

“WHATEVER HER FAITH MAY BE”: SOME NOTES ON CATHOLICISM IN MARIA EDGEWORTH’S OEUVRE

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29

1. Introduction

Maria Edgeworth was the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord who returned to the family county home in Longford in 1782. Thanks to his contacts on the Continent and his enlightened views —Richard Lovell belonged to the Lunar Society—, he provided his eldest daughter with a very solid formation in economics, sociology and history, and personalities such as Erasmus Darwin or Josiah Wedgwood frequented the Edgeworth household. After the success of *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the authoress travelled around Europe and developed a more elegant style in her writings which were admired by Walter Scott. Edgeworth became popular in the French-speaking world thanks to the translations of her Swiss friends Charles and Marc-Auguste Pictet in *Bibliothèque Britannique*, so versions of Edgeworth’s works circulated all around the Continent. Along with pedagogic literature (*Practical Education* [1798], *Essays on Professional Education* [1809]), she composed novels of manners (*Belinda* [1801] and *Helen* [1834]) and epistolary fiction (*Leonora* [1806]) of remarkable merit. Edgeworth enjoys a considerable status since it was she who gave literary form to Hiberno-English and she inaugurated the Anglo-Irish novel and the Big House novel, a genre followed by Maturin (*Melmoth the Wanderer* [1820]), Charles Lever (*The O’Donoghues* [1845]), and William Carleton (*The Squanders of Castle Squander* [1852]).

Though the Edgeworths were not estranged from Catholicism and they even had Catholic ancestors,¹ Edgeworth is still regarded as a representative of the Protestant Ascendancy, the social group who had long dominated Ireland, and an inmate of the Big House. It is precisely due to their ideology that the Edgeworths became unwelcome objects of some critical studies of Irish literature and even English literature. Scholars have analysed Edgeworth's uncomfortable position as both agent and subject of patriarchal colonial rule (Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 147-148; Corbett 1994b: 397). Suffice it to say that Virginia Woolf featured Richard Lovell as a bore and a tyrant to his five wives (1942: 151-154) and that Irish nationalism despised Edgeworth because her patriotic feelings did not refer to the Catholic struggle to free themselves from the Protestants which attracted Romantic authors (Wolff 1978: xxiv). Marilyn Butler, Edgeworth's biographer, cites more criticisms against Edgeworth, namely, her inability to reproduce Ireland physically and the fact that intellectually she belonged to the generation previous to the French Revolution and wanted to prove not that the Irish were unique, but rather that they were worthy of equality (1972: 391).

30

Since the 1990s, scholars from the fields of postcolonial and gender studies have turned their attention to Edgeworth. Her Irish works (*Castle Rackrent* [1800], *Ennui* [1809], *The Absentee* [1812] and *Ormond* [1817]) represent only one field of interest. Both the recent work edited by Heidi Kauffman and Chris Fauske (2004) and the anthology prepared by Julie Nash (2006) confirm the vitality and variety of Edgeworth Studies and illuminate the political, historical and cultural context of a prolific writer who dealt with educational issues, cultural stereotypes and the relationship between Ireland and Britain. Butler has claimed that Edgeworth wished for "a change of heart in individuals rather than a change of national status for Ireland" and her efforts "showed more political insight than anything else written in fiction in her generation except the novels of Scott" (Butler 1972: 392-393).

In a recent article, Butler insists on one of Edgeworth's achievements in particular. By using a variety of narrative techniques, she fused mythical echoes and realism in texts which are equally indebted to the French moral tale, the Scottish Enlightenment and popular culture: "Maria Edgeworth's register was hardly aristocratic; her distinctive feature was her detailed, focused attention to the language, manners, and daily lives of the Irish masses" (2004: 47). This critic maintains that Edgeworth did not mean to portray Ireland as unique, but as a place similar to England. Furthermore, the idea that Edgeworth was committed to Britain or England rests on presuppositions rather than on a close reading of texts and political contexts since her Irish works advance a "localized, hybrid, an ideal society mutually tolerant and harmonious with itself" (Butler 2004: 50). According

to Butler, the Edgeworths were fascinated by the rural Catholic peasantry and tenantry. The authoress identified the Irish nation as a cultural formation with very strong local roots though she consistently avoided identifying the Irish nation with any nation-state and its institutions (Butler 2004: 48; see also Dabundo 2006: 193-198).

The critical shift articulated by Butler is very significant since other scholars, such as Julian Moynahan, still argue that the distance from the Irish pervades Edgeworth’s writings: the Edgeworths’ concern with Ireland “mingles objective curiosity with ethnic prejudice, affection with fun that may in unsettled times become terror, real familiarity with the wonder that grows from a sense of unbridgeable difference” (Moynahan 1995: 17-18). Drawing on Butler’s idea that Edgeworth understood Ireland as a single hybrid society, the present article provides a new approach to the debate on the role of Catholicism in Ireland and its relation to literature as reflected in Edgeworth’s oeuvre. We will resort to Homi K. Bhabha’s ideas on colonial representation and enterprise, which in Ireland is characterised by the assimilation to Protestantism and the suppression of local features.² This article also aims to enlarge Susan Manly’s thesis that Edgeworth engaged with Edmund Burke’s pleas for religious toleration and drew on arguments about tolerance, prejudice and toleration, showing an anti-aristocratic and cosmopolitan vision (2000: 154; see also McLoughlin 2002; Kim 2003; Fernández 2009). As will be argued, Edgeworth never stayed clear of the religious issue in the context of Pre-Victorian Ireland and proposed two strategies to achieve the integration of the Catholic Other with the Protestant Self.³ Whereas the Edgeworths sustained that Catholics must be given the same educational opportunities as Protestants; marriage and motherhood are regarded in Edgeworth’s fiction as the means of reconciling the Catholic population with their Protestant landlords, which is accomplished through the heroines. Robert Tracy has already pointed out that the plot device of intermarriage is employed to insist on the need to endorse Irish tradition and identity (1985: 9),⁴ but here it will be argued that these unions also advance a view of Ireland as a prosperous land.

2. Writing on religion in a divided country

In order to study Edgeworth’s views concerning religion, certain factors must be borne in mind. To begin with, the conquest of Ireland in the Middle Ages transformed the island into a palimpsest where two languages and two religions were intermingled and established the beginning of a social divide and an intricate relationship between the Protestant Anglo-Irish—the people of English ancestry living in Ireland—and the Roman Catholic Irish. At the level of national discourse,

the former were clearly identified as the settler landed class with better prospects, better education and possessing larger landholdings which their ancestors had seized from the conquered native population. For Bhabha, in this process of interaction characterizing cultures, meanings are vicariously addressed to an Other—in this case Ireland—, which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic and historic reality (1994: 52, 58-59). Historically, the end of the eighteenth century coincided with the English struggle to reinforce national security in the face of the threat from Ireland—a colonised inferior Other—, but also from France—the world’s foremost Catholic power— while Burke insisted on the primacy of imperial interest in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

Another point to consider is that, though most Anglo-Irish literature was produced by colonisers who rejected the colonised, the importance of the Protestants in Irish literature is incontestable due to their national consciousness and determined interest in Ireland. Many remarkable authors were of Protestant stock and the Dublin Society and the Royal Irish Academy were inspired by a sense of national responsibility and identity. As Butler has pointed out, Anglo-Irish writers had their audience outside Ireland and King George III admitted that after reading *Castle Rackrent* he had learnt something about his Irish subjects (Butler 1972: 359). Moreover, Irish life did not become a literary topic until the consolidation of the middle classes. This circumstance coincided with the spread of agrarian disorder fomented by secret societies and with the image of the Roman Catholics as a menace to the Ascendancy due to the Reform Act of 1832 which increased their voting strength.

In the Edgeworths’ works there is neither a concern with the spiritual dimension of religion nor a defence of Protestantism. Curiously, in other European literatures Edgeworth’s reception depended on her image as a moral writer, even as one who reflected Catholic values. The Spanish educationalist Mariano Carderera emphasised that Edgeworth was not unfamiliar with the living force of faith and her mistakes sprang from feminine reserve and her scrupulous rectitude (Carderera 1855: 159; Fernández 2010b: 28-29, 33). The absence of explicit religious references brought about Edgeworth’s decline and condemnation by British reviewers, who attacked the “striking and much-to-be-lamented deficiency in every thing like religious principle” (Rees 1819: xix). Unable to appreciate the religious dimension of *Practical Education*, critics considered Edgeworth a better novelist than Austen but a worse Christian (Butler 1981: 96-7).⁵ As a woman, Edgeworth was also in the ambiguous position of a disenfranchised member of the Protestant Ascendancy,⁶ and the conservative John Wilson Croker in *Eclectic Review* accused her father of being irreligious and morally corrupt to the point of launching an attack on the basis of Edgeworth’s gender. By featuring religion as a feminine

grace, Croker condemned those women who enter the public realm as irreligious because “[it] cannot be otherwise than painful, must be felt as derogating from the first character [women] have to sustain —the character of the sex, to the proprieties of which, talent can offer no indulgence” (Rev. of *Tales of Fashionable Life, Second Series* 1812: 979-1000). Croker’s reaction was in consonance with the tendency to associate the nation with woman.⁷ Robert Hall, a Baptist, held that in Edgeworth’s writings virtue was possible without religion, so he severely criticised her productions (Grey 1907: 297), while the *North American Review* simply praised Edgeworth: “whatever her faith may be, it is but just to say that her works have done more good than all the professedly religious novels that have been written since the creation of the world” (Rev. of *Helen* 1934: 170).

The Edgeworths had firm enlightened ideas: their attitude was invariably critical to the point of making reason and integrity prevail over religion. In *Professional Education*, they disapproved of the recluse education of the Roman Catholic clergy: “which, from childhood, separates them from the rest of society, tends to make a dangerous division of interests between the clergy and the laity; to excite suspicion and jealousy on the one side, and on the other, a spirit of mystery and priestcraft” (Edgeworth 1994a: 77). Likewise, on another occasion, Edgeworth alluded to her father’s illness in the following terms: “Half the people who make a prodigious show of their religion have not so much true religious feeling, so much resignation —submission, gratitude as he [my father] has— as he has shewn [sic] in the hour of most severe trial” (Häusermann 1952 : 76 [Letter to Mrs. Marcet, 30 May 1814]).

33

Finally, the Anglo-Irish writer did not consider all religious practices in the same way. She showed manifest sympathy for certain religious communities, such as the Jews or the Catholics, who were debarred from the ownership of the land and full citizenship and were constantly under suspicion as potential destroyers of political stability. These groups are handled positively and related in Edgeworth’s works. *Harrington*, for instance, depicts the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in 1780 and the behaviour of the Jews in this story compensates the negative portrait in previous tales (Fernández 2009). At that time, the Jews were seen in England as a menace, and, in Edgeworth’s texts, the perception of Catholics mirrors that of the Jews (Felsenstein 1995: 194).

Undoubtedly, it was prejudice that Edgeworth most strongly opposed, and she used humour to criticise intolerant attitudes. In a long letter to her Swiss correspondent Étienne Dumont, Edgeworth explained about Methodists: “Since the days of Urbain Grandier there were never such convulsionists [sic] as these Methodist possédés —It is scarcely possible to believe that the scene is England & the time in ‘our enlightened days’ (Häusermann 1952: 112 [Letter to Étienne Dumont, 19

March 1821]). Similarly, *Belinda* (1801) —a domestic story about women entering fashionable life—, describes the execrable effect of Lady Delacour’s methodist readings (Edgeworth 1994b: 270). The chapter on the education of country gentlemen in *Professional Education* also contrasts the conduct of the Methodist South Sea Missionaries with that of the Quaker missionaries towards the North American Indians. The Quakers showed the Indians how to use the plough or build houses with shingled roofs and stone chimneys, among other improvements. However, in their attempt to civilise people, the Methodist missionaries spoke of things beyond the poor savages’ grasp, so their listeners replied “Massa [sic] give us great deal of good talkee [sic], but very little of knives and scissors” (Edgeworth 1994a: 270).

34

In *Ormond* (1817) —a *Bildungsroman* set in Ireland and the Continent and containing multifarious political references—, Evangelism is identified with Mrs. M’Crule, formerly Miss Black. Edgeworth’s “orphan book”⁸ features the Catholic boy Tommy O’Shaughlin who aspires to be educated and faces the opposition of middle-class Protestant bigots, especially the hateful Mrs. M’Crule. This lady rejects Catholics and claims Ireland would be positively ruined if Tommy was admitted in a charity school since Catholic children cannot become good Protestants (Edgeworth 1972: 287). By resorting to irony, the narrator insists on her incapacity to see “the ridicule to which she might expose herself, by persisting in sounding so pompously a false alarm” (Edgeworth 1972: 290) while Mrs. M’Crule maintains that the errors of popery are wonderfully infectious (Edgeworth 1972: 291) and opposes Lady Annaly’s idea that “if you cannot make them [Catholic children] good Protestants, make them good anythings” (Edgeworth 1972: 291). At the end of the episode, Florence Annaly invites Mrs. M’Crule to partake of some goose pie symbolically standing for the desired political balance (Edgeworth 1972: 290).

Edgeworth did not ignore the other side of the story, how the native Irish attacked the English, as her plays reveal. In spite of Edgeworth’s unwillingness to be seen as a dramatist (Butler 1972: 278-279, 301), her *Comic Dramas, in Three Acts* saw the light with a preface signed by Richard Lovell Edgeworth. This paratext clearly distinguishes between Edgeworth’s previous productions or tales and the comedies, where “the characters must be shewn by strong and sudden lights, the sentiments must be condensed; and nothing that requires slow reflection can be admitted. —The audience must see, hear, feel and understand at once” (Edgeworth 1817: vi). *Comic Dramas* had its origin in amateur home theatricals and contains three plays —*Love and Law*; *The Two Guardians* and *The Rose, Thistle and Shamrock*— thematically related to prior works. The first deals with the love story of the Protestant Honor M’Bride and the Catholic Randal Rooney

whose families are involved in bitter feud over the bog of Ballynascraw which Cathy Rooney claims to be hers. In this play, proud Catty Rooney’s insults — symbolising the Catholic native resistance—, are directed against the M’Brides accused of being “Cromwellians at the best” and “not Irish native-at-all-at-all” but “people of yesterday, graziers and mushrooms —(mushrooms)— which tho’ they’ve made the money, can’t buy the blood” while Catty’s ancestors sat on a throne (Edgeworth 1817: 45-46).

As mentioned above, the Anglo-Irish writers were not at all indifferent to religion. The problem was that neither she nor her father took up a clear position regarding the established Anglican Church. Rather, the Edgeworths were more concerned with elaborating a utopian educational programme based on inclusion and contributing to the participation of the Catholic masses in the development of their country.

3. A want of culture

Education is probably the most variously approached issue in Edgeworth’s oeuvre. Persuaded that education was a synonym of individual and collective happiness, the Edgeworths embraced paternalism and relied on perfectibility, on a rational reform implying an industrialised and capitalist society. Therefore, as Edgeworth explained to an American friend, the Jewess Rachel Mordicai, Ireland was on “the eve of a very great national benefit” (MacDonald 1977: 74-75 [Letter to Rachel Lazarus Mordecai, 2 May 1825: 74-5]). From her point of view, Catholic emancipation would imply the promotion of “punctuality, order, economy, virtues and happiness which have been for centuries unknown to the despairing, oppressed Irish population” (MacDonald 1977: 74-75 [Letter to Rachel Lazarus Mordecai, 2 May 1825: 74-75]). She concluded by acknowledging that the new legislative measures “come home to every family, every cabin, every heart” (MacDonald 1977: 74-75 [Letter to Rachel Lazarus Mordecai, 2 May 1825: 74-75]). The Edgeworths naively dreamed of an educated Ireland. Edgeworth’s father established schools on the estate where Catholic and Protestant children were educated together, with periods for separate religious instruction, and he supported Catholic emancipation as well (Moynahan 1995: 16).⁹ Yet, as Terry Eagleton argues, despite Richard Lovell’s insistence in the parliamentary debates that the force of education was greater than the power of the sword, he was wrong to imagine that religious conciliation could prove effective (1995: 76).

After the Reformation, Irish Catholicism became historically linked to the denial of patrimony and to the Penal laws segregating the Catholic aristocracy and gentry

from the land and its people. The first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise to political consciousness of the Irish peasants and the Catholic middle class. Nevertheless, the Act of 1704 had excluded Catholics from direct political representation and office, that is, “from all the institutions that helped to produce and shape the masculine ideal of the landed gentleman” (Corbett 1994a: 888; Ryan 2006: 178-179). Even though public employment and the legal profession were closed to them until the Catholic Relief Act (1779), trade was open, and, by 1750, there was a growing class of prosperous Roman Catholic merchants (Ryan 2006: 179). Yet, there was a significant difference between the Protestant and the Catholic community. Advancements up the social scale strengthened the coherence of the Protestants and was an essential characteristic of the Ascendancy: as Beckett explains, a Protestant boy, however humble his origin, might hope to rise, by some combination of ability, good luck and patronage, to a position of influence from which a Roman Catholic however well-born or wealthy, would be utterly excluded (Beckett 1976: 44-45, 65). This is precisely what the Edgeworths denounced in *Essay on Irish Bulls*. This text, which was jointly authored, defends the Irish as a single hybrid society. The Edgeworths eschew mention of the Catholic/Protestant opposition again but continually highlight the ability of the Irish to achieve great objectives regardless of their religion.

Partly written as an apology for *Castle Rackrent*—which had been taken by some readers as a satire on Irish manners—, *Irish Bulls* (1802) aimed to combat racism and to defend Irish idiosyncrasy by extolling the eloquence of the Irish (Manly 2006: 2). Edgeworth’s intellectualism and rationalism are filtered through the numerous anecdotes, quotations, and popular expressions she employs to define what an Irish blunder is. The conclusion is that blunders appear in all types of literature—ranging from great English authors to the preface to the dictionary of the French Academy—, and that most of them are basically linguistic inaccuracies. If they are systematically associated with Irishness, it is because the Irish employ comparatively more metaphors and witty remarks than the English, and the brogue—or Irish accent—produces a comic effect (Edgeworth 1967: 184). What is more, without bulls, social intercourse would end. An attempt to give a linguistic account of the English spoken in Ireland as Elizabethan English, *Irish Bulls* offers a historical outline of its development (Edgeworth 1967: 150-151). The final anecdote is about the Czars of Russia, who put the cap and bells of their fool on the head of the subjects they wanted to disgrace. The question posed by authors—“Would it not be a practical bull to place the bells upon her own imperial crown?” (Edgeworth 1967: 187)—erases polarities and refers to previous works.¹⁰

Together with “The Hibernian Medicant”, “Bath Coach Conversation” and “The Irish Incognito”; “Little Dominick” is one of the four chapter-length prose

national allegories in *Irish Bulls*, where the Edgeworths weaken the political allegory by introducing a Catholic child’s experiences in a boarding school, based on those of Richard Lovell Edgeworth himself (Butler 1999-2003: 327-328, vol. I note 74).¹¹ At the end of the story, Little Dominick’s English proves to be better than that of his master. Still, he remains loyal to his identity and, with his good friend and schoolmate Edwards, he retains his “ould Irish brogue” (Edgeworth 1967: 111).

Formal education does not only concern Catholics and men. Many Protestants undergo a process of education and reform, and female education is unconditionally promoted in Edgeworth’s texts written after *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1798). Therefore, the hero in *Ennui* will not obtain Cecilia Delamere’s hand unless he is fit for a profession, as Lord Y__ explains to him (Edgeworth 1967: 387). *The Rose, Thistle and Shamrock* deals with the management of a new inn. In the play, the schooling of the Catholic boy Owen Larken is accomplished thanks to the generosity of an Anglo-Irish landlord, Sir William Hamden, so that the boy’s education “not be left half done” (Edgeworth 1967: 380). Until his father died, Owen went to school and got good results, but later he had to help Widow Larken. Aware of the importance of education, Mabel emphasises before the Scot Andrew Hope that “it’s with the head, as my father used to say, he’ll make more than the hands” (Edgeworth 1967: 338-339), and the Larkens plan to get a post as a clerk or as a teacher for Owen.

37

Orlandino (1848), Edgeworth’s last tale, was composed to collect money for the Irish poor after the Famine. Mitzi Myers has defined this work as a text structured around colonialism and community; it deals with orphanage, estrangement and famine (1995: 201). The Anglo-Irish authoress was personally involved in raising funds for famine relief and at the same time composed a moving story about perseverance which satisfied Walter Scott’s request in 1827: “shew us how the evils which prevent them [the lower classes in Ireland] rising in the scale of society possessed as they are of so much that is amiable and excellent [...] I think you could do so much for us in shewing us how to mend the worst part of our British machine” (Butler and Edgeworth Butler 1928: 291). *Orlandino* centres on a mysterious young man who left Ireland and his family in search of adventures and who, on his return, reforms with the help of a Protestant family. Once he has assumed a new character, Orlandino periodically sends his sister Mary a pound so that she can pay a girl to do the housework and have some time for her own improvement and attendance at school: “she was thus instructed in all which her mother’s fallen fortune had prevented her hitherto from having time or opportunity to learn” (Edgeworth 1848: 136). As a result, the girl is prepared “for any change in their circumstances which might take place” (Edgeworth 1848: 136).

Another pervading trait in Edgeworth's oeuvre is the centrality of women, which is as remarkable in her Irish tales as in the work of other contemporary authoresses, such as Lady Morgan (*The Wild Irish Girl* [1806]). According to Robert Tracy, ancient Irish literature —aisling poetry, for instance— contains many references to symbolic matings which give a chieftain legitimacy over a local area (1985: 21). In fact, marriage became one of the dominant metaphors for representing England's complicated relationships with its partners/possessions within the British Isles and it also had a long tradition on the Irish stage, such as in Charles Shadwell's *Irish Hospitality* (1718), Thomas Sheridan's *The Brave Irishman* (1755), Charles Macklin's *Love à la Mode* (1759) or John O'Keefe's *The Shamrock; or St. Patrick's Day* (1777) (Fernández 2012: 36). Butler explains that Irish women in Edgeworth's oeuvre have a more significantly political part in the narrative than in the tales set in England and are related to political consciousness: "The imagined community and the empowered woman tend to appear in a symbiotic relation, each needing the other as a condition of existence" (1992: 50). We will try to show that Catholic women in Edgeworth's tales not only introduce the past in the story, but also discover their true identity in the middle of narratives helping to bridge the gap between the Catholic and the Protestant Self.

4. Tales of love and restoration

The two series of *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809, 1812) contain several feminocentric fictions in line with Jean-François Marmontel's *contes moraux*.¹² Throughout Edgeworth's lifetime, *Ennui* was almost always named among her finest productions. It focuses on the Earl of Glenthorn's adventures in Ireland, where he meets the Irishwoman Ellinor O'Donoghue. Her sincerity and authenticity work as a spell on the protagonist, boosting the ennuyé's self-esteem and creating a fiction with very positive consequences (Fernández 2008: 311-313). Through Ellinor, the Anglo-Irish landlord discovers Irish customs and stories and is aware of how his family became Protestant, for she remembers "[...] 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" (Edgeworth 1967: 230-1). She also regrets that the family "stooped to be *lorded*" (Edgeworth 1967: 230-231) and changed their Gaelic surname, O'Shaughnessy.

Ellinor is associated with secrecy, and, interestingly, the hero's anagnorisis takes place after Glenthorn's refusal to save Christy from being arrested during a rebellion. In one of the most moving love scenes ever penned by Edgeworth, Ellinor reveals that Glenthorn, and not Christy, is her real son and is a Catholic who had been switched at birth (Edgeworth 1967: 352). For Mary Jean Corbett,

Ellinor subverts the very system on which masculine fictions of identity depend through an act of misrepresentation (2002: 321). The substitution of Glenthorn for Christy demonstrates the fictional status of the Self and its properties, denaturalising both, so as to shift the grounds of entitlement from birth to merit. On a different level, Glenthorn is attracted by the witty Lady Geraldine, who, devoid of feminine shyness, is quite determined and not at all interested in Glenthorn, a misogynist afraid of a second marriage. The young lady distorts reality and laughs at the English, who would avidly study Mr. Graiglethorpe’s book as a *New View of Ireland* (Edgeworth 1967: 288) and is based on the pack of lies she has told the gentleman about this country. Lady Geraldine affirms Irishness by bravely encouraging Irishwomen “let us never stoop to admire and imitate these second-hand airs and graces, follies and vices. Let us dare to be ourselves” (Edgeworth 1967: 302). As a consequence, and after asking him if Lady Hauton and Mrs. Norton’s remarks about Ireland are relevant, Glenthorn realises that “I had a soul and that I was superior to the puppets with whom I had been classed” (Edgeworth 1967: 303). Eventually, the hero prefers Cecilia Delamere’s softness to Lady Geraldine’s vivacity, and his marriage means a second rebirth since he is reconciled with the Old English —and Catholic— past alluded to in the surname Delamere.

The importance of female reputation —and especially the reputation of Catholic women— is remarkable in Edgeworth’s national tales. Also, in the play *Love and Law*, where Mr. Gerard O’Blaney, a distillery owner who does illegal business, plans to marry Honor M’Bride and tells his servant, Pat Cox, to sully Honor’s reputation around town and expose her until Catty Rooney retorts: “this is the saint, that Honor M’ Bride would be passing herself upon us for —And all the edication [sic] she got at Mrs. Carver’s Sunday school. —Oh, this comes of being better than one’s neighbours” (Edgeworth 1817: 51-52). Fortunately, Mrs. Carver, the Justice of Peace’s wife, solves the situation by explaining that the girl was with her, so Catty eventually grants her permission and the couple marries.

The Absentee, a story praised by Sir Walter Scott in the preface to *Waverley* (1814), portrays two girls with the revealing name of Grace. One is a poor Catholic girl living with Widow O’Neill (Edgeworth 1994c: 191), and the other is Grace Nugent, a symbol of Catholic resistance attacked by many reviewers (Butler 1999-2003: xxx-xxxi, vol.1). An orphan brought up by Lady Clonbrony, Grace Nugent is closely related to the hero Lord Colambre and she has refused several offers of marriage with “a tincture of Irish pride” (Edgeworth 1994c: 149). Lady Dashfort reveals to the hero that Grace Nugent’s mother was a St. Omar (Edgeworth 1994c: 72) a name associated with French Catholicism, and an exception in a family of women *sans reproche*, which intrigues Colambre (Edgeworth 1994c: 149). Like

the Delameres, the Nugents were Old English settlers from the medieval period and Catholics.¹³ It seems that Grace's mother kicked over the traces and had an affair with Captain Reynolds. She brought a child to England and met Nugent there. Count O'Halloran, significantly epitomising the Wild Geese—that is, the Irish Roman Catholic aristocrats who had been dispossessed and excluded from politics and were residing on the Continent—, clarifies the situation and facilitates the restoration of the mother's reputation: Reynolds and Miss St. Omar were privately married though the former did not acknowledge the union until he was dying (Edgeworth 1994c: 243).

The epitome of Gaelic nobility and Catholicism in *Ormond* is King Corny whose daughter is courted by Black Connal. No matter how eagerly the latter tries to make Dora a woman of fashion, the young lady retains her Irish character. When the protagonist reencounters Dora, he realises that she is no longer his playmate on the Black Islands. In the past, Dora insisted that young Irish girls are not “cyphers” (Edgeworth 1972: 156) and she was quick to attack men who said one thing and meant another—“a woman might as well listen to a fool or a madman” (Edgeworth 1972: 120). Now, though Dora prefers *le grand monde*, Ormond is happy to see that she has not adopted loose morals: “she did honour to Ireland by having preserved her reputation; young, and without a guide, as she was, in dissipated French society, with few examples of conjugal virtues to preserve in her mind the precepts and habits of her British education” (Edgeworth 1972: 397).

40

In conclusion, religion repeatedly appears in the works that Edgeworth produced alone and in collaboration with her father.¹⁴ Edgeworth's critical attitude towards the Ascendancy was totally misunderstood and provoked condemnation from reviewers. Despite the difficulty of reconciling her sensitivity to the dispossessed Catholic Irish with her position on the family estate, she was committed to Ireland and deeply aware of the evils produced by the split between Catholics and Protestants. Edgeworth's national tales reveal an enlightened reliance on individual worth, self-control and justice, as well as a disapproval of fanaticism. As an inheritance of her father's unionist thought, she regarded the incorporation of the Catholic Other as something positive and the best way to achieve a reconciliation with the Protestant identity without denying or suppressing the Catholic alterity. It is, rather, the conversion to Protestantism that implies unhappiness and destruction, as can be found in *Castle Rackrent*, enacting family and political decay. In Edgeworth's oeuvre, local attachment allows for multiple national allegiances, a plurality which implies national improvement rather than national weakness and can be articulated through education and the discovery of the past. For Edgeworth, the Union meant taking advantage of the shifting forces and fixities of colonial power described by Bhabha. In this regard, Edgeworth deserves to occupy an outstanding position in

British literature for her defence of the individual and the consequent amelioration of the community. Such insistence on Anglo-Irish hybridity and cultural contrast is very striking in a Protestant authoress who called into question Britishness and urged the English to become aware of the alien country they ruled.

Notes

¹. On the other hand, the Abbé Edgeworth was Louis XVI's confessor, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth was nearly lynched in 1798 when mobs considered him a French spy or a United Irishman, an event repeatedly fictionalised by his daughter (see Butler 1972: 196; Butler 1999-2003: xxvi-xxvii, vol 1; McCormack 1985: 104; Dunne 1991).

². In Bhabha's theory, this process is linked with the disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority, which, instead of resolving the tension between two cultures, creates a crisis for any concept of authority (1994: 52, 114).

³. Integration is a key word understood here as the inclusion in a large unit—the nation—which ideally respects the Self and contributes to the creation of an ideologically hybrid multicultural community (Fernández 2010a).

⁴ See also Fernández applying O'Shaughnessy's analysis to *Ennui* (2008: 310-313).

⁵. On Austen's religious views, see Michael Giffin (2002). Peter Knox-Shaw criticises Butler's ideas by insisting on Austen's relationship with [the] Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment. In an attempt to justify Austen's centrist politics, he places her as an Anglican Erasmian rather than as an Evangelical (2004: 5).

⁶. In Edgeworth's letters there is a pervading tendency to associate herself with Rosamond, a character in her children's stories, and with Irishwomen, as she once wrote to a relative (Colvin 1971: 286 [Letter to Honora Edgeworth, 5 December 1820]), and who "have a part in a narrative itself

more significantly political than the tales set in England, and because their symbolic roles [...] have to do directly or implicitly with national consciousness" (Butler 1972: 50). Furthermore, for Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, women in Edgeworth's national tales are victims, predators or objects desired by the hero and offstage until they finally join him. In the seminal *Castle Rackrent*, for instance, failed marriages symbolise the failure to grant Catholic emancipation (Ní Chuilleanáin 1985: 120).

⁷. Hannah More believed that "the well-being of those states, and the virtue and happiness, [...] the very existence of that society" (Kelly 1992: 118) depended on women's behaviour, and James Fordyce's sermons usually related the "daughters of Britain" to morality (Kelly 1992: 110-111).

⁸. Edgeworth used to refer to *Harrington* and *Ormond* in this way because they were published in the same volume after Richard Lovell's death on 13 June 1817 and therefore appeared without his imprimatur (Butler 1972: 278).

⁹. For Tom Dunne, however, Richard Lovell's support of Catholic emancipation was interested: "among those most active in the Catholic cause in the area were a Nugent and several O'Ferralls—members of the original Old English and Gaelic Irish families whose dispossession was the basis of the Edgeworthstown estate" (1991: 116). The idea of mixing Catholics and Protestants at school appears in *The Absentee* with excellent results (Edgeworth 1994c: 166-167).

¹⁰. "Did the Warwickshire militia, who were chiefly artisans, teach the Irish to

drink beer? or did they learn from the Irish to drink whiskey?" (Edgeworth 1994c: 6); "They [People] say that the American dogs did not know how to bark, till they learnt it from their civilized betters" (Edgeworth 1967: 429).

¹¹. When Richard Lovell was eight, he was similarly bullied at school in Warwick (Dunne 1991: 102-103).

¹². The first series comprised *Ennui*, *Almeria*, *Madame de Fleury*, *The Dun* and *Manoeuvring* while the 1812 series included *Vivian*, *Emilie de Coulanges* and *The Absentee*.

¹³. Two critics offer excellent accounts of the importance of women's surnames in Edgeworth's national tales: Mitzi

Myers (1996) and Butler (2001). For more information about the Nugents, see Dunne (1991: 97), and McCormack and Walker (1988: ix-xii).

¹⁴. It was at the end of her career—and after Richard Lovell's death—that Edgeworth's ideas evolved as a consequence of the hard times that Ireland faced towards the mid nineteenth century, and she wrote to her brother about her inability to recreate Ireland: "[...] realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature— distorted nature, in a fever" (Butler 1972: 452 [Letter to Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, 19 February 1834]).

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42

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