] During the first few decades of the twentieth century, women activists often had to choose between the nationalist and suffragist causes. Many nationalists believed that Ireland's independence would result in women's rights, and that any energy directed towards gaining the vote for women merely siphoned off energy that could be directed towards the nationalist cause. See Beth McKillen, "Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914-1923", and Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (1983), for discussions of the tensions between nationalist and suffragist groups in Ireland. In her conclusion, Ward documents the continued subordination of women's rights to the nationalist cause in Sinn Féin and the IRA in the 1970s and early 1980s.

quality of the nation (ideally but not always conjoined in a nation-state) informs Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an imagined community. This recognition of the nation as an imaginative construct helps to account for the development of a sense of belonging among members of the nation despite actual economic, social or political inequalities which may exist. As Anderson points out when explaining his choice of the word "community," "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). This "deep, horizontal comradeship" has historically always co-existed with the suppression or devaluing of groups within the nation. Therefore, the political disabilities imposed within the state on some members of the nation do not prevent these individuals from belonging to the nation, but may qualify their membership or the role they may play in the process of imagining and manifesting that nation. If nations are imaginative constructs, "the products of an imaginative ordering of [social and political] experience, not its revealed reality" (Cubitt 3), then we must ask the question "Who does the imagining?"

While it is vital to an understanding of the nation to remember that the nation is not synonymous with the state, there are links between the two; the forces that worked to exclude women from participation in the state also affected their participation in the nation. As patriarchy and nationalism mixed in late eighteenth century Ireland, a "gender-based division of labour" (Curtin, "Women" 133) developed, allowing women to be members of the nation but allotting them a different role within it. The alleged disabilities which curtailed their involvement in the state also limited the extent to which they could actively participate in the process of envisioning the nation: their national imagining was to come to them from men. Rather than opening up an increased imaginative opportunity for women, nationalism seemed to reinscribe the traditional roles for women, including supporting men, and bearing and bringing up children, framing these roles within a nationalist discourse.

The limitations placed on women's involvement in the process of imagining and manifesting the nation are perhaps most visible in the development of United Irish republican nationalism. Influenced by the French Revolution, the United Irish sought to create an inclusive nation which would allow all men, regardless of religion or class, to exercise their public rights and duties. According to Eric Hobsbawm, "the element of citizenship and mass participation or choice" was an integral component of republican nationalism (18-19), and the United Irishmen included universal male suffrage in their revolutionary platform. There was, however, no complementary drive to overthrow traditional gender inequities (as there was, rather briefly, in the early stages of the French Revolution). The emancipatory edge of Locke and Hutcheson, who argued that citizens must consent to be governed, was not extended to women, who were said to have yielded to their husbands this right to political consent.

Women did have a role to play in the United Irish movement, but their involvement tended to be channelled into supportive activities which facilitated men's participation.[20] Women provided aid to United Irish prisoners and their families, raised funds for the cause, and helped to recruit men to the organization (Curtin, "Women" 134). Women swore oaths and became members of United Irish societies; they also performed "the dangerous business of gathering information and carrying secret messages within the vast network of local United Irish societies" (Curtin, "Women" 134). Women's limited political role actually worked in their favour when acting as messengers; they were less likely to be

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[20] See Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, for an account of the dissatisfaction of some members of Cumann na mBan when expected to act as a female auxiliary to the IRA rather than as a fighting force during the Easter Rising. Although many members of Cumann na mBan were prepared to join the male members of the IRA during the Easter Rising, most were turned away by commanders such as Eamon de Valera. Female members of the Irish Citizen Army bore arms and participated in the fighting.

suspected of seditious activities.

In classical republicanism, and in the political philosophies of Francis Hutcheson among others, a key imperative was the "subordination of private interest to the public good" (Curtin 137), expressed in Hutcheson's formula of the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers. Women were to subordinate their private claims to husbands and sons, and exhort men to seek virtue through the fulfillment of their public duties. A woman's role thus was to bear and raise sons who would become good republicans, and to release them, and in fact encourage and pressure them, to perform their civic duties including fighting for the republican cause.[21]

Women's contribution to the imagining of the republican nation was limited by their exclusion from important sites of the enunciation of the nationalist vision. Political theories developed by men underwrote nation, and though women authored political works their texts did not enter into public debate the way that men's did. Women were excluded from meetings at which the policies and philosophies of the movement were discussed and decided. As Kevin Whelan notes, up to the spring of 1798 United Irish meetings were frequently held in pubs, the "key arena of masculine sociability" (*Tree* 90). Men's and women's societies were segregated; Mary Ann McCracken complained of this segregation to her brother, the United Irish leader Henry Joy McCracken, arguing that "there can be no other reason for having them separate but keeping the women in the dark and certainly it is equally ungenerous and uncandid to make tools of them without confiding in them" (McNeill 118). Though women like McCracken saw a greater role for themselves in the envisioning and manifesting of the Irish republican nation, they were

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[21] This attitude found its extreme expression in popular political ballads in which women urge republican men to fulfil their civic obligations, even if it means death. In 'The Patriot Mother', quoted by Curtin, a mother encourages her son to choose execution rather than betrayal: "Dearer, far dearer than ever to me/My darling you'd be on the brave gallows tree" ("Women" 138).

prevented from taking up that role by the gendered division of labour within the nation.

Mary Ann McCracken[22] is a striking example of a woman who sought to negotiate and change the prescriptions which circumscribed women's lives. She had read more political theory than brother Henry Joy, and in her letters to him discussed the implications of these theories for the United Irish movement and their vision of the nation. She read Wollstonecraft as well, and insisted on the inter-connectedness of national politics and gender politics:

> I do not hold out the motive of interest as an inducement for man to be just, as I think the reign of prejudice is nearly at an end, and that the truth and justice of our cause alone is sufficient to support it, as there can be no argument produced in favour of the slavery of woman that has not been used in favour of general slavery and which have been successfully combatted [sic] by many able writers. I therefore hope it is reserved for the Irish nation to strike out something new and to shew an example of candour, generosity and justice superior to any that have gone before them (McNeill 127).

McCracken was drawn into the drama of the rebellion, carrying information to her brother in Kilmainham gaol, providing him with food, clothing and intelligence when he was in hiding after the rebellion, and arranging his escape to America. He was arrested on his way to the boat; McCracken and her father sat through his trial. Her brother requested that she not witness his hanging; however, she arranged for his body to be brought home, and was one of only two family members who walked in his funeral procession. McCracken also met with prison and military officials to argue for the release or pardon of

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[22] McCracken was born in Belfast and attended David Manson's innovative co-educational school. In the late 1780s she and her sister Margaret founded a muslin manufacturing business which remained in operation until 1815. She was involved in philanthropic and political work throughout her life; her causes included poor house reforms, the rehabilitation of female prisoners, the education of poor girls, and the abolition of slavery (Curtin, "Women" 142). When she was "within 17 days of 89" she was handing out anti-slavery tracts to emigrants leaving Belfast for America (McNeill 295).

other United Irish prisoners. When her family prevented her from travelling to Dublin for Thomas Russell's trial, she wrote furiously of having "my liberty of action confined and circumscribed" (McNeill 219). McCracken's access to the process of imagining the nation was limited by her gender, yet she had a significant impact on the historical writing about the rebellion and the United Irish vision. R.R. Madden, author of the most influential nineteenth century history of the United Irish movement, based parts of his account on information and interpretations supplied by Mary Ann McCracken.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle for women like McCracken was the intense power and presence of the symbolic woman invoked in men's nationalist writings. The use of a woman to symbolize the nation was a standard patriotic convention. The allegorical representation of Ireland as an oppressed or victimized woman was a common feature of the aisling.[23] The Patriot politician Henry Grattan invoked this convention when celebrating parliamentary independence in 1782, declaring: "I found Ireland on her knees, I watched over her with an eternal solicitude; I have traced her progress from injuries to arms, and from arms to liberty (quoted in Boyce 113). United Irish political propaganda also represented the nation as a violated woman in need of protection, in order to spur republican men to action. The lived experience and political acumen of real women was subordinated by the value of the symbolic woman in the definition of men's roles and in the encouragement of men's activism in the national struggle.

The last decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a period of intense nationalist activity aimed at reshaping state institutions, whether through the parliamentary autonomy sought by the Protestant colonial nationalists, or through the separatist agenda of the United Irishmen. This period ended with the Act of Union in 1801. The British

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[23] According to Siobhan Kilfeather, the aisling is "[o]ne of the most prevalent forms of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry [...] in which the poet has a dream vision of Ireland as a woman waiting to be rescued from oppression by a lover" (12).

administration had proposed the Union between Britain and Ireland to put an end to political unrest and to encourage economic growth in Ireland. This proposal provoked mixed reactions in Ireland among Protestants and Catholics alike. A vocal Protestant opposition made its views known in the College Green parliament, but many members of the Protestant Ascendancy, frightened by the extent of the rebellion and lured by the promise of future economic benefits, supported the Union. A good proportion of Ulster Dissenters advocated union with Britain, presuming that "in an era of reform their progressive liberalism might find more scope and sympathy in the United Kingdom than in a self-governing Ireland predominantly Catholic" (McDowell, "Revolution" 372). Encouraged by the relief acts passed at the British administration's behest, many Catholics believed that the Union would result in full emancipation (Foster, *Modern* 282). Catholic support for the Union persisted even after the act was passed without the inclusion of emancipation, and not all Catholics later subscribed to Daniel O'Connell's repeal campaigns (McDowell, "Revolution" 372). The Act of Union dissolved the Irish parliament and implemented direct rule from Westminster, effectively limiting nationalists' influence on and access to the political institutions of the state. With the hope of a forthcoming Irish nation-state quashed by the Union, nationalists turned ever more toward the cultural sphere as an arena for political activity. As the political focus moved from state to nation, from parliament to culture, a window of opportunity opened for women writers like Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Morgan to enter the debate about the construction of the nation through their political fictions. In doing so they created a new genre, the national tale.

The standard plot structure of the Irish national tale,[24] first mapped out by Sydney

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[24] In her excellent study of the national tale, "National Character, Nationalist Plots," Katie Trumpener charts the development of the genre in Scotland as well as Ireland. I have restricted my field of study to Ireland.

Owenson in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), follows a metropolitan traveller (normally English, though often with instabilities in this national identity which are revealed later)[25] as he traverses Ireland. He meets a native Irish woman who educates him about her country, its people and its culture. The mentor status of the woman (at least before marriage) gives her a superiority to balance the inequalities of gender and class. The Englishman's prejudices against Ireland are overturned, and he marries his Irish mentor, thereby effecting a personal union which re-enacts the political Union between Ireland and England. This fictional, symbolic union at once reinscribes and resists the inequities of the historical political Union. Under contemporary laws, a woman ceded her property to her husband and subsumed her legal identity within his as she took his surname. However, the national tale replaces the traditional authoritarian marriage with a companionate model. The English husband has undergone a transformation as a result of his experiences and education in Ireland, signalling a shift in power relations within the marriage and between the countries. No longer simply a backward colonial possession, Ireland's unique national identity is recognized as the complement of England's within the Union.

An integral feature of the Irish national tale is the creation of a representation of Ireland aimed explicitly at an English readership, for the purpose of educating that readership about Ireland and of offering an Irish viewpoint on the relationship between the two countries. The direct appeal to an English audience, the "acute awareness of the metropolitan addressee informing the text" (Ferris, "Narrating" 291), has affected the reading and interpretation of the national tale. In the critical reception of the genre in the past, the national tale tended to disappear within the genre of regional or provincial novel. This categorization elides the political energies of these texts, reducing them to vehicles

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[25] The metropolitan traveller is often an absentee landlord (or the son of a landowner) who has resided in England all his life. Although this grants him the metropolitan perspective, his "Englishness" must be qualified by his Irish connection.

for the recording of "local colour" for the entertainment of a metropolitan audience. In recent years the national tale has been regarded as "a distinct genre founded in the British peripheries in the early nineteenth century" (Ferris, "Narrating" 288); however, as Ina Ferris notes, most critics have considered the national tale to be "a colonial genre that harnessed nationalist energies in the Celtic territories on behalf of an imperial "British" identity" ("Narrating" 288). According to this reading, the national tale tames and contains Irish culture: the "wild" Celtic peripheries become civilized, assimilable or at least acceptable within the developing British imperial identity.

Joep Leerssen terms the national tale's address to an external, English audience "exotericism" (257), noting a contrast with the works of pre-Union writers who projected an Irish readership as well.[26] He argues that the exotericism of the post-Union novel works to divorce the Irish author from an Irish readership and to alienate her from her subject matter: the author "becomes an intermediary, an exteriorized, detached observer" (Leerssen 258). As a result,

> Ireland as a *representandum*, as subject-matter, does not speak in its own voice but is spoken for; the author speaks, not as an Irish person, but on behalf of Irish people, adopts a (purportedly neutral) midway point between readership (English) and topic (Irish) (Leerssen 258).

In Leerssen's model (as with others), the national tale packages a passive or silent Ireland to be consumed by an English readership.

According to this reading, the national tale's representation of Ireland has the effect

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[26] Leerssen cites the introduction to Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) to illustrate the pre-Union relationship to a projected English/British audience:

> As yet, we are too little known to our noble neighbour of Britain; were we better acquainted, we should be better friends. The British muse is not yet informed that she has an elder sister in this isle; let us introduce them to each other! (quoted in Leerssen 255-56)

As Leerssen indicates, although Brooke refers to a projected British audience, this readership is "a third party"; she directly addresses an Irish audience, with which she claims affinity by using the pronoun "we" (256).

of turning the country into an exotic entertainment for the English audience. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo define "exoticism" as "the aestheticizing means by which the pain of [imperialist] expansion is converted to spectacle, to culture in the service of empire, even as it may also act to change the originating national culture" (3). If writing about Ireland from the outside, from the metropolis, exoticizes the country and its people, then, according to Leerssen, Morgan and other practitioners of the national tale in Ireland inscribe a sort of "auto-exoticism" within their texts (262). Their writing from within Ireland, as it attempts to represent Ireland to an English audience, makes Ireland and its people into the "other," even as it seeks to familiarize the metropolitan reader with the country and its customs (Leerssen 262).

Ina Ferris provides an important counterpoint to this reading, in which she argues that the national tale "deploy[s] the pragmatics of narrative to effect a breach in metropolitan reason so as to gain Ireland a particular kind of hearing":

> Building out of romance modes and the proto-ethnographic discourse of travel, the national tale relocates the scene of cultural encounter, confounding the distinction between "over here" and "over there" in order to move the modern metropolitan subject/reader into a potentially transformative relation of proximity ("Narrating" 288).

In a useful clarification, Ferris notes the difference between the mimetic and the performative functions of representation. The national tale not only offers a "duplication or imitation" of Ireland (the mimetic function), but also offers "the performance of a potential" -- a potential nation -- as well as the presentation of Ireland to an audience in order "to create a certain effect" (Ferris, "Narrating" 289). This accords with Katie Trumpener's assertion that the national tale sought "not only to reflect but to direct national sentiment" (689). The destabilizing of metropolitan certainties experienced by the metropolitan traveller during his fictional encounter with Irish culture is replicated in the dislocation experienced by the metropolitan reader who witnesses and is drawn into the

transformative encounter as she reads the text.

It is essential not to diminish the exoticizing potential of the representation of Ireland in the national tale, nor to ignore the genre's implication in colonial discourse. However, Ferris' emphasis on the transformative possibilities of cultural encounter reasserts the national tale's political edge, turning it from a tool for colonial containment into a text that "operates in between standard binaries, seeking to effect their crossing":

> It may gesture toward the presentness and interiority of a "native" writing, and it may move within the textuality and exteriority of a "foreign" narrative, but its specificity derives from its eluding both categories: standing neither inside nor outside, the national tale occupies the space of their encounter. And through the dynamism and mobility of encounter that it activates, the subjected nation becomes not so much a "picture" gratifying curiosity (although the picturesque always remains in play) as a participant in an event through which metropolitan perceptions themselves undergo a certain estrangement (Ferris, "Narrating" 292).

As part of their political agenda, and in order to assure the necessary success in the English market,[27] the Anglo-Irish authors of the national tale had to direct an explicit appeal to an English audience. However, the critical focus on this appeal disregards the existence of an Irish readership whose political opinions the authors also sought to influence. This Irish readership included Edgeworth and Morgan's Anglo-Irish compatriots, as well as extending increasingly to the Catholic Irish. As Gaelic was replaced by English in the early nineteenth century, as reading rooms and literacy

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[27] The English market was important to Anglo-Irish writers not only because it offered a larger potential readership but also because before 1800 their works were not copyright-protected in Ireland. The 1801 Copyright Act which came into force in Ireland as well as England extended copyright protection to works published in Ireland, but unfortunately had a catastrophic economic effect on the Irish publishing industry. Irish publishers could no longer count on the financial boon of reprints of successful novels (previously unprotected by copyright in Ireland), and the printing work that remained was not sufficient to maintain the pre-Union status of the industry (Eagleton 145-46).

campaigns made English texts more accessible, and as Daniel O'Connell's mass-based campaigns increased political awareness, the Irish audience for political works grew ever larger.

The didactic imperative of the national tale leads to narrative disruptions which fracture the aesthetic reading of the text. Most national tales, and Morgan's in particular, come with a framework of footnotes. For the most part, these footnotes serve to ground the author's representation of Irish culture in the authority of personal experience or scholarly (antiquarian) texts. The insertion of an asterisk in the fiction at moments when Irish customs or language are at their most pronounced in order to insist on the "realness" of these customs highlights difference, and at times has the effect of exoticising Ireland: the author reminds the reader that "Ireland is stranger than the laws of fictional *vraisemblance* will allow for" (Leerssen 261). But at the same time this form further destabilizes the perspective of the metropolitan reader. The function of the footnotes is to claim legitimacy for descriptions of Ireland, and in a way for Irish culture. The asterisks serve to mark the insertion of authority into the narrative, as the author claims legitimacy for another point of view and lived experience, and also claims legitimacy for another culture of authorities, the Irish antiquarians who have studied, authenticated, and authorized Irish culture.

Marilyn Butler makes an interesting point, citing Edgeworth, Morgan, Hamilton, Porter and Ferrier as the authors of the first national tales, and noting that these novels include powerful and articulate women characters. Butler suggests that "[t]he imagined community and the empowered woman tend to appear in a symbiotic relation, each needing the other as a condition of existence" ("Introduction" 50). These women are individuals who may be read symbolically; they may serve as the symbol of the nation but they also have lived experience and political awareness. Thus they are unlike the purely symbolic and insubstantial women that often populate men's nationalist writings. The

women in the national tale tend to draw on the tradition of woman as keeper of civic virtue or cultural memory, what Butler refers to as "a recognized focus of national consciousness" ("Introduction" 52), rather than on the tradition of the woman-nation as victim, threatened by outside forces. As Butler points out, these women do not maintain power for any length of time; however, these characters and their stories serve as a critique of the purely male role in nation-building:

> Far from simply allowing a woman protagonist to act out clichés from the early nineteenth century masculine historical or colonialist yarn, the woman's version identifies the politicking and the wars as particularly male pursuits, and holds them up to scrutiny. Both the political concept, might is right, and the ideal of masculinity emerge undercut from this series of fictions ("Introduction" 53).

These novels insist on a centrality of women to the nation that does not depend on symbolic qualities (even as they may symbolize the nation). They attempt to move beyond the straitjacket of prescriptions which limits women's role in imagining the nation as it augments men's.

The national tale creates a picture of a stable place through an accretion of detail, and the plot's movement is enacted as a passage through space rather than through time. As the metropolitan traveller journeys from England through Ireland, the novel presents stratified cultural zones within this spatial framework; Katie Trumpener has suggested that this may be read as the "spatialization of political choices" (693). As the national tale developed and changed over the early decades of the nineteenth century, these political choices also changed, to reflect and direct the political climate in Ireland and England. Moving from the early focus on the education of English readers, Irish national tales began to offer "critical sociologies of colonial society" and finally to present "militant histories of colonialism" (Trumpener 703). In their interrogations of Ireland's status within the Union, they also raised questions about the nature of the metropolitan centre, at at time when a new British imperial identity was forming.

In this thesis I construct a case study of Irish nationalist literature written by women in the early decades of the nineteenth century, by looking at two fictional responses to the same event, the Rebellion of 1798. I have chosen the rebellion as an historical benchmark because the political and religious issues and the violence involved affected all levels of Irish society and resonated in England as well. The rebellion was also the subject of numerous contesting interpretations generated in the decades following the Union. I have chosen to focus on works by Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Morgan, two authors who enjoyed great popular success in both Ireland and England in the post-Union period. The works of both these authors were reviewed in literary magazines in England and Ireland; their reputations and popularity ensured that the ideas presented through the medium of their fiction were discussed and debated in the public arena. The influence of these authors in the development of Anglo-Irish literature is widely acknowledged by critics (Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* is often regarded as the first Anglo-Irish novel), and their contributions to Irish political thought are beginning to be recognized (Morgan in particular is cited as an influence for the Young Ireland movement). Edgeworth and Morgan are also interesting studies in that they both may be considered as members of the dominant elite in Irish society. Edgeworth was the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord and later managed the family estate. Although Morgan was the daughter of an Irish actor, Robert Owenson (originally MacOwen), she was taken up by Irish high society after the success of *The Wild Irish Girl*, and became a member of that society when she married Sir Charles Morgan. As members of the Irish ruling elite, Edgeworth and Morgan may be seen as writing within the dominant discourse, and yet as women, they are marginalized within the power structures of their society, and as such their ability to voice the dominant discourse is qualified by their gender.

Bell Chevigny suggests that we use literary theory

not just to analyse the texts that voice the dominant discourses or even to

> uncover the points of tension within the discourses, but also to find places where the discourse could be challenged and to identify the challengers (Chevigny et al. 24-25)

She refers to this process as "patrolling the borders." This enterprise seems particularly suited for the examination of these two national tales by Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Morgan. Through their national fictions these authors engaged in their own processes of patrolling borders, exploring issues of national identity, cultural difference, and the boundaries and crossings of metropolis and colony. The examination of Edgeworth's and Morgan's trenchant critiques of colonial society and their fictional constructions of the Irish nation allows for further insights into Irish nationalism in the post-Union period, and develops our understanding of how nationalism may be inflected by gender.

In the following chapters I consider the ways in which Edgeworth and Morgan use the genre of the national tale to echo and challenge the dominant discourse, and to offer alternative interpretations of historical events and the contemporary political situation. In the first chapter, I examine Maria Edgeworth's seemingly contradictory use of political economy and of fable in her critique of the Protestant Ascendancy and in her plan for Anglo-Irish reform. In the second chapter, I explore Sydney Morgan's use of contemporary Irish historical studies to question the authoritative status of historical narratives and to offer a critique of the colonial relationship between England and Ireland. Morgan exposes the dangers of the conflation of history and myth yet points to a new nationalist mythology through a synthesis and re-interpretation of recent historical events. In both these chapters, I consider the strategies Edgeworth and Morgan had to use as women authors to claim authority for their political and literary voices.

Restoring the "Natural" Order:
Ascendancy Reform in Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui*

In her second Irish novel, *Ennui* (1809), Maria Edgeworth writes her own version of the causes, events and aftermath of the Rebellion of 1798. Edgeworth's satire traces the source of the poverty, corruption and inefficiency pandemic in Ireland to the poor management of the Anglo-Irish landlords who neglect their responsibilities while profiting from their estates. Although the Rebellion of 1798 provided clear evidence that the Protestant Ascendancy had failed to establish a hegemony over Catholics and Dissenters in Ireland, Edgeworth suggests that a *reformed* Ascendancy is the only class in Irish society capable of ruling through moral suasion. In recounting the progress of the Earl of Glenthorn from indolent aristocrat to enterprising professional, Edgeworth outlines a plan of reform for the Irish nation which creates a productive ruling class whose paternal interest will help form an educated, industrious peasantry. The plot of *Ennui* centres on personal and national change, yet the novel illustrates Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's contention that "dominant social formations can and do reconstitute themselves around the self-same contradictions that destabilize them" (93). By casting the Rebellion as an Ascendancy problem that requires an Ascendancy-driven solution, Edgeworth constructs a "natural order" for Ireland which elides and contains the competing voices of the Catholic leadership and of the United Irishmen and their Defender allies.

The Act of Union signalled the defeat of the United Irishmen's hopes for a new republic; it also formalized a changed dynamic between the Protestant Ascendancy and the British government. Before the Union, members of the Ascendancy saw themselves as a "nation apart" (Moynahan 6), distinct from the Catholic Irish and equal to their English neighbours. However, this perception of equality between the kingdoms was illusory. The Ascendancy's distinct and privileged position within Ireland had been established and maintained through the legislative and military support of the English government. The Ascendancy may have chafed under Westminster's invasive legislation before the Union,

but the 1798 Rebellion showed all too clearly the fundamental role the English administration played in securing Ascendancy rule and Protestant property.

Some members of the Ascendancy favoured the Union as a means of preserving Protestant power after Catholic emancipation: they believed that the voice of Catholics elected to office would carry little power in the midst of a predominantly Protestant combined parliament.[1] However, given that Irish representation was limited to one hundred members in the house of commons, it was questionable whether Anglo-Irish concerns would receive adequate consideration at Westminster (McDowell 365). Maria Edgeworth's father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, was among those who believed that a union with Britain could benefit Ireland economically; however, he voted against the bill because he was disgusted by the British administration's blatant use of bribery to influence the vote.[2] The corruption which tainted the Union vote in Dublin sounded a warning that

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[1] Although Catholic emancipation was promised as one of the conditions of the Act of Union, the support of prominent politicians including William Pitt did not prevent Geroge III from vetoing the bill in 1803. This legislative about-face had as much if not more to do with the ramifications of Catholic empancipation for England, than with any over-riding desire to support the Ascendancy. The Catholic Emancipation Act was finally passed in 1829, removing the restrictions which prevented Catholics from holding military, civil, or political offices. It is ironic that this legislation actually decreased the number of Catholics eligible to vote in county elections. Irish Catholics had been disfranchised in 1728, but in response to the increasing tensions in the 1780s and 1790s, the British government pressured the Irish parliament to pass a Relief Act in 1793 enfranchising (male) Catholics once again. This act allowed 40 shilling freeholders to vote in county elections; however, the Catholic Emancipation Act raised the voting requirement to £10, reducing the total number of Irish county voters from 216,000 to 37,000 (Foster, *Modern* 302).

[2] In a letter to Erasmus Darwin, R.L. Edgeworth writes that, "though I think such a union as would identify the nations, so as that Ireland should be as Yorkshire to Great Britain, would be an excellent thing; yet I also think, that the good people of Ireland ought to be *persuaded* of this truth, and not be dragooned into submission" (Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, II:252). Although Edgeworth hoped the union would "identify

the united parliament would simply expedite the implementation of Britain's colonial policy in Ireland, regardless of the wishes of the Anglo-Irish.

In effect, the Ascendancy faced the same fate as the Old English governing class which it had replaced. The English administration had found it expedient to diminish and finally to extinguish the distinction between the native Irish and the Old English, creating and dispossessing a new Catholic aggregate through the penal laws. The Ascendancy could no longer count on preferential treatment from the British administration after the Union, "the constitutional effect of which was to make all Irish the same and subject to the direct rule of the British government" (Moynahan 6). The promise of Catholic Emancipation presaged the collapse of Ascendancy privilege into an undifferentiated Irish population tarred with the negative stereotypes formerly reserved for the Catholic Irish.

As the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord Maria Edgeworth belonged to the Ascendancy class. The Edgeworth family's history in Ireland was typical of the Ascendancy[3]; however, Edgeworth's father was not a typical Ascendancy landlord. Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a reforming landowner whose approach to estate management was influenced by Adam Smith, Arthur Young, and his correspondence with English Midlands industrialists.[4] His refusal to engage in sectarian politics raised questions

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the nations," his analogy reduces Ireland to the status of a shire within England, rather than an equal nation within Great Britain.

[3] Marilyn Butler suggests that the history of the Edgeworth family in Ireland was "typical of the Anglo-Irish gentry" (Butler, *Edgeworth* 13). The Edgeworths were part of the New English colonial settlement; in 1619 King James I granted Francis Edgeworth the 600 acres in Co. Longford that came to be known as Edgeworthstown. During the Great Rebellion in 1641 the estate was attacked by a Catholic mob, and in 1689 the Edgeworths were briefly dispossessed when King James II resettled expropriated land on former Catholic landowners (Butler, *Edgeworth* 14).

[4] Both R.L. and Maria Edgeworth read Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), as well as Arthur Young's *Tour in Ireland*

about his loyalty to the Ascendancy during the tense period leading up to the rebellion. In her continuation of her father's *Memoirs*, Edgeworth records that her father's inquiries into the wrongful imprisonment of Catholics and his decision to include both Catholics and Protestants in his yeomanry corps aroused the suspicion of his Protestant neighbours (Edgeworth, *Memoirs* 206-209, 212). After the French landing at Killala he was accused of attempting to signal the invading troops from the top of Longford gaol (Edgeworth, *Memoirs* 228). He and an out-of-uniform officer were accosted by a mob which "pelt[ed] them with hard turf, stones, and brickbats" (Edgeworth, *Memoirs* 230). He suffered the further injury of seeing the instigator of the attack acquitted.

Edgeworth fictionalized her father's experiences in *Ennui*, which she began writing in 1804, three years after the Act of Union came into effect, and one year after Robert Emmet's unsuccessful rising briefly revived the republican threat. She was well aware of the "party spirit" which led to sectarian violence in Ireland, and had witnessed the dangerous effects of such violence during the rebellion. As she worked on *Ennui* the competing sectarian interpretations of the rebellion began to proliferate and solidify. Raised in a secular family and educated in Enlightenment values, she deplored sectarian hatred. She directed some of her harshest criticism, both in *Ennui* and in her continuation of her father's memoirs, at the extremist Protestant Orangemen. Yet although she supported Catholic Emancipation, she did not want to see control of the state simply pass from Protestant to Catholic hands, asserting that "Catholics *can* and should have equal rights [...] but *must* not have a *dominant* religion" (quoted in O'Ferrall 116). She shared

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(1780). R.L. Edgeworth was introduced by Erasmus Darwin to the Lunar Society, a group of English Midlands industrialists which included Darwin, James Watt, James Keir, and Josiah Wedgwood among others (Butler, *Edgeworth* 33). While not all members of the Lunar Society were "practising industrialists", they were drawn together by "their interest in bringing scientific investigation to bear on industrial problems" (Butler, *Edgeworth* 34).

the concern of many liberal Protestants that the nature of the Catholic religion, what they saw as its deference to pope and priest, hindered its adherents from participating fully in an enlightened liberal leadership. Again, like many liberal Protestants she believed that given access to enlightened education and to full political rights, Catholics would become better able to exercise their political duties. Her challenge in *Ennui* was to find a way of envisioning an Irish nation which included Catholics and Protestants and allowed for a political and social framework which would enable the enactment of controlled reforms.

Although the Union promised to effect reforms by identifying the nations and implementing Catholic Emancipation, it had proven to be an incomplete measure. Dublin Castle and its English-appointed administrators maintained a powerful position as Ireland continued to be governed by a separate executive (O'Ferrall 17). Edgeworth had inherited the colonial nationalist suspicion of the British agenda in Ireland, and did not believe that an British administration could be trusted to effect policies which would eliminate sectarianism. She voices these suspicions in her father's memoirs, suggesting that the British government allowed various subversive groups to battle each other in the 1790s for the purpose of convincing the Irish gentry that a Union was necessary to ensure the safety of their lives and property:

> It is certain, that the combinations of the disaffected at home, and the advance of foreign invaders, were not checked till the peril became imminent, and till the purpose of creating universal alarm had been fully effected. As soon as the Commander in Chief and the Lord Lieutenant (at that time joined in the same person) exerted his full military and civil power, the invaders were defeated and the rebellion was extinguished (Edgeworth *Memoirs* 239-40).

The enactment of necessary reforms and the development of the economy required political stability, not the upheaval of rebellion nor the divisiveness of sectarian schisms. Building on the defeat of the rebels, and the death of the old Ascendancy ways, Edgeworth set about imagining an improved and harmonious Irish nation and constructing

a progressive identity for the Anglo-Irish.

As in her other national tales, Edgeworth directs her argument primarily to a projected British audience, establishing a point of connection with English readers through the character of the English-born Earl of Glenthorn, and implying that, like Glenthorn, her audience is familiar with the workings of English society but unfamiliar with the customs and realities of Ireland. Her underlying message to her British audience is that within a United Kingdom, the unique character of the Irish nation and its inhabitants must be recognized and respected. She implies that British ignorance and prejudice regarding the Irish national character and social conditions prevent British politicians from designing policies that truly serve the needs of Ireland and its people. She has to be diplomatic in presenting her case; otherwise, her British readers might extend the stereotype that the Irish were "unreliable and tended to exaggeration" to Edgeworth herself, as a means of deflecting any blame that might be attached to British policy in Ireland (Deane, "Fiction" 81). She blends social realism and satire to represent 'objectively' and humorously Irish social conditions, positioning herself as an enlightened Anglo-Irish commentator who can provide the data and insights necessary to a proper understanding of the Irish situation.

She grounds her critique of old-style Ascendancy rule and her plan for Anglo-Irish reform in the theories of political economy, which she had studied as a teenager. By invoking the discourse of political economy, a discipline associated with disinterested "scientific" pursuit, she appropriates the authoritative voice of "an elite observer who is impartial, integrated, and capable of speaking about - and for - other men" (Poovey 43). At the same time, she claims this authority for her class:

> Knowledge becomes a disinterested knowledge of what the public is, and of what is good for the public, and it becomes the property of a particular *social*, and not simply of a particular occupational class. Ignorance too becomes the property of a particular class, the class which is the object of knowledge, and so the object of the discourse (Barrell, quoted in Poovey

43).

She presents the Anglo-Irish as the only class with the education, knowledge and ability to lead the country; the basis of their authority appears self-evident. It no longer matters that the old Ascendancy either neglected or misruled the lower classes, resulting in a rebellion. This new, reformed Anglo-Irish class would use education and sound economic principles to lead the lower classes to prosperity and productivity -- with the implication that an educated, productive peasantry will eschew irrational and disruptive outbursts of civil violence.

Edgeworth draws on Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), in which Smith differentiates between productive and unproductive occupations (Butler, "Introduction" 28). Smith slots the monarch and the aristocracy into his unproductive category, and Edgeworth follows his lead in levelling her satire at English aristocrats and the Anglo-Irish peers who attempt to imitate them. According to Smith, landowners who lease their land may still be considered productive if they reinvest part of their profits in the "maintenance and improvement" of the land. This reinvestment increases the productivity of their tenant farmers, and thus adds to the wealth of the landowners and ultimately to the wealth of the nation (Butler, "Introduction" 30-31). She also links productivity -- the fulfillment of the tasks and responsibilities required by one's social position -- to the achievement and practise of civic virtue. This focus on productivity and civic virtue make her critique equally applicable to England and Ireland; she refutes the assumption that the lack of productivity is an inherently Irish trait, thereby destabilizing metropolitan stereotypes of the Irish national character.

Ennui was originally published as part of the three-volume collection entitled *Tales of Fashionable Life*[5]; as R. L. Edgeworth wrote in his preface, all the tales were "intended

[5] The other tales in the collection were *Almeria, Madame de Fleury, The Dun* and *Manoeuvring*.

to point out some of those errors to which the higher classes of society are disposed" (quoted in Butler, *Edgeworth* 286). The four other tales are set in England, and in *Ennui* Edgeworth begins her critique in England, where the Earl of Glenthorn is brought up to value privilege over productivity. The Earl is the son of an absentee landlord who enjoyed the revenue of his Irish estate but spent almost no time in Ireland; as Glenthorn notes, his father "had a dislike to that country, and I grew up in his prejudices" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 145). "Bred up in luxurious indolence" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 143) in England, Glenthorn begins to suffer from ennui long before he reaches the age of majority (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 144). Without the anchor of education and industry, he descends from foolishness through vice to despair. He is cheated by his guardian, steward and servants (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 147, 150); his gaming losses lead him to marry an heiress against his will; she subsequently leaves him for his steward (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 150, 162, 165). He turns to fashionable epicurism, lapses into hypochondria, and finally becomes suicidal. The young Glenthorn is unable to see beyond his wealth and social position to the duties and responsibilities Edgeworth suggests he also inherits. By locating Glenthorn's formative (and destructive) early years in England, she undermines anti-Irish prejudices, reminding English readers that these vices exist in their country as well. The epigraph to *Ennui*[6] suggests that the novel is not simply a challenge to Anglo-Irish landowners to reform their management practices, but also a challenge to Edgeworth's English readers to gauge themselves against the productive model she espouses.

Having established the ill effect of indolence on an individual's character, Edgeworth moves the action to Ireland, where she may illustrate the effect of indolence,

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[6] Marilyn Butler gives the translation of the Italian epigraph as "Everyone listened smilingly to the pretty little tales, in which they all saw the faults of other people rather than their own; or if they suspected their own, they believed that no one else would do so" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 353n1).

neglect and corruption on a nation. When Glenthorn lands in Ireland, he is pleasantly surprised by the elegance of Dublin; however, he quickly learns that opulent exteriors are belied by poor management and neglect. An Irish gentleman tells Glenthorn that in Ireland: "We begin like princes, and we end like beggars" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 170). Glenthorn's castle proves another visual example of an ambitious beginning ruined by bad management and neglect. As Glenthorn drives up to his home, Ellinor shouts from a window "'Mind the big hole in the middle of the bridge, God Bless *yees*'" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 177). The castle presents an imposing appearance, but on closer inspection, it has deteriorated in parts to the point of posing a danger.

Edgeworth illustrates the fatuity of the Ascendancy while underlining the links between English and Irish high society when she parodies the slavish desire of many Anglo-Irish landowners to imitate fashionable English society. Their undiscriminating admiration for the English *bon ton* leads Lady Ormsby and her circle to idolize visitors who spend time in Ireland. The visitors, for their part, are only there to make an impression and enjoy a status (mistakenly conferred on account of their Englishness) which would be denied them at home. According to Glenthorn, Mrs Norton and Lady Hauton, the vaunted guests at Ormsby Villa, "were persons of no consequence and of no marked character in their own country," yet in Ireland they make "a prodigious *sensation*," "turn[ing] the heads of half Dublin by the extravagance of their dress, the impertinence of their airs, and the audacity of their conduct" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 222). Only Lady Geraldine values integrity over imitation, and she urges her friends to cast off their devotion to second-rate English fashion: "'O! my dear countrywomen, let us never stoop to admire and imitate these second-hand airs and graces, follies and vices. Let us dare to be ourselves!" (Edgeworth *Ennui* 225). Through Lady Geraldine, Edgeworth argues that the Irish have a distinct identity which is every bit as worthwhile as that of the English, and that persons of

their rank would do better to "dare" to be Irish than to imitate persons who do not represent the best of English society.[7]

Edgeworth satirizes metropolitan ignorance and insularity in the character of Lord Craiglethorpe, the metropolitan traveller "full of English prejudices against Ireland and everything Irish" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 209). He views Ireland through a colonial lens, in which he is reflected back as the master and better of his Irish hosts. Lady Geraldine, angered by "his ill-bred show of contempt for the Irish" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 209), condemns his attitude towards "us poor Irish savages":

> here he comes to hospitable, open-hearted Ireland; eats as well as he can in his own country; drinks better than he can in his own country; sleeps as well as he can in his own country; accepts all our kindness without a word or a look of thanks, and seems the whole time to think, that "Born for his use, we live but to oblige him" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 210).

Craiglethorpe sees nothing but the stereotypes which his prejudice predisposes him to see, and then disseminates these prejudices in the guise of first-hand observation. His lack of knowledge about Ireland and his inability to see Ireland as it really is typifies the worst of English attitudes towards Ireland and renders the English unfit to govern Ireland.

Without effective and responsible leadership, corruption and brutishness rush in to fill the vacuum. Although the Ascendancy is the governing class, its members undermine their effectiveness as legislators by becoming caught up in the corruption and power plays which characterize Dublin Castle. Edgeworth derides the ambition which attracts land-owners to the power and intrigue of politics while distracting them from the attendant responsibilities. Lord O'Toole exemplifies the self-importance and questionable motivation of the typical Ascendancy politician: "his lordship's whole soul seemed devoted to

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[7] Edgeworth develops this theme further in *The Absentee*, in which Lady Clonbrony, an absentee landlord's wife, earns nothing but contempt for her endeavours to enter and imitate London society.

ambition, and he talked so much of great men, and state affairs, and court intrigues, and honours and preferments" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 218). Edgeworth links these concerns with a selfish desire for power: O'Toole's recital incites a desire for power in Glenthorn's mind -- "I thought only of the pleasures of power. Such is the infectious nature of ambition!" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 218). Although Lord O'Toole's ambition may seem laudable in the face of Glenthorn's ennui, this ambition results in an equal neglect of the lower classes and their concerns. Edgeworth allows Lady Geraldine a more forthright statement of contempt in her evaluation of Lord O'Toole and his brother, Lord Kilrush:

> I suppose you know there are many Tooles in Ireland; some very ancient, respectable and useful: this, however, is but a mere political tool, and the worst of all tools, a cat's paw. There's one thing to the credit of these brothers, they agree vastly well; for one delights in being always on the stage, and the other always behind the scenes.... My lord O'Toole is -- artifice without art. My lord Kilrush -- importance without power (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 221).

Dublin Castle, the "Irish Court" which was the power centre of colonial government rather than the College Green parliament (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 219), is clearly identified as the locus of intrigue and corruption. Its power over individuals (as when Cecil, a capable administrator, is denied a post for no better reason than for having offended O'Toole) rests on preferment and political manoeuvring, rather than earned respect and proven abilities.

Edgeworth suggests that the prejudiced, hard line stance that Hardcastle, Sir Harry Ormsby's agent, shares with so many others of his class has laid the groundwork for the rebellion that now threatens civil order. As the reforming agent McLeod points out, Hardcastle's method of estate management reinforces the poverty of his tenants by encouraging middle-men, who will "underset the land, and live in idleness, whilst they *rack* a parcel of wretched under-tenants" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 190). Hardcastle insists that education must be denied to Catholics in order to keep the tenantry quiet. In his experience, "poor scholars" become "the most troublesome seditious rascals in the community":

> 'No, sir, no, trust me -- keep the Irish common people ignorant, and you keep 'em quiet; and that's the only way with them; for they are too quick and smart, as it is, naturally. Teach them to read and write, and it's just adding fuel to fire -- fire to gunpowder, sir. Teach them any thing, and directly you *set them up*: now it's our business to *keep them down*, unless, sir, you'd wish to have your throat cut' (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 193).

Hardcastle's great boast is that no one can "show me a quieter, better-managed set of people than I have made of mine" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 193). As long as he keeps them poor and uneducated, under tight control, he believes he may quell any unrest. However, beneath his bravado, Hardcastle is besieged, under constant threat of a tenant revolt. It is not surprising then that Mr -- "now *Captain*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 245) -- Hardcastle figures in the sectarian "violent party" which brutally and indiscriminately attempts to rout out the rebels.

As Edgeworth points out, the lack of effective leadership in Ireland means that there is no legal or political framework to protect tenants from the caprices of the upper classes (a framework which she suggests exists in England). As Glenthorn discovers in an earlier dispute with Hardcastle, the legal system at the local level is as corrupt as the political system at the national level. In recounting this dispute, Glenthorn refers to "*my* justice of peace and *his* justice of peace," and goes on to explain the extent of the corruption in the Irish legal system:

> To English ears the possessive pronouns *my* and *his* may sound extraordinary, prefixed to a justice of peace; but, in many parts of Ireland, this language is perfectly correct. A great man talks of *making* a justice of the peace with perfect confidence; a very great man talks with as much certainty of *making* a sheriff; and a sheriff makes the jury; and the jury makes the law (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 198).

The partiality and corruption of the legal system become even more pronounced during the rebellion, when even the nominal rule of law breaks down. Glenthorn, "used to the regular course of justice which prevailed in England," finds the "summary proceedings" of his neighbours more shocking than the "symptoms of insurrection" (Edgeworth, *Ennui*

245). "Justice" is meted out along party lines, and thus Glenthorn's attempts to prosecute the loyalists who injured his foster brother merely cast suspicion on his own loyalty (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 247-48).

Edgeworth's warning is clear. As long as landowners and their agents keep the tenants in poverty, deny them education and prevent them from gaining justice, the threat of insurrection will always remain. Men like Hardcastle use their privilege to oppress the tenants, and when some of their victims rebel, the only response they know is even greater oppression. Until landowners institute a new system of estate management based on productivity and improvement, the cycle of oppression and rebellion will continue, with the certainty of an escalation in the level of violence.

Edgeworth constructs a two-tiered Irish society, simplifying the complex social strata in Ireland into a dynamic between an Anglo-Irish ruling class and a Gaelic, Catholic lower class. In this portrayal of Irish society, the middle classes disappear. She suggests that the character of the Catholic lower classes is dependent upon and directly formed by the actions of the higher classes. In her portrayal of lower-class Catholic characters, she illustrates the effects of Ascendancy misrule, arguing that tenants living under these conditions have no impetus to become productive nor to improve their landlords' estates. Those tenants who do make improvements or try to better their situation may still lose all due to the landlord's greed or mismanagement, and can expect no protection from a corrupt and ineffectual justice system. Too lazy to develop a sustained plan to improve the lot of his tenants, Glenthorn's response to the poverty he sees on his estate is to give "indiscriminate donations to objects apparently the most miserable" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 189). His actions are self-serving in that they relieve his "uneasy feeling of pity" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 189), and they simply worsen the situation: he is soon surrounded by "crowds of eloquent beggars" who would rather seek his charity than work steadily

(Edgeworth, *Ennui* 190). Lacking the training, means or motivation to improve their possessions or homes, Catholic peasants like Paddy and Ellinor become accustomed to broken-down chaises and dilapidated cabins.

Edgeworth's lower class Irish characters express the deference and loyalty often included in descriptions of the Irish national character at the time. However, Edgeworth challenges the assumption that blind loyalty and servility are inherent traits of the Irish peasant. Once Edgeworth reveals Christy O'Donoghoe to be the real earl of Glenthorn, his deference to his aristocratic foster brother is revealed to be the product of his upbringing rather than a natural response. The loyalty of Glenthorn's old nurse Ellinor, which leads her to travel to England and to care for him after his accident, takes on a different light once she later reveals that he is actually her biological son. Her primary loyalty is to her own family, and this leads her to switch one of her sons for the real earl. When she fears that another son, Owen, has been arrested as a rebel, she reveals Glenthorn's true identity, and expects him to feel an immediate loyalty to his biological family which will supersede the responsibilities of his position.

Edgeworth further explodes the myth of Irish deference by revealing the subversiveness that may be masked by servility. As a member of a subordinate class Joe Kelly must know the dominant class as well if not better than its members know themselves. Glenthorn, a member of the dominant class, knows almost nothing about his underling. Glenthorn sees Kelly only in terms of the functions that Kelly performs for him as a servant or as an entertainer. Glenthorn's privileged position blinds him to the possibility that Kelly may be more than the sum of the functions he performs, that his deference may be a cover for rebelliousness. This lack of reciprocal knowledge between landlords and tenants is a serious threat: Kelly knows Glenthorn's weaknesses and how to use them.

In her portrayal of Kelly Edgeworth hints at the dangers of the unequal relationship between landlord and servant, but then withdraws from its full implications by turning Kelly into a cowardly buffoon. The improbable rebel plot to enlist Glenthorn is foiled when the earl easily neutralizes Kelly by locking him in a closet. In writing her version of the Rebellion, Edgeworth contains the threat posed by the United Irish movement by portraying its members as "upstart and ignorant *associators*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 248) and as "desperate wretches called *defenders*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 245).[8] Glenthorn's description of their campaign, that "*the rebels were up, and the rebels were down*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 247; italics in original), suggests that the United Irishmen lacked leadership and strategy. By identifying Joe Kelly as "a *united-man*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 261), Edgeworth further diminishes the threat posed by the historical United Irishmen. She suggests the restriction of United Irish membership to self-serving members of the lower classes, negating the idealism and intellectual grounding of the movement, and erasing the power of the movement to enlist supporters across class lines. Edgeworth implies that the United Irishmen consisted primarily of Defenders, portraying them as a motley crew of illiterate and unscrupulous lower class men, thereby eliding the middle class Catholic leadership. By focusing on the Defenders, Edgeworth was also able to write out the Protestant split between Dissenters and Anglicans, echoing contemporary sectarian revisions which downplayed the cohesiveness and scope of the alliance between the Defenders and the United Irishmen, and catalogued the Defender organization as another of the many Catholic agrarian secret societies, such as the White boys, Rightboys,

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[8] Edgeworth gives a different sense of the magnitude of this threat in the *Memoirs*: "The people were leagued in secret rebellion, and waited only for the expected arrival of the French army, to break out" (209). "Those who were really and actually engaged, and in communication with the rebels, and with the foreign enemy, were so secret and cunning, that no proofs could be obtained against them" (210)]

and Heart of Oak Boys.[9]

The national vision of the United Irishmen and the Defenders remained in circulation after the Union, offering a still potent alternative to Edgeworth's vision of Ascendancy reform. The Protestant leadership of the United Irishmen, especially in the north, based their criticisms of British and Ascendancy rule on the works of Adam Smith and John Locke (among others), the same philosophers that Edgeworth admired. The United Irishmen shared Edgeworth's commitment to reform, education, and industry. However, they differed from Edgeworth in their definition of the "industrious peoples" in Irish society. The United Irishmen also disagreed with Edgeworth on a fundamental point: they believed that the Ascendancy was unreformable. Following the theories of Locke and Francis Hutcheson, the United Irish believed that a lack of sound leadership leads to corruption in the body politic, and that rebellion is a justified response to corrupt leadership.

Edgeworth counters the United Irish endorsement of revolution by representing rebellion as a disease to be cured by the reform of the Ascendancy. Edgeworth equates the personal malaise of Glenthorn with the larger social ills of Ireland. She suggests that both the indolence of the higher classes and the rebelliousness of the peasantry are diseases which may be cured. Glenthorn describes the rebellion as a political and social "disease" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 245): he refers to "the *symptoms* of insurrection," and speaks of rebellious tenants as being *"contaminated* by the *epidemic infection*" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 245; emphasis added). Edgeworth's implication is that a proper diagnosis of the social situation and an appropriate course of treatment will effect a lasting

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[9] These subversive societies used sabotage and at times violence to protest such issues as tithes and high rents, but did not agitate for the overthrow of the Ascendancy or independence from Britain.

cure on the body politic, as a cure is effected on the body and mind of Glenthorn. Glenthorn blames his underestimation of the gravity of the events of 1798 on his ennui. Glenthorn's ennui may be a personal malaise, but it is symbolic of the lack of awareness that neutralizes the majority of his Anglo-Irish acquaintances. Their insulated lives leave them oblivious to the unrest growing in the country until they can no longer safely ignore the danger. Unfortunately, as the example of the land agent Hardcastle shows, once they do become aware of the danger they react with sectarian violence, retreating into the very beliefs and behaviours which fostered the discontent of the Catholic tenantry.

Edgeworth uses the Scottish agent and landowner McLeod to outline her plan for responsible Anglo-Irish leadership. He bases his plans for reform on the theories of Adam Smith, and has put them into practice on a "little estate of his own" in Glenthorn's neighbourhood (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 215). Glenthorn is pleasantly surprised by the results of these reforms: McLeod has created a "paradise" which closely resembles England: "there was such an air of neatness and comfort, order and activity, in the people and in their cottages, that I almost thought myself in England" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 215). McLeod's account of his methods makes his tenants sound like children: he and his wife did not "[expect] too much at first"; they set an example, and remained patient: "so by degrees we led where we could not have driven; and raised in them, by little and little, a taste for conveniences and comfort" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 215). The school-house is a prominent place of reform; the older tenants will not change, but their children may be taught to desire a different way of life (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 215). McLeod and his wife have created "a race of our own training" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 216). McLeod's good sense has even overcome "the great difficulty in Ireland," religion (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 216). According to McLeod, they make "no difference between protestants and catholics" (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 216); the children are educated together in all secular matters, and

their segregated religious instruction is limited to Saturdays. McLeod's paternalistic reforms end sectarian violence and promote productivity.

In order to justify the dominant position of the Anglo-Irish she underscores the *Irish* part of their hybrid identity, constructing a fabulous rehash of history to establish the interconnectedness of the Anglo-Irish and the Catholic Irish (both Gaelic and Old English) and to suggest that the Anglo-Irish are part of the organic nation, not a foreign colonial elite grafted onto that nation by force. She evades the issue of confiscation of Irish lands by English settlers, a fact of her own family background, by implying that the Glenthorn family is actually of Gaelic stock. When Ellinor nurses Glenthorn after his fall, she tells him stories of his ancestry:

> She was inexhaustible in her anecdotes of my ancestors, all tending to the honour and glory of the family; she had also an excellent memory for all the insults, or traditions of insults, which the Glenthorns had received for many ages back, even to the times of the old kings of Ireland; long and long before `they stooped to be *lorded*; when their names, which it was a pity and a murder, and moreover a burning shame, to change, was O'Shaughnessy.' (Edgeworth, *Ennui* 160).

In establishing the Glenthorn family's descent from ancient Ireland and the Irish chiefs, Edgeworth emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Ascendancy with the Catholic lower classes. The Ascendancy becomes an integral part of Ireland's history, erasing their implication in England's colonizing program in Ireland. The late eighteenth-century interest in antiquarian research focused attention on history as a facet of nationalism and played an integral part in the development of Protestant colonial nationalism. Although few Ascendancy families could trace their lineage back to old Gaelic families, Glenthorn's Gaelic ancestry strengthens Edgeworth's claim for an Irish identity for Anglo-Irish.

This is not Edgeworth's only bit of historical manoeuvring: Lady Geraldine's name, as Marilyn Butler remarks, is reminiscent of the Old English Geraldine faction in

Ireland, active in rebellions from the 1530s to 1798 (Butler, "Introduction" 43).[10] Lady Geraldine's husband, Cecil Devereux, bears the family name of the Earls of Essex, who helped to spearhead the New English invasion of Ireland.[11] The first Fitzgerald came with Strongbow's Norman invasion force in the twelfth century; his descendants became part of the Old English opposition to the New English settlers, whose most brutal leader gives his name to Devereux. In the marriage of Lady Geraldine and Cecil Devereux, Edgeworth unites opposing factions, ironically sending them off to administer another of England's colonies. By using names fraught with Ireland's colonial history, and suggesting the difficulty in fixing meaning to them, Edgeworth at once points to the vagaries of Ireland's history and negates its overwhelming power. If names, identities and allegiances fluctuate so easily, then their political force is lost.

Edgeworth disrupts the narrative based in realism at the point of the most serious disruption to the political narrative of Ireland. At the moment when history most obviously intrudes into the plot -- when Glenthorn becomes caught up in the events of the Rebellion -- Edgeworth turns to fable and myth to drive the plot. Glenthorn, suspected of

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[10] James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald led the Desmond rebellion in the late sixteenth century (Foster, *Modern* 29); James Fitzthomas Fitzgerald, earl of Desmond, was involved in O'Neill's Gaelic rebellion (Foster, *Modern* 41); and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, brother to the Duke of Leinster, was one of the leaders of the United Irishmen (Foster, *Modern* 268).

[11] Walter Devereux (1541-1576), the first Earl of Essex, commanded a campaign to colonise Ulster in 1573. When Queen Elizabeth ordered his withdrawal, he and his men massacred the inhabitants of Rathlin Island. As Roy Foster notes, "His sanguinary Irish policy was not unique, but none of his contemporaries practised it so wantonly" (Foster, *Modern* 34 n.xi). Queen Elizabeth appointed Robert Devereux (1566-1601), the second Earl of Essex, as the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in 1599. He lasted five months, angering the Queen by holding talks with the rebellious Gaelic chieftain Hugh O'Neill.

Catholic sympathies, discovers the scheme to force him to become leader of the "rubbles" or, if he refuses, to murder him. He heroically foils the plot, with the level-headed help of McLeod and Christy, only to be caught up in Edgeworth's contrivance: he learns that he is not the real Earl of Glenthorn. He is Ellinor's biological son, switched at nurse with the real earl, whom Ellinor has raised as Christy O'Donoghoe. Glenthorn chooses to acknowledge his true identity and relinquishes his title and estate to his foster brother. The former earl travels to London to study the law and thus transforms himself into an industrious professional man. The former blacksmith is ill-prepared to take up the responsibilities of his new noble position, and his tenure ends disastrously with the death of his son. Stereotypes of national character are undermined as the certainties of birth are overturned. This fabulous twist allows Edgeworth to accomplish two ends: she may prove that education, not birth, forms character (thus implying an almost limitless potential for improving the social and political situation by extending the education of individuals more widely in Ireland), and that a man may change and reform (thus implying that a country can do the same).[12]

Marilyn Butler rightly points out that Edgeworth's novels were recognized as participating in a new discourse of class in the novel. Edgeworth's use of social realism implies that her schematic of Irish society is a description of conditions and class relations as they really were in Ireland circa 1798. Contemporary reviewers praised her for her perceptiveness and realism in her representations of the Irish social situation and Irish

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[12] Edgeworth's educational philosophies were influenced by Locke, who asserted that a "child's mind and character were formed by his environment rather than by heredity" (Butler, "Introduction" 19).

characters.[13] Her popularity (measured both in sales and respectful reviews) indicates that her work was taken up in the public sphere and likely affected opinion in both Ireland and England. However, her construction of a "natural order" for Irish society, while represented as disinterested description, is in fact loaded with ideological and political implications. Her social realism exhibits the same "tension between description and theory" found in Adam Smith's presentation of his theory of political economy in his *Wealth of Nations* (Poovey 16). According to Mary Poovey, Smith presented his descriptions of the economic workings of his society in a "language that emphasized the rational and "objective" nature of the procedures" (20). His theory of political economy apparently followed from these scientific observations. However, Poovey suggests that the underlying theory directed his descriptions, and his emphasis on the empirical, objective basis of his descriptions in fact "masked the political agenda legitimized by the theory and generated, alongside the theory's ordering principles, an impression of totality and objectivity" (20). The classificatory thinking which informed Smith's *Wealth of Nations* "reproduced *as inequalities* the social differentiations it purported simply to describe" (Poovey 19; emphasis in original). Edgeworth, influenced by Smith, reifies and naturalizes the existing hierarchies in Ireland.

Edgeworth posits an ideal "natural" order for the people of Ireland, existing outside social conditions and historical developments. She implies that social categories exist, and that the people within those categories may be worthy or unworthy of their position. However, the behaviour of the individuals within these categories does not call the categories themselves into question, but rather foregrounds the need for a more

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[13] In 1812 John Wilson Croker asserted that Edgeworth "exhibit[ed] the most accurate and yet the most diversified views that have ever been drawn of a national character" (Butler, "Introduction" 38).

faithful adherence to the requirements -- the fulfillment of the responsibilities and the right use of the privileges -- of each category. The story of the loss and restoration of Glenthorn's title and estate suggests that the self-made, productive man may advance in society. Edgeworth seems to replace privilege based in birth with success based in merit, constructing a meritocracy which allows for the rise of a man who strives to embody the ideals of productivity, without advocating the radical republican doctrine of equality of all men. However, her formulation is limited by the a priori existence of a natural order whose boundaries are not nearly so porous as they may be represented.

Edgeworth is a member of the dominant social formation, the Ascendancy, and yet prefers to position herself outside, or perhaps morally above, that formation. However, her reformed Anglo-Irish ruling class does include the "self-same contradictions" that endangered the Ascendancy's power. Her assertion of a "natural order" in Ireland, with the reformed Protestant Anglo-Irish landowners continuing to occupy the dominant position, does not change the basic terms of the social hierarchy. Her educational project may improve the living conditions of the lower-class Irish, but at the cost of their own culture, language, and eventually, religion. Although she ridicules the political toadyism of Dublin Castle, and deplores the British ignorance and prejudice regarding Ireland, she continues to look to England for models which may be imposed on Ireland, which will write over the culture, religion and history of the Catholic Irish. At the same time, Edgeworth's assertion of the importance of a unique Irish national identity destabilized metropolitan prejudices about the Irish national character and contributed to the debate about the status of Ireland within the Union. Her appeal to reason and to political economy provided the groundwork for a necessary alternative vision for the nation at a time of heightened sectarian threats in Ireland.

Into the Breach:

Fractured Narrative and (Un)Authorized History

in *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys*

Sydney Morgan appended the subtitle *A National Tale* to her final Irish novel, *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys*, signalling once again her intention to speak to an English audience on behalf of Ireland.[1] *The O'Briens* was Morgan's fourth national tale; it found a receptive audience, running to three editions in its first year. In her first national tale, *The Wild Irish Girl*, Morgan's narrative of the encounter between the son of an absentee landlord and the daughter of a Gaelic prince created a geographic dislocation for her English readers which served to foster "a breach in metropolitan reason" (Ferris, "Narrating" 288). The geographical dislocation of the metropolitan character both mirrors and instigates the rational dislocation of the metropolitan reader's beliefs about Ireland and its people. Through this narrative strategy of "transformative encounter" (Ferris, "Narrating" 299) Morgan valorized Gaelic culture and suggested that the solution to Ireland's divisions was an increased understanding of and respect for the native Irish. However, by the time Morgan published *The O'Briens*, her intention had changed from a valorization of Gaelic culture to a critique of the colonial presence in Ireland. In this final national tale, her transformative narrative strategy centres around a Catholic character whose encounter with Irish geography and history defies a harmonious dénouement.

The story of Murrogh O'Brien's journey through the geographical and political landscape of Ireland in the 1790s allows Morgan to examine the at times obscured affinity between the making of myths and the writing of history. She invokes the legitimating function of history to ground her argument, yet at the same time undermines its authoritative status. Writing at a time when nations were beginning to define themselves

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[1] Her three other Irish novels are *The Wild Irish Girl*, 3 vols. (London: 1806); *O'Donnel. A National Tale*, 3 vols. (London: 1814); and *Florence MacCarthy. An Irish Tale*, 4 vols. (London: 1818).

in part in terms of their accepted history, she underlines the malleable nature of historical narrative. Inasmuch as she relies on history to structure and support her argument for Catholic Emancipation, her narrative ends with the failure of history to provide answers for Ireland's present. In contrast to her defence of Gaelic antiquarian studies in *The Wild Irish Girl*, she now challenges the Gaelic sources privileged by antiquarian scholars. She discards the Gaelic mythical "history" of Ireland, showing through Murrogh O'Brien the damaging possibilities of myth and its inability to serve the Irish nation in the early nineteenth century. At the same time, she uses and alters history to legitimate her vision of Ireland, creating a new nationalist mythology through her portrayal of Henry Grattan and the Whigs, the United Irishmen, and the Rebellion of 1798.

The "packaging" of the 1798 Rebellion began within years of that failed rising as various histories were published, most with a sectarian slant favouring either the Catholic or Protestant viewpoint. The speed with which contemporary historians wrote accounts which inscribed a sectarian nature to the rebellion attests to the perceived subversive power of the United Irish movement, with its vision of new alliances and aspirations that went beyond the Protestant-Catholic dichotomy. At the same time, these histories re-enacted political actions taken by the Ascendancy politicians and Dublin Castle functionaries, including "the deliberate injection of sectarianism by conservatives, and ultimately by the government, as a counter-revolutionary weapon" (Whelan, *Tree* 129).[2] These competing revisions of '98 covered the full spectrum of Irish political and religious positions, including Sir Richard Musgrave's recital of Protestant fears which blamed the Rebellion on

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[2] Kevin Whelan argues that the blame for the rise in sectarianism should not be laid at the feet of the United Irish movement, but rather must be traced to propaganda efforts by conservatives and the government. According to Whelan, the failure by scholars to seriously consider the government's role "can be traced to the overwhelming emphasis in work on the 1790s on popular radicalism, and the neglect of popular loyalism, in an obsession with revolutionaries, but not with counter-revolutionaries" (*Tree* 129).

a "popish plot," Francis Plowden's Whig apology which cast Catholics and United Irishmen as reluctant revolutionaries, and Daniel O'Connell's politically expedient re-fashioning which downplayed the involvement of Catholics in the rebel leadership (Whelan, *Tree* 133-170).[3] Many of these texts were couched as historical studies but their role was never intended to be purely academic: as Kevin Whelan points out, "[t]he struggle for control of the meaning of the 1790s was also a struggle for political legitimacy" (*Tree* 133). These texts were designed to have material effects on political discourse at both a popular and a governmental level.

A variety of sectarian commentaries on the rebellion were published in the post-Union period when Morgan (then Owenson) was writing *The Wild Irish Girl*. After the disturbances and bloodshed of the 1790s the push for a post-Union conciliation was strong enough that the optimistic rapprochement between Catholics and Protestants presented in *The Wild Irish Girl* was still imaginable. However, the political developments of the period between the publication of *The Wild Irish Girl* (and *Ennui*) and of *The O'Briens* made such an ideal solution unlikely. George III was intransigent on the issue of Catholic Emancipation; he insisted on upholding his coronation oath to protect the Protestant church. Any expectations of a reversal upon the accession of George IV were soon disappointed (O'Ferrall 3).[4] Anti-Catholic rhetoric circulated freely within the continuing

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[3] For a discussion of the varying interpretations of the rebellion, see the chapter entitled "'98 after '98: The Politics of Memory" in Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830* (Cork: Cork UP, 1996) 133-171. For an overview of Irish historiography over the long eighteenth century, see Jacqueline Hill, "Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History 1690-1812," *Past and Present* 118 (February 1988): 96-129. Both Whelan and Hill draw on Donal McCartney, "The Writing of History in Ireland 1800-30," *Irish Historical Studies* 10-4 (1957): 347-362.

[4] The campaign for Catholic Emancipation in Ireland was seriously affected by the British administration's anxiety about extending political rights to Catholics in Britain.

debate over Catholic Emancipation.[5] Although the Relief Acts in the 1790s had lifted the formal restrictions on some public offices, Catholics continued to be barred: "such 'virtual' exclusion was even more galling than legal exclusion" (O'Ferrall 17). By the 1820s Catholics and their Protestant allies were becoming impatient with the continual obstacles and delays.

A number of events occurred in the 1820s to force the issue. The early years of the decade saw Rockite and Ribbonmen disturbances which revived the threat of rebellion (O'Ferrall 23-25). The unrest was exacerbated by the 1822 famine. Daniel O'Connell spearheaded the development of a mass-based Catholic political movement which exercised its economic clout and achieved major upsets during the general election of 1826 (O'Ferrall 268). After this public demonstration of political strength the Catholic Association became more assertive; in January 1827 O'Connell first broached his demand for Repeal of the Union (O'Ferrall 154). In the years immediately preceding Emancipation the strength of the Catholics was such that, as Thomas Wyse claimed,

> Had things gone on in the state in which they were, it is quite certain the great mass of the Catholics, at no distant period, would scarcely have thought it worth their while to have continued asking any longer, for what had been so long and so punctiliously refused them (quoted in O'Ferrall 268).

Wyse wrote these words in 1829 after Emancipation was finally granted, and his

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English Catholics had not benefitted to the same extent from the Relief Acts which had removed some of the restrictions on Québécois and Irish Catholics in the later eighteenth century.

[5] The controversy over Catholic Emancipation arose in part from the veto question. The Catholic leadership was divided over the issue of whether to allow the Protestant government to have a voice in the affairs of the Catholic church. Daniel O'Connell was insistent that Catholics should only accept an unconditional Emancipation; his view prevailed after continued parliamentary dithering made it clear that Catholic compromises would not expedite emancipation.

pronouncement is stamped with the bravado of recent victory. However, his words mark the early stages of a shift in the balance of power in Ireland that continued over the course of the nineteenth century.

Published in 1827, two years before the Emancipation act passed, *The O'Briens* reflects the continuing failure of the Union to effect Catholic Emancipation, and is influenced by the remarkable success of O'Connellite politics. The novel is a fictionalized account of the historical events which "prepared the Rebellion, and accomplished the Union" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv), and Morgan intended it to influence public opinion in favour of Catholic Emancipation. She and her husband were deeply involved in the pro-Emancipation campaign; their home in Kildare Street was used for meetings "where the Morgans and the Wellesley administration brought together both Catholics and Orangemen" (O'Ferrall 116). She was thus identified with the Catholic cause through her previous writings and through her political activism, centred in her salon held at Kildare Street, the address given below her signature at the end of *The O'Briens*' preface.

In order to gain a hearing for her argument Morgan must establish her authority as an author; however, this process is complicated both by her controversial subject matter and by her gender. The public exercise and expression of political beliefs was still considered to be the province of men, and women who made too public a display of their opinions or who dared to publish them risked reprimand. When presented in the forum of the literary review, these reprimands usually did not engage in a reasoned critique of the woman author's published opinions, which would have allowed for an equally well-reasoned rebuttal. Instead, the reviewer undermined and dismissed the author's credibility by emphasizing her sex and insisting that as a woman she had neither the education, the experience nor the ability to write about politics.[6] By the time she was working on *The*

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[6] For an excellent discussion of the treatment of women writers in literary reviews in the early nineteenth century, see Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority:*

O'Briens, Morgan had already come in for her share of criticism in the magazines of the day. In a review of *O'Donnel* in the *Critical Review*, the "fair author" is faintly ridiculed for showing the reader that "her reading is far beyond the usual studies of her sex; and that she prefers the boldness of masculine reasoning to the softer claims of feminine opinions" (quoted in Ferris, *Achievement* 48). William Hazlitt was even more dismissive in an 1824 article in the *Edinburgh Review*:

> Women write well only when they write naturally [...] and therefore we could dispense with their inditing prize-essays or solving *academic questions*; - and should be far better pleased with Lady Morgan if she would condescend to a more ordinary style, and not insist continually on playing the diplomatist in petticoats and strutting the little Gibbon of her age! (quoted in Ferris *Achievement* 52; emphasis in original).

Morgan courted renewed criticism with the publication of *The O'Briens*, her strongest critique of Ascendancy privilege and colonial policy in Ireland. She no longer suggests that political and cultural conflicts may be resolved in a symbolic marriage, thereby injecting an appropriately "feminine" plot device into her fiction. Instead, a more politically astute Morgan explores the paradoxes and limitations of the various parties, revealing problems rather than providing tidy solutions.

As a woman writing about politics, Morgan cannot assume (as she is well aware) that her readers will be receptive to her message nor that her voice will be perceived as authoritative. For a woman writer, a direct claim to intelligence or political acumen is not sufficient to counter dismissal on the basis of sex, as the remarks of Hazlitt and the reviewer for the *Critical Review* show. Morgan uses a variety of strategies of self-representation to destabilize readers' assumptions about women authors and thus to gain a positive reading for her argument. Morgan's repeated insertion of her persona as voice for (and of) Ireland in the preface, footnotes, and narrative creates a text with permeable

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Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991).

borders, a text which, while its production and reception are shaped by attitudes and events outside itself, at the same time seeks to shape attitudes and events in the material world. She inscribes a dialogic relationship between author and reader, between the acts of writing and of reading, which foregrounds the performative function both of her role as author and of her text, while acknowledging the active nature of the reading process.

Tom Dunne may be correct in suggesting that Morgan's Irish tales are "contemporary novels suffused with history" (Dunne, *Witness* 139), and yet Morgan presents *The O'Briens* as an historical novel, laying claim to a relationship with the genre elaborated by Walter Scott in his *Waverley* novels.[7] In the preface, she casts the Rebellion and the Union as the events of an era clearly divided from her own. She describes that bygone era as "an epoch of transition between the ancient despotism of brute force, and the dawning reign of public opinion" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv). It contrasts with the present "times the most fatal to faction, and favourable to the establishment of equal rights, which Ireland has yet witnessed" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xvi). As she sets forth this opposition, she positions her readers as a sympathetic audience who will share with her the more enlightened attitudes of the present age. By foregrounding the alterity of this past era, Morgan is able to present herself as an authoritative historical interpreter from an entirely different age.

In the preface to *The O'Briens*, she describes the act of writing as holding a mirror up to nature, and claims that in her novel she has "drawn none but such as represent a class, or identify a genus" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xi). This, as a double echo of Samuel Johnson's preface to his edition of Shakespeare, is a bold and sweeping assertion of validity and authority. In her national tales she describes an Ireland which pre-exists the act of writing,

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[7] The genesis of the historical novel is usually associated with Sir Walter Scott, but in fact the genre may be traced back to Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (*Feminist Companion*). At about the time Sydney Owenson began her career as a novelist, Jane Porter was using the historical genre to write of the independence struggles of other nations (*Feminist Companion*).

in a sense compiling a taxonomy of Irish traits and customs for her English audience. She characterizes her writing as an objective, scientific practice, linking it to the developing "science" of ethnography, but with the addition of a self-reflexive twist which Ina Ferris, borrowing from Mary Louise Pratt, has termed auto-ethnography (Ferris, "Narrating" 291).

Morgan's claim to authority was in part based in her self-exoticization, in her performance as `the wild Irish girl.' Perhaps because of her early experience of the theatre (her father, Robert Owenson, was a theatre manager), Morgan understood the value of spectacle and publicity. After the success of her first national tale, she willingly took on the role of Glorvina, creating a fashion rage for Irish cloaks and brooches (Ferris, "Narrating" 298). She played on the popular identification of herself as the representative of Ireland, if not as Ireland itself (a role similarly projected onto and also taken up by Maud Gonne a hundred years later). Morgan's reputation as a fashionable writer meant that to a certain extent her radical ideas were contained within the exoticised persona projected upon (and embraced by) her. Yet her popularity also meant that her political ideas were more broadly disseminated.

Morgan plays with her readers, reminding them that she is a figure of controversy and a shape-shifter worthy of public notice. She asserts the influence of her past literary productions, noting the fears of the *bon ton* society "who affect to tremble lest `Lady Morgan should put them into her book'" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xvii). In the final lines of the novel Morgan refers back to this prefatory discussion of her role as author and the reception of her work, thus framing the novel with her literary self-awareness. In a self-transformation worthy of her creator, a Dublin Castle hanger-on has transfigured herself into a Princess by marrying an Austrian prince. Morgan inserts her echo when the Princess is invited to write: "If I did, every body would say I put them into my book" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 567). Morgan flings a last challenge to her readers in the novel's final

exchange:

> 'Upon my honour that's the raison I prefer writing my journey to Jerusalem. I defy any one to take offence at a book written just about nothing at all.'
>
> 'Don't be too sure of that,' said her Excellency (Morgan, *O'Briens* 567-68).

Morgan confounds the lines between fiction and lived experience in these closing lines as she moves in and out of her fiction, the knowing author giving a nod to her quick-witted reader.

In the preface to *The O'Briens*, she explicitly links this text with *The Wild Irish Girl*, establishing her credentials as a writer who does battle for Ireland: she describes writing *The Wild Irish Girl* as "flesh[ing] my maiden sword" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv). She opens her preface by positioning herself as a patriot in turbulent times, whose gifts as a writer allow her to speak a truth which is dangerous, but which she must and will speak:

> To live in Ireland and to write for it, is to live and write *poignard sur la gorge*; for there is no country where it is less possible to be useful with impunity, or where the penalty on patriotism is levied with a more tyrannous exaction (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv).

She presents her mission as the same "cause, which made Esther eloquent, and Judith brave" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv), citing Biblical examples of women who took action to save their people. She thus grounds her patriotism in the familiar and acceptable precedent of the Bible while making the exotic woman a serious role-model.

Morgan's roles as an author of patriotic Irish texts and as a character from her own novel blend -- a voice for Ireland becomes the voice of Ireland. As a patriot, she is able to write on behalf of Ireland, becoming a literary protector. She overcomes the charge of "unfeminine presumption in `meddling in politics'" by framing her production as an act of patriotism, asserting that "love of country is of no sex" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xv). This is a stance which Morgan had used to good effect in the past, claiming that "Politics can never be a woman's science, but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment" (from

Patriotic Sketches of Ireland, quoted in Eagleton 232). Yet her patriotic writings are clearly intended to affect political decisions; her participation in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation was intended to have a direct impact on laws passed in parliament.

While asserting her authorial control over her text, Morgan also admits the instability of this control. Her plea to her readership to refrain from "the fabrication of false `keys'" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xvi) to her novel actually works to invite readers' interpretations and to inscribe the mutability of her text. In this way Morgan suggests a dialogic relationship between her writing process and its reception. Her warning, that readers' attempts to identify "real" people in the novels impedes her ability to write "fearlessly" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xvi), may come across as authorial posturing. However, while it is difficult to picture the Wild Irish Girl, darling of the *bon ton*, threatened with violence because of her writing, it is possible to see that the voice of an older and more politically challenging woman might be silenced if she failed to negotiate the complexities of that public opinion, both literary and political, to which she appealed.

Morgan creates a multi-layered text in order to legitimate her blending of fiction and history, and to grant authority to her particular interpretation of Irish history. In addition to her preface, her paratext includes a scholarly framework of footnotes, giving voice to an editorial authority which shapes the readers' response to the main body of the text. She also inserts texts within her text, including letters, legal documents, and historical annals. This accumulation of documents and references creates and authenticates her interpretation of Irish history while introducing the reader to another culture with its own panoply of legitimating customs and texts. Yet this assemblage of often contrary texts and intertextual references also insists on the difficulty of determining final authority, whether legal or historical, in Ireland.

Unlike Edgeworth who praises English law and cites it as a model for Ireland in *Ennui*, Morgan shows the negative effects of attempting to impose foreign law on another

culture. In her representative land ownership case, Morgan refers back to the Enlightenment philosophy embraced by the Patriots and the United Irishmen. Montesquieu's proposition that *les lois* must arise from and reflect *l'esprit* of the people invalidates the colonial laws, which served only to buttress the claims of the elite minority. However, Montesquieu's dictate also calls into question the validity of the Gaelic code, which no longer expressed *l'esprit* of a population altered by exposure to the colonial laws, and which was no longer culturally or religiously homogeneous.

Morgan begins the novel with this clash between *les lois* and *l'esprit*, between colonial and Gaelic legal codes. The initial chapter consists of a correspondence from the 1770s, some twenty years before the main action of the novel, which outlines the legal basis for a lawsuit initiated by Baron Terence O'Brien to seek the restitution of land in Connemara to the exiled Count O'Flaherty. Through these letters Morgan presents the intertwined histories of the O'Brien and O'Flaherty families and illustrates the pernicious effects of English colonization on these families and, by extension, on Ireland. She chronicles the failure of the English colonial process either to establish hegemonic control over Ireland or to restore the damage it has inflicted. The continued co-existence of the Gaelic code and the colonial law results in an awareness of the shifting relationship between history and the law, and of the final instability of legal authority in Ireland.

In her critique of colonial law-making Morgan suggests that the legal process in Ireland is transparent only in its moments of unmitigated bias. The Elizabethan policy of regranting land to Gaelic chieftains who "came in" appeared to establish clear land titles; yet it had the effect of facilitating the alienation of that land to the Crown, usually to be given as payment to Protestants for services to the monarch (Morgan, *O'Briens* 4-5). Such legal mechanisms as the court of claims, set up to return land to "innocent papists" after the Cromwellian resettlement, performed the authorizing function of the law but in an unjust way. The majority of Catholic land claims were never heard, and "an act of

explication was passed, forbidding all who were unheard ever to prefer their claims again" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 6). A sense of proprietary right to the land continued to exist among the descendants of dispossessed Catholic landowners. Their belief that their land rights had been denied through legal manoeuvring, but had never been fully erased by law or history, contributed to the instability of land ownership and of the authority of the law.

In *The O'Briens* the land of both the O'Brien and the O'Flaherty families had been expropriated. However, Morgan illustrates how the convolutions of the legislation governing land settlement in Ireland may be used against the colonial elite, overturning land claims like that of the Protestant Archbishop Hunks. Baron O'Brien was raised in the knowledge of the old Gaelic ways and has become a famous "shanaos" and antiquarian, but during his indenture to Hunks the solicitor, he also learned the ways of the colonial lawmakers. O'Brien invokes the precedent of the old Gaelic customs and laws to establish the original ownership of the O'Flaherty land, and then uses the terms of the colonial legal system to dispossess the current Protestant landowner. Hunks' father converted to the Church of Ireland and under the penal laws laid claim to the land of the recusant O'Flahertys. However, he had failed to secure the proper indicators of entrance into the Protestant Ascendancy, having "never received the sacrament, nor subscribed the declaration, nor taken the abjuration oath, nor filed a certificate thereof in a court of justice" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 9). Morgan reveals the economic and political motives behind the issue of landownership. The laws were never intended to initiate a mass conversion of Catholics; rather, they were intended to safeguard the concentration of power in the hands of a Protestant minority elite.

The invocation of Gaelic customs and law alongside colonial law, and the use of colonial law to restore lands to a dispossessed Catholic family, marks a point of encounter between the English-style legal system in Ireland and the pre-existing Gaelic code. In this encounter, neither code supersedes the other. Both codes are open to manipulation, thus

setting up the possibility for certain groups to utilize the law for their own purposes. As Morgan's case proves, the inadequacy of the legal system may allow dispossessed persons to subvert the colonial law by using it to achieve their own ends, exactly opposite to what the law was originally intended to do. Morgan's cautionary tale foreshadows Wyse's later boast: if these systems aren't changed consciously and directly, dispossessed people may take the initiative to utilize them in a way which had not been foreseen.

The novel's explicatory footnotes provide Morgan's readers with a key to the text, and by extension, a key to the Irish nation. She translates the Gaelic words scattered through the text and explains "exotic" Irish customs, for example keening. In addition to this educative function, the footnotes inscribe a polemical subscript. The reliability of the editorial voice established through the factual notes tends to carry over into the audience's reading of the more polemical footnotes. Morgan constantly positions her audience as an intelligent group capable of logical thinking in the face of controversy. She often challenges her English readers, but she is ready to soothe them when expedient. She footnotes a recital of eighteenth-century history, which includes the penal laws and the American Revolution, with an assurance to the readers that she revives these bitter recollections "neither to irritate nor insult the English nation, from whose justice and good sense Ireland has so much to expect" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 63-63). Hazlitt may have dismissed Morgan as a "diplomatist in petticoats" but in her novel she shows that she has learned some of the lessons of diplomacy: she appeals to her audience's good opinion of themselves to elicit a hearing for her work.

Morgan's extensive use of scholarly texts makes the novel intertextual, as she cites most of the relevant heavyweight texts of the time in her notes. She refers to John Curry's *Review of the Civil Wars of Ireland* (1775), Joseph Walker's *Historical Essays on the dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish* (1788), and Sir James Ware's *Antiquities*, translated in 1705. She also draws from the works of Charles O'Conor the Elder, a

founding member of the Catholic Committee, who co-authored *Observations on the Popery Laws* with John Curry in 1771. She clearly casts her vote against the sources privileged by the Gaelic historian Geoffrey Keating and antiquarians such as Sylvester O'Halloran who were rediscovering and translating old Irish manuscripts filled with chronicles, tales and verse.

Her use of these authorities changes over the time between *The Wild Irish Girl* and *The O'Briens*, and reflects the changing attitudes and controversies within Irish historiography. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, she used these sources uncritically, and identified antiquarian studies with Father John, an articulate and enlightened Catholic priest who evinces none of the negative qualities normally assigned to "superstitious," "backward" Catholics. Father John ably defends Gaelic sources, antiquarian studies and their representation of Ireland's glorious past:

> it is the fate of our unhappy country to receive as little credit in the present day for its former celebrity, as for its great antiquity, although the former is attested by *Bede*, and many other early British writers, and the latter is authenticated by the testimony of the most ancient Greek authors (Morgan, *Wild* 171).

In contrast, most of the historical documents that appear in *The O'Briens* are linked to Baron Terence O'Brien, Murrogh's father, who concentrates in one character the negative and harmful aspects of antiquarian study and revivalist activism. Terence O'Brien is a pathetic character, illustrative of the effects of English colonial policies in Ireland (most particularly the penal laws); the lesson to be learned from his descent into poverty and near-madness is that obsessing about the past and attempting to (re)create a Gaelic, Catholic ascendancy will never be the salvation of Ireland.

This considerable shift in Morgan's attitudes to and expectations from the ancient texts has been read as evidence of her growing anti-Catholicism (Dunne, *Witness* 51, 154). However, her shifting attitudes must be read within the context of the ongoing debate

about the practice of history and in particular the granting of authenticity and authority to documents and sources. Her original glorification of Gaelic civilisation was based in the works of Geoffrey Keating and Roderick O'Flaherty, the two "greats" of seventeenth-century Irish historiography, and their followers. O'Flaherty's *Ogygia* and Keating's *Foras Feas an Erenn* with their celebrations of a highly-developed Gaelic civilisation, descended from the Milesians and with a written language (ogham) that pre-dated Christianity, combated the accounts written by Giraldus Cambrensis and Spenser, among others, which portrayed the Gaelic Irish as barbarians. These pro-Irish histories relied on synthetic Gaelic texts, in particular *Lebor an Gabala*, and accepted their accounts as fact. The politically charged atmosphere of the seventeenth century produced sectarian histories, such as that of the Protestant William King, which presented Catholicism as "popery" or "papistry", an international conspiracy. Many histories written from a Catholic perspective accused the Protestant church of a corresponding political agenda while defending the achievements of the early Celtic church and establishing its separateness from the Rome.

The Gaelic culture found in Scotland, Wales and Ireland was seen as a positive, possibly unifying force when a Union between Ireland and the newly united Scotland and England was suggested in 1709 (Hill 104). Keating's work became available to a wider audience through Dermod O'Connor's English translation of 1723.[8] This English translation replaced most of the original text's Catholic overtones with references to a more generalized Christianity, and also emphasized the long parliamentary tradition in Ireland, thus making Keating's work more palatable to Protestant Patriots (Hill 103). The dissemination of Keating's positive view of Gaelic Ireland helped to promote an enthusiasm for Gaelic civilization in Ireland and England.

Around mid-century a new wave of Catholic writers sought increased respect and

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[8] The list of subscribers to O'Connor's translation included English, Anglo-Irish and Irish names (Hill 103).

rights within the Protestant establishment, without agitating for its overthrow. Proponents of this "enlightened" Catholic position, such as Charles O'Conor and John Currey, once again asserted the independent, pious nature of the Celtic church, and argued that "popery" was introduced after the Norman conquest, having previously been alien to the Gaelic Church. Thus around mid-century the three main strands of Irish historiography (patriot, Gaelic enthusiast, and "enlightened" Catholic), came together in their acceptance of the Williamite revolution, the Protestant establishment and the close relationship between England and Ireland and in their celebration of Ireland's parliamentary tradition.

However, this brief period of scholarly concord came under attack even as it consolidated. The sources privileged by "Gaelic enthusiasts" (*Lebor na Gabala* and the like), had been called into question by Thomas Innes in 1729. Later in the century the controversy over the authenticity of MacPherson's *Ossian* further contributed to the debate over the accuracy of the Gaelic sources. Jacqueline Hill suggests that the most damaging attack on these sources and their positive representation of early Irish history came from David Hume, whose *History of England* inscribed a progressive view of history. The antiquarian celebration of Gaelic Ireland as a great civilisation that had inaugurated a parliamentary tradition was denied by Hume's assertion that the values of "liberty and monarchy limited by law" were recent developments which could not be traced back to what he considered a barbarous past (Hill 108). Hume used Protestant propaganda to ground his account of 1641, reviving the "beleaguered Protestant" interpretation of Irish history. Hume's accounts of Catholic-led massacres were countered by Catholic scholars such as the Abbé MacGeoghan, quoted by Morgan in her footnotes (*The O'Briens* 6), who gave voice to a "long-suffering Catholic" interpretation which stressed the loyalty of Catholics to the Crown and catalogued Protestant atrocities (Hill 114-16).

As the authenticity of Gaelic sources came under increasing scrutiny at the end of

the century, their status began to shift:

> those of the Anglo-Irish community who shrank from controversy, yet wished to retain something of the idea of a great Gaelic past, moved sideways into Romanticism, focusing attention on the Gaelic sources not so much as history but as literature (Hill 119).

Charlotte Brooke, much admired by Morgan (Campbell 56), published excerpts from Gaelic manuscripts in her *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), clearly labelling these as literature and not history. Brooke included the Gaelic originals of her translations, thus setting her genuinely scholarly and enquiring project apart from the highly dubious one of Macpherson.

Textual authenticity became a focus of scholarly inquiry and debate, particularly after the formation of the Royal Irish Academy in 1786 (Foster, *Modern* 184), the Gaelic Society of Dublin in 1807 (Foster, "History" 126) and the Iberno-Celtic Society in 1818 (Foster, "History" 126n17). The scepticism of Edward Ledwich,[9] who attempted to expose the inaccuracies of the Gaelic enthusiasts (at times over-zealously), and the investigations of these societies inspired the development of a "scientific method" in scholarly works on topography, law and ancient history (McCartney 348). These societies signalled at least the intention to move away from sectarian interpretations into scholarly scrutiny.

Morgan enters into this debate over what constituted legitimate historical sources. As already noted, the footnotes to *The O'Briens* show that Morgan was acquainted with historians and scholars writing from a number of viewpoints.[10] In Volume Two of *The*

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[9] Edward Ledwich, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (1790; 2nd ed., 1804). Ledwich's own work contained scholarly inconsistencies which arose from "his curious mixture of enlightened scepticism and historical romanticism" (McCartney 348). However, Donal McCartney suggests that these inconsistencies helped to spark "the controversy upon authentic sources" (348).

[10] One of the more flamboyant historians of the period (his 1813 obituary in the *Irish Magazine* asserted that "A greater example of human depravity has not appeared for

O'Briens, she inserts a text within her text, producing her own synthetic version of the Gaelic annals collected in the 17th century by Geoffrey Keating. Following the form of the annals collected by Keating, Morgan constructs a chronology of Ireland from the Creation of the world. These annals trace the arrival of successive waves of conquerors and settlers, focusing on the town of St. Grellan and the progressively more complicated and interconnected fortunes of the O'Brien and O'Flaherty families.

Morgan heavily footnotes these annals, but in contrast to the rest of the novel, these footnotes work to undermine the credibility of the text rather than to establish it. Morgan's authoritative editorial voice appears alongside footnotes signed by Baron Terence O'Brien, Murrogh's father. Baron O'Brien uncritically accepts the veracity of the annals, even when the claims of the chronology seem impossible outside the realm of mythology. One of the agendas of the Gaelic annals was to establish an Irish lineage extending back through the Milesians to Adam, miraculously uninterrupted by the Great Flood. Morgan includes an entry which recounts the transformation of Fintan into a salmon during the Great Flood; Fintan recovers his shape and goes on to live longer than Adam. Baron O'Brien's footnote to this episode cites "the learned and revered Keating" who "expresses some doubt as to Fintan living 2,000 years" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 216-17). O'Brien also refers readers of the Annals to the *General History of Ireland*, for "the rest of the pedigree of the O'Briens, up to Noah" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 218). The juxtaposition of Baron O'Brien's voice and the authoritative editorial voice works to undermine the

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many years") was the Rev. Denis Taaffe, a pro-Catholic writer whose position fluctuated between conciliation and provocation in works published between 1796 and 1811. McCartney describes Taaffe as being a man "tossed about with the changing winds of opinion" (354); in his hurry to promote his current political position he was known to make factual errors (352). Morgan does not cite Taaffe in the footnotes to *The O'Briens*, but it is tempting to read the eccentric Protestant Mac Taaf sisters as a nod to this historian who was expelled from the Catholic Church, became a Protestant minister, and then became a Catholic priest (McCartney 354).

authority of Keating and the historians O'Brien cites alongside him (including Macpherson). This fracturing of authority removes the Gaelic historians and antiquarians from the privileged position of bona fide historical scholars and shunts them into a limbo of those who cannot distinguish history from myth. The fact that these annals are linked to Baron O'Brien makes them seem positively harmful as well as incredible. The elder O'Brien's obsession with the Gaelic past precipitates his descent into poverty, madness and death.

Murrogh O'Brien, the Baron's son, finds "The Annals of St. Grellan" in his father's house. The younger O'Brien is invited to see himself as the revenant and successor of the first Murrogh O'Brien (a sixteenth century chief of the isles), in a rhyming prophecy about the man who shall rescue the O'Brien family:

> Midst Aengus forlorne
> Shall th'O'Brien be borne
> And bear in his face
> The mole of his race (Morgan, *O'Briens* 231).

As O'Brien realizes, the accidents of his own birth and person could qualify him as the saviour of the family. However, rather than stepping into myth, Morgan's enlightened hero chooses to walk away from it. He denies these annals the status of history, viewing them instead as "the fables of national vanity and poetical hyperbole" and a "tissue of monkish lies" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 231). He compares his childish response to traditional stories -- that their characters were a race of saints and heroes -- to his mature understanding: that the Gaelic Irish were "a barbarous people checked in their natural progress towards civilization by a foreign government" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 231). He rejects the destiny history seems to have prepared for him, and refuses to accept the idea that the past must determine the future. After Murrogh makes this decision, his father's house, the ancestral O'Brien home, literally collapses around him.

Between *The Wild Irish Girl* and *The O'Briens*, Morgan's view of the position of

Catholics in the nation changed as her political vision for Ireland matured. *The Wild Irish Girl* harkened back to the moment of convergence among Patriots, Gaelic enthusiasts and "enlightened" Catholics which Jacqueline Hill suggests occurred around 1750. The novel's "Glorvina solution" proposed that the Protestant elite would become more responsible through education and that the Catholic inhabitants of Ireland would be satisfied with some long-deserved respect and a proper recognition of their history and antecedents. This reconciliation of "legal right (Anglo-Irish) and traditional right (old Irish)" (Robert Tracy, quoted in Ferris, *Achievement* 124) happily merged enlightened Catholic and Whig positions: Catholics received their due respect as the original inhabitants of the island, descended from a great Gaelic civilisation, and proven in their loyalty to the Crown, while Protestant landowners maintained their privilege in a manner that better incorporated the Catholics.

However, by the time Morgan wrote *The O'Briens*, this hopeful solution was appearing less and less possible in the face of post-Rebellion and post-Union sectarianism, and the rise of O'Connellite politics. In *The O'Briens*, it is not an absentee landlord who makes the journey into Ireland but a Catholic rediscovering his home after his education and travels on the Continent. Murrogh O'Brien's journey to the West shows him the poverty and difficulties of the native Irish, who have suffered from their dispossession and their lack of proper education and opportunities, direct results of the penal laws. Gone is the sentimentalized family of *The Wild Irish Girl*, noble even in their poverty (16), at one moment melancholy over the loss of their old Gaelic customs under the English, at the next "in the true pliability of the Irish temperament" "as if bit to merry madness by a tarantula, set to dancing jigs with all their hearts" (18). Instead, in *The O'Briens* Morgan presents her readers with two representative Irish men: one, Emunh na Lung, attempts to eke out an existence for himself and his family in dire poverty, and the other, Shane, becomes inarticulate and half mad in the loss of his culture and status, unable to find a

place for himself within a mixed society.

Morgan rejects her earlier belief (shared by Edgeworth in *Ennui*) that the Ascendancy could be reformed. The journey West is also undertaken by Lady Knocklofty and her society crowd; however, their journey does not educate or change them. Lady Knocklofty's attraction for O'Brien leads her to help with his release but her final change of heart -- leaving Lord Knocklofty -- does not indicate a rejection of Ascendancy values: she leaves Lord Knocklofty for a younger aristocrat well-positioned in London society. The final break-up of the political oligarchy, symbolized in its social form, removes its members from Ireland, but their self-serving commitment to Protestant privilege and their prejudice towards the Irish middle and lower classes remain unreformed. These representatives of the Ascendancy are intractable, and Morgan suggests that there is no role for them in post-Union Ireland.

For all her disavowal of mythical writings as an accurate record Morgan is caught up in the need for myth in nation-making. Robert Gildea neatly sums up the role of history and myth in the making of nations as follows: "What matters is myth, not in the sense of fiction, but in the sense of a construction of the past elaborated by a political community for its own ends" (quoted in Whelan, *Tree* 133). Even as she critiques Gaelic historiography in the manner of Keating, Morgan replicates its blend of myth and history in her own text. Her goal is to reassert the secular nature of the United Irish rebellion in the face of the sectarian reinterpretations promulgated by historians and politicians. She seeks to blend the Irish Whig tradition, "the acceptable face of Irish nationalism" (Foster, "History" 134), with a re-writing of the United Irish movement. Unlike Edgeworth, who erases the intellectual roots of the United Irish movement and foregrounds its later commitment to physical force, Morgan focuses on the philosophy of reform shared by the Whigs and the United Irishmen. She suggests that the United Irish movement was a natural outgrowth of Whig attempts to reform the Irish parliament and to release the

stranglehold of the morally and politically corrupt administration at Dublin Castle.

In her rewriting of the 1790s, one of the techniques which Morgan uses is the representation of "real" historical events and descriptions of famous historical figures, "whose delineation was almost a plagiarism" (Morgan, *O'Briens* xvi). She places her hero O'Brien at the Review of the Irish Volunteers at Phoenix Park, alongside Lord Charlemont, the Duke of Leinster (brother of the United Irish leader Lord Edward Fitzgerald) and Henry Grattan, "the Irish Cicero" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 73). She focuses on the reform agenda of the Volunteers and the Patriots as she describes this event, and through the presence of O'Brien and a number of lower class Irish onlookers suggests that it was a moment of solidarity between Protestants and Catholics. Morgan establishes a link between the Volunteers and the United Irishmen through O'Brien, who later attends a meeting of the Dublin United Irishmen where he sees Simon Butler, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, and Napper Tandy. She replaces the radical Lord Edward Fitzgerald with Lord Walter Fitzwalter, who denies that the United Irish seek independence from England. She thus aligns herself with the early leadership of the Dublin United Irishmen, who "envisaged the United Irishmen as high-profile power-brokers, whose rhetorical and publication skills would act as the crucial lever to prise reform from the government" (Whelan, *Tree* 155).[11] To facilitate her project for absorbing the United Irishmen into the Whig tradition, Morgan elides their separatist aims and their negotiations with the French, casting them as reluctant revolutionaries. She hints at a justification for the eventual rebellion in a quotation from John Locke's *On Government* that serves as the epigraph to the chapter

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[11] William Drennan was also an influential member of this coterie. Their agenda contrasted with that of Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell, and the Ulster leadership, including Samuel Neilson and Henry Joy McCracken, who believed that the United Irishmen must become a broad-based radical organization on mass democratic principles. Drennan, Butler and Rowan left the United Irish movement in 1794 (Whelan, *Tree* 156).

entitled "The United Irishmen":

> Whenever the legislators endeavour to take away, or destroy the property of the people or to reduce them to slavery, under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people; who are thereupon absolved from any further obedience, and are left to the common refuge which God hath provided against force and violence (Morgan, *O'Briens* 309).

She portrays the members of United Irish as reasonable men forced into rebellion by an unreasonable colonial government. She effaces most of the violence from the Rebellion, containing it in a single reference to "the reign of terror, which preceded the horrible epoch of the Rebellion" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 550). By including this historical strand in her work, Morgan worked to assimilate the Whigs and the United Irish movement into an Enlightenment tradition, and to separate them from the tradition of sectarian rebellions going back to the seventeenth century and before.

Murrogh O'Brien joins the Dublin United Irishmen, but at the point where he might be expected to become involved in the rebellion, she spirits him out of Dublin to the sublime landscape of Connaught. Once the scene shifts, the novel takes on a gothic strain. While this sudden change of focus may be seen to mark a hiatus in Morgan's political (and nationalist) project, I would argue that it forms part of her argument for Catholic Emancipation. Following Whig tradition, she believed that Catholic Emancipation should be promoted by a patriotic Anglo-Irish leadership; also following the Whig tradition, she assumed that once Catholics were granted admission to the full rights of citizenship, they would cast aside their popish superstitions. Her portrayal of the fanatical Jesuit, the Abbate O'Flaherty, suggests that, without the ameliorating effects of Emancipation, some Catholics may retreat into extremism. She circumscribes this Catholic "threat" by raising the spectre of the Jesuits in a Gothic, western landscape. The Jesuits were something of a safe target, since the order had been suppressed in the 1770s. In this light, the Abbate becomes a sort of Jesuit bogeyman, easily dismissed into fiction along with the

conventions of the Gothic novel.

Morgan invites her readers to contrast the Abbate with Murrogh O'Brien and Beavoin O'Flaherty, two enlightened Catholics who reject sectarianism along with their early Jesuit education. Murrogh and Beavoin are like Edgeworth's Geraldine and Cecil, the capable administrative couple whose value is not recognized in a corrupt Ireland. As Beavoin tells O'Brien, "Every where, talents such as yours will avail, save only at home!" (Morgan, *O'Briens* 517). However, Edgeworth's competent couple safely direct their energies to India, where their talents will be used in the service of Britain's empire. Murrogh and Beavoin turn to the Continent, where their energies are harnessed in the service of Napoleon. Therein lies Morgan's warning to her English readers: Ireland's Catholics will not be dominated, and if they are not allowed to use their considerable talents in the service of their country, they may very well use them in the service of England's enemies. The novel's argument for Catholic Emancipation necessitates that its primary focus must be the colonial relationship between England and Ireland and the effects this relationship has had on the people of Ireland. However, the binaries of the relationship between England and Ireland, of imperial centre to colonial periphery, are destabilized by the introduction of the relationship between Ireland and France. The link between these countries, forged by a long history of Irish Catholics living in exile, studying for the priesthood, and entering military service in France, presents Ireland as a nation with its own foreign policy and challenges the primacy of the colonial relationship between England and Ireland.[12] This challenge is an indication that Morgan is less drawn to accommodation and compromise than Edgeworth. Morgan's social background and her

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[12] In 1803 Napoleon agreed to the creation of a legion formed of Irishmen living in France: "At his coronation Napoleon presented the legion with a colour with his own name on one side and a harp (without a crown) and the inscription *L'indépendance d'Irlande* on the other" (Simms 655). The legion ceased to exist after 1815 (Simms 656).

generational position may have influenced her refusal to write a fictional conciliation between metropolis and colony in *The O'Briens*; this refusal makes her a link forwards towards later nineteenth-century radicalism, beginning with Thomas Davis and the Young Ireland movement (Dunne, "Haunted" 70).

Kevin Whelan argues that the retreat of conservative Protestants into sectarianism "effectively ceded the concept of the nation to Irish Catholics," and thus "Irish political nationalism ... entered the [1790s] as a Protestant phenomenon but exited it as a Catholic one" (*Tree* 140). At a time when strongly sectarian versions of the 1798 Rebellion were being produced, and when Daniel O'Connell's political campaigns were initiating an exclusively Catholic national identity. Morgan was attempting to revive the non-sectarian nationalism of the United Irish movement, or at the very least to create a nationalist narrative celebrating the Whigs and the United Irishmen that could be incorporated into the developing Catholic cultural nationalism. She was very aware of the political power of historical interpretation in Ireland:

> all [Morgan's] novels ...belong properly to the realist tradition and their concern with history owed less to romanticism than to a recognition that clashing perceptions of Irish history formed a central element of the reality she wished to confront and to influence (Dunne, "Witness" 135).

Her gesture towards a unifying myth faltered in the face of the irreconcilable interpretations of Irish history circulating at the time. Yet through her fiction she succeeded in destabilizing her readers' prejudices and certainties, and in passing on an awareness of the shifting ground of history. In *The O'Briens*, her final national tale, Morgan pointed towards the possibility of a future national synthesis that could truly incorporate and celebrate all the varieties of Irishness.

"To strike out something new"[1]

The Rebellion of 1798 continues to capture people's imaginations for the sheer audacity of the United Irishmen's political and social vision. In his recent study of the 1790s, Kevin Whelan writes of

> the window of opportunity which opened and was forcibly closed in the 1790s, a window which beckoned to the still unattained prospect of a non-sectarian, democratic and inclusive politics adequately representing the Irish people in all their inherited complexities (*Tree* ix).

The 1798 rebellion was a major political crisis which in the years to follow garnered multiple contested meanings, galvanizing the anxieties and ambitions of various political and religious factions within Ireland. Although these factions attempted to control the meaning of the rebellion, shaping it to fit partisan historical narratives, the radical possibilities of the 1790s and the rebellion could not be fully contained. The memory of the alliances between Protestants and Catholics, and the links forged with the French by the United Irishmen, prevented any full and final closure to the rebellion, despite the ferocity of the countervailing actions of the Protestant Ascendancy and the British government. In retrospect, the development during this period of three successive and overlapping formulations of Irish nationalism - Protestant colonial, United Irish republican and Catholic cultural nationalism - highlights the constructedness of the concepts of nation and nationalism themselves. The attempts by politicians and historians to construct a coherent Irish nationalism after the Union throws light on the development of the ideology of modern nationalism, which in this early stage had not yet coalesced into the assured definitions of the later nineteenth century.

As Ireland's colonial identity was reified through the dismantling of its parliamentary institutions and the establishment of direct government from Westminster,

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[1] Mary Ann McCracken, "To Henry Joy McCracken," 16 Mar. 1797, In *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken 1770-1866: A Belfast Panorama*, by Mary McNeill (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1960) 127.

the cultural articulation of the Irish nation became increasingly important. Maria Edgeworth's and Sydney Morgan's fictions about the 1798 Rebellion and the Union provide a useful starting point for an examination of the rise of nationalism and the relationship of women to the Irish nation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through their national tales and through their non-fiction writing, Edgeworth and Morgan participated in and influenced the main intellectual debates of the day. Ina Ferris suggests that the issues of Irish politics were argued out in Morgan's terms for years afterwards; certainly her first national tale, *The Wild Irish Girl*, had a considerable impact on the development of a romantic nationalism in the post-Union years. Both these authors influenced the English view of the Irish national character, and also profoundly affected Irish thinking about the nation and about its relationship to England. Owing to the limited the scope of my study I have focused on the national tales in which Edgeworth and Morgan write their versions of the rebellion and the Union.[2] However, an expanded study of women's political writing about Ireland in this period would allow for a fuller examination of the ways in which women negotiated their relationship to the nation. Nationalist writings by men often invoked symbolic women, including the woman who traditionally symbolizes the nation, to help define men's role within the imagined community. We need to examine women's responses to the roles prescribed for them within such nationalist writings, to understand how they at times played on these roles and at other times rejected them outright in order to gain an audience for their own creations.

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[2] Further sources for women's writing about the rebellion include the letters of Mary Ann McCracken and Mrs. McTier, as well as the published political writings of Henrietta Battier. For a later fictionalized account of the rebellion, written by an English woman, see Elizabeth Ham's 1848 novel *The Ford Family in Ireland*.

My suggestions thus far have focused on middle- or upper- class Protestant women writing in English. I have yet to find any published research which mentions reports of the 1798 rebellion written by lower class or Catholic women, writing in English or Irish. Unfortunately this lacuna in the first-hand written record means that we are missing a vital perspective on the rebellion. I would hope that this gap is an indication of the obscurity of the sources rather than an indication that the sources have not survived.

In order to comprehend better individual women's understandings of their relationship to the imagined community, we need to explore the ways in which women have expressed themselves as subjects of their own discourse: as authors, as patriots, as cultural and political commentators. In reading their texts, we reveal the strategies of representation available to and utilized by women writers. We also uncover the ways in which they reinforced or challenged the dominant discourse, understanding that women "draw on the cultural resources available to them -- they make some amendments, they refocus or rewrite them in a different direction -- yet they are basically bounded by certain cultural parameters" (Walkowitz quoted in Chevigny et al. 30). Women like Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Morgan were identified with the Protestant Ascendancy, and as such were implicated in the dominant colonial elite in Ireland. Edgeworth in particular has been coded by some critics as a conservative supporter of colonial rule. However, their relationship to the colonial elite was complicated by their gender, which "effects a certain difference" in their position, "revealing one among other instabilities within the ostensibly dominant term of the opposition between colonizer and colonized" (Corbett 393). Without discounting the privileges awarded to Edgeworth and Morgan on the basis of their social position, we may recognize that their relationship to the state and to the nation was limited by their gender, by the coexistence of patriarchy and colonial rule. Their national tales reveal the disjunction between their status as members of the Protestant Ascendancy and their status as women within a patriarchal society. As they attempt to write over this disjunction, Edgeworth and Morgan reveal a great deal about the strategies used by authors writing from the margins.

Thus as scholars attempt to move beyond the "comforting polarities" (Whelan, *Tree* ix) of revisionist and nationalist history to develop new interpretations of the rebellion and the Union, the political writings of women like Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Morgan offer a viewpoint which can further destabilize former certainties. In addition to

presenting two strategies for navigating the prescribed authorial and political roles for women in the early nineteenth century, Edgeworth's and Morgan's fictions about the rebellion illustrate two possibilities for imagining the Irish nation. Both women regarded their national tales as political and cultural interventions, intended to influence public opinion and to produce material effects. For both "the task of literature was not simply to reflect the past, but to generate the transformations which it required" (McCormack 159).

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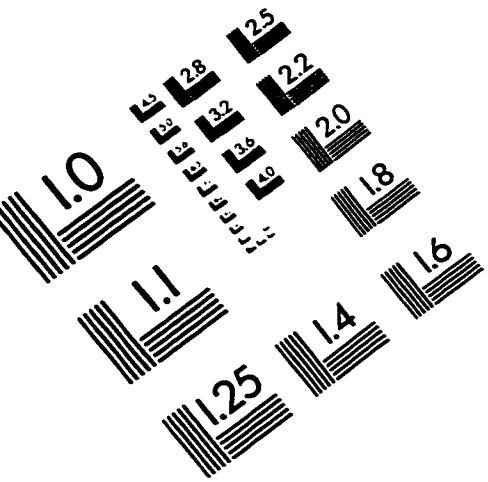

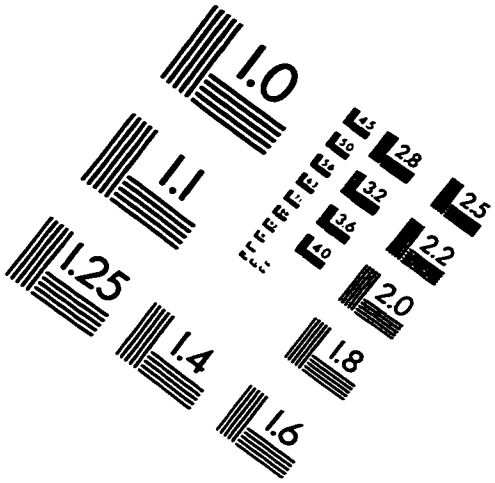

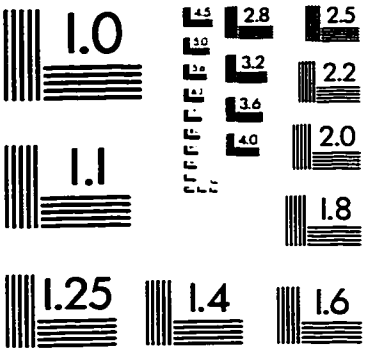

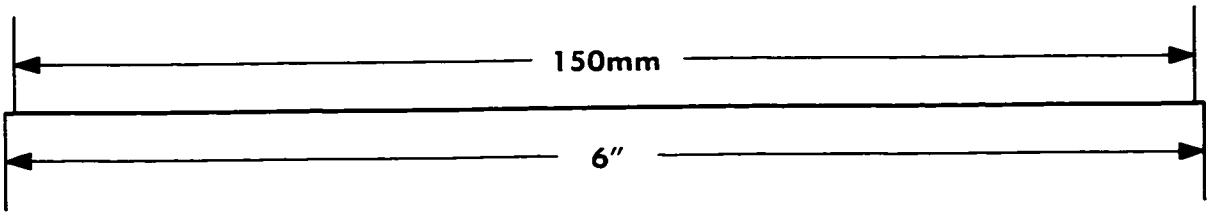

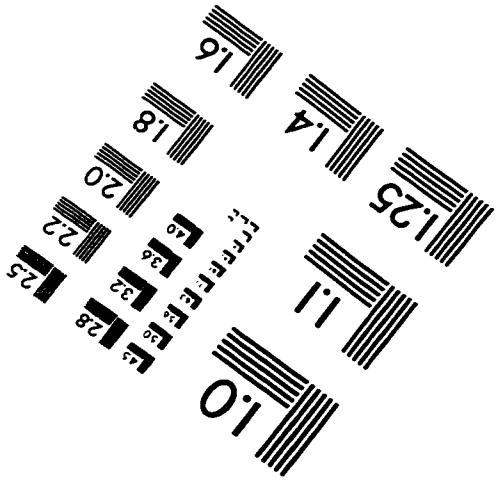

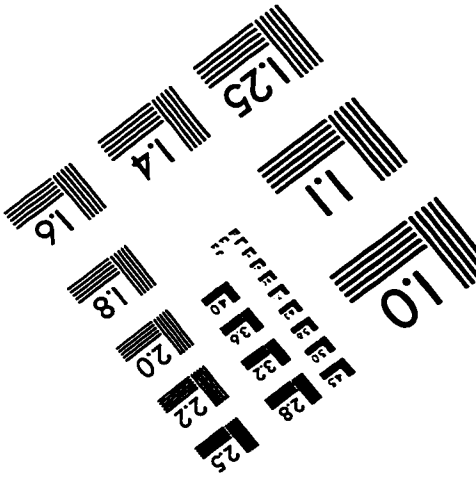

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