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THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL CLASS AND THE REFORMATION OF IRELAND: MARIA EDGEWORTH'S *ENNUI*

DEBORAH WEISS

> Mamma wants me to catch somebody, and to be caught by somebody; but that will not be; for, do you know, I think somebody is nobody.
>
> —Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui* (205)

Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui*, a fictional memoir by the Anglo-Irish Earl "Lord Glenthorn," was published in 1809, shortly after Ireland's union with Britain, and is set in the years surrounding the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Marilyn Butler notes in her introduction to *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui* that Edgeworth was writing this novel "in the immediate context of the traumatic events of 1798, when she and her family witnessed atrocities, and were themselves threatened, as a Rebellion of Protestants as well as Catholics was bloodily put down" (35). In her contribution to her late father's *Memoirs*, Edgeworth describes the danger to the family at Edgeworthstown as the French advanced on Longford, and she narrates with great detail her father's efforts to maintain the peace—efforts that put him into considerable danger from Protestant militia leaders (chapters X and XI). Although the novel makes no direct reference to the union, and while it appears to give only slight attention to the rebellion itself, most critics are in agreement that *Ennui* should be read, to use Butler's dramatic description, as a "fictional allegory on a sweeping scale" (introduction 2).

Composed during this time of turmoil, *Ennui* is Edgeworth's first effort to represent in fictional form the conflict in Ireland and the subsequent political absorption of the nation into the United Kingdom. As an Anglo-Irish writer, Edgeworth clearly had divided loyalties. She was born in England, spent a

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great deal of time there, and, with her father, was closely connected to Anglo-Scottish intellectual life. At the same time, the Edgeworth family was at pains to bring enlightened, modern, nonrepressive forms of management to their Irish estate, and they generally resisted recognizing and fostering factional and religious differences. In her continuation of her father's *Memoirs* Edgeworth notes that even during the rebellion, Richard Lovell Edgeworth refused to acknowledge differences of religion or faction when considering local legal cases (207). Edgeworth has, however, in the fairly recent past, been represented by some critics as a colonialist writer and an apologist for the Anglo-Irish Ascendency (Deane, Dunne, Hollingworth); but vigorous defenses against this charge have been mounted by Butler and Mitzi Myers, both of whom make compelling cases for a much more complex understanding of Edgeworth's ideological allegiances (Butler, "Irish Culture and Scottish Enlightenment"; Myers, "'Like the Pictures in a Magic Lantern'" and "Completing the Union"). The complexity of Edgeworth's position on Ireland is best understood if we, like Butler, Myers, and a number of other scholars, consider her as an author with a broad, cosmopolitan, and, importantly, an Enlightenment-based outlook on economic and social issues (Brundan, Easton, Ó Gallchoir, Wohlegemut).

At a time of widespread turmoil—a time of terror, repression, and rebellion—Edgeworth turns to Enlightenment concepts of economics and education for both diagnosis and cure. Rather than hold English colonial practices, religious sectarianism, or native Irish intransigence responsible for the unrest, Edgeworth clearly blames the semi-feudal socioeconomic system in which the aristocracy and peasantry have been educated, and in which the character of the classes has been formed. The violent and terrifying rebellion is shown in the narrative to be a conflict stemming from the environmental conditioning of the two antagonistic groups. In her understanding of human development and the cultural formation of classes, Edgeworth is both a Lockean and a Smithian. The coauthor of *Practical Education*—an empirically based instructional manual for parents—Edgeworth believed, as did most educated Britons of her day, that individual character was formed through experience, through education writ large. Considerably influenced by Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, Edgeworth also believed that the "character" of whole classes was subject to the economic system in which individuals lived. To use Butler's words, Smith allowed Edgeworth to conceive of character "as both a question of individual personality and a question of social class" (introduction 38). In an assessment of *The Absentee* that equally applies to *Ennui*, Fraser Easton explains that for Edgeworth, "national character, far from being an innate attribute of a people, a culture, or a tradition, depends on economic development; it is material, not cultural, at root" (120). The condition of Ireland, as Edgeworth understood it, was the result of an outdated economic system, in which people were educated *as a class* in such a way as to make either conflict or complacency inevitable. The cure she imagines

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through the creation of her allegory is, like the sickness itself, both economic and educational. For Ireland to move out of the past and into a peaceful and prosperous future, the class structure needs to be revised so that people are no longer acculturated into aristocracy and peasantry, but rather carefully trained as participants in a new economic and ideological middle ground.

Edgeworth creates her allegory of class transformation through a generic manipulation in which she associates specific genres with class-based ideologies. Edgeworth uses romance—understood at the time as a fictional form that conveyed wonder though fantastic occurrences and improbable plots (see Johnson and Reeve)—to represent both the experience and the economic system of the old regime. And she uses what we understand today as formal realism—a probabilistic narrative made up of the precise and recognizable details of everyday life—to represent the new values and the new economic system of the professional middle class. Critics such as Clíona Ó Gallchoir and Sharon Murphy, as well as Butler and Myers, have noted that the incorporation of romance and fairy tale motifs is a recurring strategy in much of Edgeworth's work of this period, and Michael Gamer has argued for the political and pedagogical importance of Edgeworth's integration of elements from romance and realism. Most careful readers have understood that the climax of the novel—the revelation that Lord Glenthorn was switched at nurse with his native Irish foster brother—operates as a politically charged fairy-tale moment (Butler, Gallagher, Gamer, Murphy, Myers, Ó Gallchoir, and Trumpener). But readers have not paid sufficient attention to what happens *after* the revelation of Lord Glenthorn's true identity. Romance disappears and formal realism prevails as the former Lord Glenthorn, unable to even conceive of living as an Irish peasant, reeducates himself to become a member of the professional middle class. Thus, one of Edgeworth's primary aims in incorporating fairy-tale and romance motifs into *Ennui* is to expose class-based education and economic relationships as the cause of the nation's troubles, and to imagine a new national identity based on the spread of middle-class professionalism.

The central figure in Edgeworth's educational allegory is, of course, Lord Glenthorn, whose memoirs we are reading and who, as both Butler (introduction) and Myers ("Completing the Union") have noted, is the individual who represents the state of the nation. Throughout much of the novel, Lord Glenthorn suffers from ennui—which is manifested through the feeling of constant boredom and the sensation of physical, intellectual, and emotional exhaustion. Although a series of experiences, including the Irish Rebellion, temporarily relieve him of his ennui, Lord Glenthorn is only able to find a permanent cure after Ellinor, his Irish nurse, tells him she is his real mother and that his foster brother, Christy the blacksmith, is really Lord Glenthorn.[1] Glenthorn decides immediately that the honest and honorable thing to do is to give up his position to Christy, but he cannot change places with his foster brother and join the Irish peasantry because he has been raised

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as a gentleman. Instead, freed from his debilitating ennui by the loss of his aristocratic privilege, and assisted by the enlightened Irish aristocrat Lord Y, Glenthorn remakes his character by becoming a lawyer and by embracing such professional values as industry, independence, and individual inner worth. This rebirth as a professional allows Glenthorn to win the hand of Cecilia Delamere, who is heir at law to the Glenthorn estate. The family of the new Earl (formerly the blacksmith) grossly mismanages the estate, and consequently Cecilia inherits the property after the Earl's son and heir burns down the castle and dies in the fire. Glenthorn then returns to the property, but he does so only through his marriage, only after he has become a self-made professional man, and only after he has learned to manage his affairs according to the values of the professional middle class. One expects, therefore, that a very different "Lord Glenthorn" has been born, one no longer affected by ennui and one who, as Edgeworth and her father recommended in their manual *Professional Education*, understands the country gentleman's role as that of a professional estate manager.[2] Through Glenthorn, the new value system is, to borrow from Gary Kelly's account of class transformation (chapter 1), sent upwards to professionalize the gentry.

The ennui that plagues Lord Glenthorn was understood in Edgeworth's day as a class-based problem, as a complaint of the idle rich (Butler, introduction 32). Lord Glenthorn's condition is, essentially, a problem of weak agency and tepid desire that stems from his position as an aristocrat. There is nothing he wants to do because he can have everything he desires by doing nothing at all. The syndrome renders somatic and psychological the condition of the aristocracy, which is a class made up of individuals who do nothing: One does nothing *to be* an aristocrat and one does nothing *as* an aristocrat. From the very beginning of the novel, Edgeworth highlights this condition, signaling Lord Glenthorn's connection to aristocracy by choosing an epigraph that associates the character with his social class.

> 'Que faites-vous a Pozdam?' demandois-je un jour au prince Guillaume. 'Monsieur,' me repondit-il, 'nous passons notre vie a conjuguer tous le meme verbe: Je m'ennuie, tu t'ennuies, il s'ennuie, nous nous ennuyons, vous vous ennuyez, ils senuient; je m'ennuyois, je me'ennuierais & etc. (143)[3]

The epigraph, a quotation spoken by a prince, is about the court of Frederick the Great and consists of the conjugation of the French verb "ennuyer," which is, of course, the verb form of the "ennui" that plagues Lord Glenthorn. By boring the reader through grammar lessons, the epigraph enacts for the reader the very condition of ennui it is employed to depict. Moreover, by referring in French to a German court, the novel begins with the sense that ennui is a pan-European, distinctly aristocratic condition, a sense that is solidified in these early chapters by its connection to Lord Glenthorn's privileged and pointless upbringing. As

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Ó Gallchoir has noted, many critics skip over Lord Glenthorn's experiences in England and so fail to catch the way Edgeworth carefully connects him to aristocracy ("Edgeworth's Revolutionary Morality" 94). With education understood as it commonly was in the Enlightenment, as the sum total of one's youthful experience, Lord Glenthorn is educated, or formed, by moral and intellectual neglect and material excess. As a quintessential aristocrat, Lord Glenthorn lives a dissolute life in England, gambling, entertaining, and spending inordinate amounts of money. In all, he is an extreme version of his companions, a thorough aristocrat with all the standard aristocratic vices; as such, his ennui serves as a metaphor that represents the condition of an exhausted and useless social class, and he himself functions as a synecdoche for the aristocracy as a whole.

The novel's interest in the socioeconomic effects of aristocratic education becomes particularized in Ireland when Lord Glenthorn, prompted by Ellinor's sudden, almost magical appearance in England, returns to his Irish estate. Once the character arrives in Ireland, Edgeworth begins to associate the aristocracy more clearly with romance and to illustrate the dire consequences to the nation of the aristocratic system of character formation. Lord Glenthorn's journey to his remote estate is marked by the precise cultural details and accurate reproductions of Irish vernacular for which Edgeworth is known, and which have long been understood within the context of representational realism. But once Lord Glenthorn gets to his own property, Edgeworth draws heavily on romance motifs to demonstrate the outmoded condition of the aristocracy. As Murphy has noted, the initial description of Glenthorn castle is gothic (156), and Lord Glenthorn himself notes the similarity of his room to descriptions in the novels of Ann Radcliffe (179). When he arrives, treated like a returning king, Lord Glenthorn is impressed and intoxicated by the extent of his power over his Irish estate and tenants, noting "these people seemed born for my use" (178). He observes that the reaction to his return "all together gave more the idea of vassals than of tenants, and carried my imagination centuries back to feudal times" (178). Edgeworth uses the gothic, understood at the time as a species of fiction deeply tied to romance, to imbue Lord Glenthorn's experience as an Irish lord with a sense of anachronism and to suggest the antiquated and archaic nature of the traditional relationship between lord and tenant. Arriving at the estate is like traveling back in time, and indeed Lord Glenthorn's Scottish estate manager, Mr. M'Leod, notes that the Irish peasantry lives in a state similar to that of the English peasant in the time of Queen Elizabeth. The impoverishment of the Irish, the romantic setting of the castle, and the feudal relationship between Lord Glenthorn and his tenants suggest that aristocracy itself is an archaic and regressive political construct. The impact of this anachronistic system on the rural Irish is dire, as it keeps the population in a state of economic dependence and moral underdevelopment:

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Houses are cramped and smoky, children are barefoot and uneducated, dishonesty is rampant, and no one really seems to work.

The economic relationship between aristocracy and peasantry, as dramatized by Lord Glenthorn's interactions with his tenants, can best be described as parasitic. Like a prince or feudal lord, Lord Glenthorn distributes gifts to favorites and is moved by emotional appeals and impressive rhetoric. Enjoying his power and the slavish devotion of the tenants, Lord Glenthorn dispenses favors without consideration of the value of the appeal or the long-term impact of the distribution of funds. Indeed, he gives no thought to social policy or to the economic development of the estate and views his wealth as inexhaustible. Consequently, the tenants remain poor and ignorant, lacking the ability to develop self-reliance because they are consistently rewarded for short-term appeals. Through Lord Glenthorn's behavior, the novel suggests that the economics of the aristocracy—an exhausted, antiquated, and morally bankrupt class—is the cause of Irish national troubles, the reason why the Irish peasants are impoverished and rebellious.

Frequently in *Ennui*, Edgeworth signals self-consciously to her readers that they should associate aristocracy and the old feudal relationships between the classes with the improbable fictions of romance and the magic of fairy tales. For example, at a key moment in the story, Glenthorn, having given up his former identity and title, decides to study the law. He explains at this important juncture, "I have no more wonderful incidents to relate, no more changes at nurse, no more sudden turns of fortune" (305). Edgeworth uses such narrative signals, including Glenthorn's description of his former state as an "enchantment of indolence," to call the reader's attention to the tropes of romance in play through much of the novel. For critics most interested in Edgeworth's use of romance, Ellinor is a central figure, a character who, according to Myers's assessment, is a Mother Goose figure, a tale teller mocked for superstition, but who has "dangerous powers of maternal wit and primeval affection" ("Completing the Union" 54). Whether or not one agrees with Myers about the folkloric power of Ellinor's speech, Ellinor, as the holder of the secret, functions as the vehicle for Edgeworth's most audacious use of romance motifs to critique the aristocracy. Through her foster brothers switched at nurse, Edgeworth inverts an age-old device from romance and uses it to undermine the justification for aristocracy. It should be obvious to an attentive reader—and particularly to readers steeped in Lockean theories—that the reason why the Earl's baby grows up to be the blacksmith, and the peasant's son the English nobleman, is education.[4] Because the foster brothers as adults are so thoroughly the products of the environments in which they were raised and educated, the switched-at-nurse plot device topples long-held assumptions of inherent English and aristocratic superiority. In scrambling the idea of natural differences between Irish and English and between peasant and

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aristocrat, the switched-at-nurse plot exposes essentialized distinctions of class as fiction and links aristocracy itself to the genre of the fairy tale.

The tell-tale mark that distinguishes the foster brothers is a scar on the real Lord Glenthorn's head that resulted from an accident—as a baby, before he was given into Ellinor's care, he was dropped on his head by a drunken nurse. The trope of the corporeal mark, when used traditionally in narratives that deploy romance conventions, is generally a birthmark that identifies the foundling as a lord's son—one thinks of Theodore's bloody arrow in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. The birthmark serves this role because, as a sign coming from birth, it implies an essential, god-given difference between the nobly born and everyone else, and the plot device that relies on the birthmark reinforces aristocratic convictions by confirming the natural confluence of birth and worth. Although Michael McKeon's discussion of the "aristocratic ideology" is based on cultural currents from the first half of the eighteenth century, it is useful in this context, as Edgeworth appears to be well aware of the assumptions of inherited superiority conveyed through standard romance motifs such as the switched-at-nurse plot.[5] Aristocratic honor was under general attack in this period by middle-class reformers such as William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, both of whom associated it with prejudice and unmerited privilege and, in Godwin's case, with both class-based oppression and the romance genre.[6] In making the distinguishing mark a scar resulting from an accident, Edgeworth highlights the role of circumstance, or the environment, in determining the privilege of the aristocracy, an assertion that undermines claims to inherited worth and, importantly, exposes the social order as arbitrary. Through inverting this recurrent romance convention, then, Edgeworth shows that the explanation for social hierarchy is quite different from that which the romance genre developed to uphold—most importantly, her inversion demonstrates that what once were considered differences in station are in fact differences in class. And as such, they are put in place by neither God nor nature, but rather have resulted from the accidents of history—from how people have been formed through the random fact of being born and educated in a particular time and place.

While Edgeworth uses the inversion of an age-old fairy tale motif to make her point about the aristocracy's accidental position of privilege, she abandons romance when unfolding her ideas about economics and education. Through Mr. M'Leod, Lord Glenthorn's plainspoken and pragmatic Scottish estate manager, Edgeworth makes it quite clear that the peasantry suffers because the aristocracy has failed to embrace the economic theories that might bring the entire nation into the modern world. As Butler, Easton, and Ó Gallchoir have observed, Mr. M'Leod functions as the novel's link to Adam Smith's economic and educational theories.[7] What the peasantry needs, according to Mr. M'Leod, is a form of education that will help them develop values associated with the middle class, most importantly, values that privilege individual agency and

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self-improvement. Mr. M'Leod criticizes Lord Glenthorn's indiscriminate distribution of money to his tenants, noting, "I doubt whether the best way of encouraging the industrious is to give premiums to the idle." And he tells Lord Glenthorn that the difficulty of dispensing charity is "to relieve present misery, without creating more in future" (189). Mr. M'Leod's enlightened recommendations are firmly planted in the world of economic realism—a world based in the details of modern finance, international trade, and public policy, all of which are tied to the Irish estate. In a conversation with Lord Glenthorn (that Lord Glenthorn largely ignores), Mr. M'Leod covers the relationship between wage and production, the inability of the land to support the population, the disadvantages of preventing competition among manufacturers, and the division of labor, all of which were of great concern to Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Mr. M'Leod's expert discussion of economics suggests that the nation as a whole would benefit considerably if the aristocratic style of management were replaced by Mr. M'Leod's professional, enlightened approach.

As inept as it is, however, Lord Glenthorn's aristocratic style is benign compared to that practiced by his less indulgent, more partisan neighbors, whose hard-line approach to land management is represented by Mr. Hardcastle, the manager of a neighboring estate. For Myers, the characterization of Hardcastle as a brutal Protestant bigot in the Irish Rebellion provides clear proof that Edgeworth was not an apologist for the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy ("'Like the Pictures in a Magic Lantern'" 384). Within the framework of the novel, Mr. Hardcastle serves as a foil to Mr. M'Leod, allowing Mr. M'Leod to come forth as a spokesperson for a nonconfrontational position on politics that is based on Enlightenment educational theory. In contrast to Mr. M'Leod, Mr. Hardcastle sees the relationship between tenant and landlord/overseer as one of constant conflict in which the duty of the upper class is to maintain power at all costs. In staging a dispute between Mr. Hardcastle and Mr. M'Leod, Edgeworth makes it clear that education, not repression, is the solution to Ireland's political problems, and she uses Mr. M'Leod to convey the idea that the spread of Enlightenment pedagogical theories and concepts of human equality can counteract the violence that erupts from antiquated political systems. When Mr. M'Leod insists that education is the key to improving the lives of the Irish, Mr. Hardcastle responds that, on the contrary, education will lead to more political unrest. "Teach them any thing," he says, "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." Mr. M'Leod argues that this is an unfounded fear, since, as he says, "the use of education...is to teach men to see clearly, and to follow steadily, their real interests" (193). Thus, from Mr. M'Leod's perspective, an ignorant and oppressed people will incline toward rebellion, whereas an educated population will know that its real interests lie in peace and prosperity. This is an argument specifically about the poor, and it expresses

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an Enlightenment faith in the power of education and economics to transform people's lives and to solve the seemingly intractable problems in Ireland.

Mr. Hardcastle disagrees with Mr. M'Leod, in part because he conceives of the Irish as a people so different by nature from the English and the Scottish that they cannot be taught anything. In contrast, Mr. M'Leod's rhetorical question, "Why, sir; are they not men" (194), expresses the idea of a basic, in-born equality of capacity among people that was a fundamental part of Enlightenment political theory. For Mr. M'Leod, it is not Irishness that keeps the population poor, ignorant, and restless, but rather a lack of education and a history of economic dependence. All people can develop, he implies, and all people can make progress toward greater civility, productivity, and comfort; the Irish are no different regardless of how barbaric and alien they seem to the English observer. In direct contrast to Mr. Hardcastle, who sees the Irish in terms of an inherited national character, Mr. M'Leod views the peasantry as a distinct socio-economic group that awaits only education and time to improve its condition.

Mr. M'Leod's confidence in the peasantry's improvability comes, primarily, from Edgeworth's Enlightenment-based understanding of historical change and her belief in the power of education to shape character. Myers claims that because of her educational theory, "Edgeworth could become the first novelist to represent individual characters subjugated to social forces, and to do so with graphic sociological realism" ("Completing the Union" 45). Considering the play between social forces and individual development in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Myers's claim may not be precisely accurate, but Edgeworth's belief in the determining power of the environment certainly runs through all her early work, and it forms the theoretical foundation of *Practical Education* and *Professional Education*. In his preface to *Ennui* as the first of the *Tales of Fashionable Life*, Richard Lovell Edgeworth refers specifically to his daughter's belief in education, a reference that connects the entire series of novels—of which *Ennui* was the first—to Enlightenment educational theories. R. L. Edgeworth writes, "What we feel, and see, and hear, and read, affects our conduct from the moment when we begin till the moment when we cease to think. It has therefore been my daughter's aim to promote, by all her writings, the progress of education from the cradle to the grave" (*Ennui* 141). It is through her Lockean understanding of the formative powers of education that Edgeworth can represent social class as the product of large-scale, historically contingent social conditioning.Easton puts Edgeworth and Smith into a line of thinkers who believed that economics drove all sociopolitical relationships and thus all expressions of culture (102-03; 119). This intellectual tradition includes Karl Marx, and I would put Edgeworth's contemporary William Godwin into that group as well—an inclusion that helps support Myers's insistence on the radicalism of Edgeworth's position on education, which Myers sees

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as a product of her family's penchant for Revolutionary French culture (see "Completing the Union" 45).

With Enlightenment economic and educational theory in mind, and taken within the context of the French Revolution, Edgeworth's assessment of the *cause* of Ireland's troubles aligns her with the more radical branches of late-Enlightenment intellectual culture. *Ennui* seeks to demonstrate that education and history are responsible for the character of different groups, and the novel suggests that the trouble in Ireland can be traced to the constitutive character of the social classes themselves. Edgeworth's recommendations for the *cure*, however, are much less radical than those enacted across the channel in France, or those feared by the government in London. While I don't agree with Murphy that the cure Edgeworth promotes is a "greater union...between the Irish and the English race" (161), I do think that Edgeworth avoids solutions that are too revolutionary in practice. By presenting the problem of Ireland as a problem of historically rooted, class-based education—of how the aristocracy and the peasantry have been brought up over time to think and behave—Edgeworth clearly suggests that a new educational model is the only way to improve the state of the nation. As the novel presents the case, the key to the reformation of Ireland is the reeducation of both aristocracy and peasantry according to the values of the professional middle class.

To convey the importance of education for the lower classes, Edgeworth once again uses Mr. M'Leod. On his small estate, Mr. M'Leod attempts, and successfully implements, a new educational program for the Irish lower class. Like the Glenthorn estate, which functions as a synecdoche for the nation under aristocratic rule, Mr. M'Leod's small property offers a glimpse of what the future for Ireland might look like under professional middle-class management. On Mr. M'Leod's estate, gone are the trappings of romance, feudalism, and gothic antiquity. Gone, as well, are both the realistic details of poverty and the distinctive manners of the Irish lower class. Commenting on what he sees during a visit, Lord Glenthorn notes, "There was nothing wonderful in any thing I saw around me; but 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; and I could not forbear exclaiming—'How could all this be brought about in Ireland?'" (215). Essentially, what Mr. M'Leod has done is to inculcate middle-class ideas of industry through a long-term educational program. These industrious inhabitants with their neat cottages are no longer poor, and not being poor, they seem to Lord Glenthorn as somehow less Irish. Kathleen Costello-Sullivan argues that the narrative is promoting the sacrifice of Irishness for the development of Anglo-Irish identity (149), but Easton is more accurate, I think, in understanding the cultural loss as the consequence of economic gain rather than nationalistic preference (114).

These reeducated, less Irish-seeming tenants are much more productive than Lord Glenthorn's, and much less rebellious than Mr. Hardcastle's. And

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they are also, importantly, much better offer materially. Mr. M'Leod has accomplished this transformation through patience, and through instilling in the population the desire for a better life. "My wife and I went among them… so by degrees we led where we could not have driven; and raised in them, by little and little, a taste for conveniences and comforts. Then the business was done; for the moment the taste and ambition were excited, to work the people went to gratify them; and according as they exerted themselves, we helped them" (215). By introducing their tenants to the things that provide convenience and comfort, Mr. M'Leod and his wife successfully produce the desire to have such things. The people work to get what the M'Leods have, and that desire for material advancement lifts the entire community from poverty into a higher social class. The key to prosperity and to an improvement in personal (and national) character seems to be the creation of material desires that can only be satisfied through individual agency. It is not only that the environment must change, then, but the individual's relationship to that environment must change as well. When desires are satisfied without labor, as is the case for the aristocracy and for the peasants who receive free handouts from Lord Glenthorn, or when desires cannot be satisfied at all, the moral failings of indolence, dishonesty, and dissatisfaction run rampant. But when desires are introduced that can be achieved through labor, then the lower classes will strive to improve themselves by adopting middle-class values. Mr. M'Leod's project certainly depicts the moralization of capitalism, but given that his primary text is Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, this should come as no surprise to readers.

Within this elaborate allegory of the relationship between education and social class, no individual is more altered by education than the protagonist, Lord Glenthorn. Education, after all, in the form of cultural conditioning, has made the peasant a lord, and education prevents him from returning to the peasantry from whence he has come. Glenthorn, whose identity is unstable throughout most of the memoir, and who spends his time searching for a sense of self, is the Lockean "white paper" upon whose life Edgeworth inscribes her account of the state of the nation. Ó Gallchoir puts it well when she describes Glenthorn, now Mr. O'Donoghoe, as "new born," as a kind of orphan, freed from inheritance and capable of self-definition ("Edgeworth's Revolutionary Morality" 95). But Glenthorn occupies more than only two social positions. He is a figure who stands for and who stands in for, at different times in his life, most of the dominant social classes in Ireland. Toggling between peasant and aristocrat, he finally forges his identity as a middle-class professional, only to marry into the lower gentry and then find himself again in charge of a great estate. As it is for the peasants living on Mr. M'Leod's land, the route to class mobility for Glenthorn is education—most importantly, an education that teaches him to value things he must work to attain. And just as it was for Mr. M'Leod's tenants, an environmental change is not sufficient to enact

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permanent characterological change. The education that can transform a person's character and social status must come from an individual agency that registers a transformation of desire. In Glenthorn's case, as he is of a higher class, he learns to pursue desires more lofty than those of Mr. M'Leod's tenants, and he must exert energy that is intellectual rather than physical.

Although Edgeworth dismantles the hereditary basis for aristocratic privilege, *Ennui* is not a novel that imagines the leveling of class distinctions. Rather, the novel puts forth a revised version of the existing hierarchy, in which all groups, even the aristocracy, can be improved through absorbing the values of the professional middle class. The advantages to society of a reformed aristocracy are made clear through Lord Y's role as Glenthorn's mentor. Glenthorn meets Lord Y shortly after he has given up his aristocratic identity, at a moment in which he is uncertain about his direction in life. Lord Y encourages Glenthorn (at that point in the narrative Mr. O'Donoghoe) to attempt to distinguish himself through the study of the law. The law was, of course, one of the few occupational paths acceptable to younger brothers of the gentry, so in this sense, Glenthorn acts very much as would any gentleman seeking a profession. What distinguishes him and his mentor Lord Y, however, is the insistence on a value system that is fundamentally different from that which upheld the aristocracy. Apart from Mr. M'Leod, who articulates his professional middle-class beliefs primarily through economic theory, Lord Y is the most vocal proponent of education and professional values in the novel. He insists that Glenthorn (O'Donoghoe) submit to a rigorous educational agenda, and he supports a merit-based social system in which individuals earn their position through talent and hard work.

Lord Y's significance in the allegory is expressed well through Edgeworth's choice of letter for his name: Lord "Y" as Lord "Why" doesn't ask questions or point out the importance of questioning; rather, he emphasizes the existence of reasons that explain behavior. Edgeworth had used the same name for a different character in the story "Lame Jervas," published in *Popular Tales* in 1804. In that story, a character named Mr. Y functions as a teacher and a mentor to the boy Jervas, fulfilling his most important role by giving the impoverished Jervas reasons why he should work to improve himself. These reasons introduce the boy to the possibility of self-improvement through education and hard work. Lord Y serves the same role in *Ennui* as Mr. Y does in "Lame Jervas," that is, he explains the principle that one must labor and learn in order to achieve the things one wants in life. The ennui that had plagued Lord Glenthorn as a member of the aristocracy can be traced to an education that failed to teach him the value of application. Lord Glenthorn had no desire to do anything because he could never understand the reason why applying himself might matter. In encouraging Glenthorn to remake himself as a middle-class professional, Lord Y provides him with reasons for seeking out an education that requires considerable effort and self-sacrifice.

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Lord Y advises Glenthorn to become a lawyer; but more important than the financial independence he will achieve as a professional man is the character he will build to become one. Using a series of moral precepts, Lord Y provides Glenthorn with the language that explains the need for agency. "Time and industry are necessary to prepare you for the profession, to which you will hereafter be an honour, and you will courageously submit," he tells Glenthorn (304), requiring his protégé to "give proofs of intellectual energy and ability" (317), and explaining to him that "we are the artificers of our own fortune" (303). Endorsing the new value system of the professional middle class, Lord Y insists that the honors of Glenthorn's own earning are "far superior to any hereditary title." The values Lord Y seeks to teach Glenthorn are exactly in line with those Gary Kelly identifies as belonging to the professional middle class—limited egalitarianism, social mobility based on merit, reason, free inquiry, and free commerce (10-11). Thus, Lord Y's precepts indicate a considerable shift in ideology that corresponds to a loosening, but not an elimination, of social hierarchy.

It is through Glenthorn himself that Edegworth expands on the possibility of the reeducation of the aristocracy. Having been formed as an adult by the experiences of his pampered, indolent childhood, Glenthorn (now O'Donoghoe) must refashion himself completely. Following Lord Y's precepts, Glenthorn slowly, painfully, and with considerable mental effort successfully creates his new identity and develops energetic personal characteristics that replace the intellectual and physical lethargy of his aristocratic self. While Glenthorn is eager to distinguish himself according to his own merits, he is motivated most profoundly by the possibility of earning the hand of Cecilia Delamere, the real "why," or reason for his exertions. Although Lord Y counsels Glenthorn and helps him believe he is capable of earning Cecilia's hand, he interferes very little in Glenthorn's professional achievements. Glenthorn finds his own tutors and makes his own professional contacts, and he succeeds on his own in the court case in which he definitively proves his worth.

When Lord Y had first indicated that the attainment of Cecilia was a possibility, Glenthorn noted, "from this day I date the commencement of a new existence. Fired with ambition,—I hope generous ambition,—to distinguish myself among men, and to win the favour of the most amiable and lovely of women, all the faculties of my soul were awakened: I became active, permanently active. The enchantment of indolence was dissolved, and the demon of ennui was cast out forever" (305). What Glenthorn needed, it appears, was something it was impossible for him to have while trapped in the enchantment of aristocracy—a desire he had to labor to achieve and a reason for that desire. Glenthorn's escape from the enchantment of aristocracy points to a possibility for the entire class to which he once belonged—ultimately, Glenthorn's story shows that a dissolute and useless life can be transformed through learning the reason why one's actions matter. For an aristocrat, one's

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actions matter because one is an aristocrat—the assumption of inherited worth makes the holder of a title turn to heredity as a default reason for his significance. But for members of the professional middle class, the reasons a person's actions matter are completely different. A person's actions matter because they are the way he makes his way in the world, earning distinction through merit, proving worth through works, and finally reaching his goals through labor and education. The professional middle-class value system conveyed through Lord Glenthorn's transformation into lawyer O'Donoghoe is, of course, as much of an historical construct as is the aristocratic value system that the novel seeks to undermine. But what is important is the way Edgeworth participates in the emergence of this new ideology of professionalism and, most particularly, the way she uses it to imagine a new future for conflict-ridden Ireland.

Using more name changes and improbable plot twists, Edgeworth builds, in the final part of the novel, toward an Ireland reimagined through yet more shifts in social class. The novel ostensibly ends with Glenthorn happily married and well established in his profession. He appears to be a totally new man, even to the point of adopting yet another new name. Because Cecilia's mother objects to the plebian and obviously native Irish sound of O'Donoghoe, Glenthorn agrees to take his wife's name—Delamere. With the marriage to Cecilia and the new name, Glenthorn leaves behind his native Irish identity, as he has his persona as an Anglo-Irish Earl. The new Glenthorn, Mr. Delamere, is now attached through marriage to the lower gentry and, importantly for the novel's sense of national inclusivity, to an old Anglo-Norman Irish family (see Myers, "'Like the Pictures in a Magic Lantern'" 388).

However, an addendum is provided that consists of a letter from Christy, the new or "real" Earl of Glenthorn, describing the chaotic conditions at the estate—Christy's son and only heir has died in the fire that destroyed the castle. The shift of ownership from those raised as aristocrats to those raised as peasants is the real cause of this devastation, an event heavy with metaphorical meaning. It is clear that a kind of political revolution has caused the destruction—a revolution that has put the peasantry in the place of the aristocracy by elevating Christy to the status of earl and by giving his wife and her relations power and wealth. The peasant takeover and destruction of the castle remind readers that this novel is set in the aftermath of the French Revolution, as Ó Gallchoir has emphasized (*Maria Edgeworth* ch. 3). In this revolution imagined for Ireland, the uneducated peasants are unable to rule, and they prove more wasteful, more extravagant, and more careless than the aristocracy they have replaced. While Christy's rise to the status of Earl comes straight from the realm of fairy tales, there's nothing romantic in Edgeworth's conceptualization of the rule of the lower classes. The novel ends with a metaphorical, mutual destruction of the two antagonistic classes—peasantry and aristocracy—in a revolution that destroys the edifice that symbolized the power of the old regime. However, out of the strife between the two opposing

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classes emerges a powerful new class, represented, of course, by Glenthorn, now Mr. Delamere, whose wife Cecilia inherits the property after the "real" Lord Glenthorn (Christy the blacksmith) gives up his title and returns to the forge. The arrival of the Delameres to rebuild the castle and run the estate suggests that the answer to the nation's problems can be found neither in the continuance of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, nor in a native-Irish takeover, but through the managerial skills of a professionalized Irish gentry.

Glenthorn's return to the estate and constantly shifting identity force the question: Who is this protagonist? If we consider his shifts, he has been Baby O'Donoghoe, the young Lord Glenthorn, Christy O'Donoghoe, Mr. O'Donoghoe the lawyer, Mr. Delamere, and finally, perhaps, Lord Glenthorn by marriage. The title page indicates that the text is the memoir of the "Earl of Glenthorn," which seems to indicate that he has reassumed the title. But at the conclusion, not only does "Lord Glenthorn" no longer exist, it seems that such a figure never existed at all. For Delamere, born an Irish peasant, never really was Lord Glenthorn; and Christy, born the Earl's son, was never "Lord Glenthorn" either. Given the title page, it's possible that Cecilia's inheritance causes the Earldom to revert to her husband. But the novel doesn't intimate, one way or the other, what has happened to the aristocratic title. Even if Glenthorn does regain his title, the concept of the aristocracy has been so battered by his transformations that it has become much more of a label attached to a position than any indication of inherited worth or value. Indeed, upon his return to the estate, Glenthorn/Delamere perhaps ought to be considered a country gentleman, rather than a Lord-to-be, since Cecilia belonged to the lower gentry before her inheritance, and because Glenthorn/Delamere himself has been educated by Mr. M'Leod according to the strictures for a young landowner laid out in *Professional Education.*

The question of who the protagonist might really be is captured at the novel's midpoint by Lady Geraldine, an attractive member of the Irish aristocracy with whom Lord Glenthorn (still in his aristocratic role) is infatuated.[8] She says of him, "Mamma wants me to catch somebody, and to be caught by somebody; but that will not be; for, do you know, I think somebody is nobody" (205). As Catherine Gallagher has observed, Lady Geraldine here is alluding to Lord Glenthorn's lack of character in his days as an aristocrat suffering from ennui (300). The statement is true in terms of Lord Glenthorn's boring and blank personality, but it is also apt at a number of other levels. The plot hinges on the fact that Glenthorn really is, by the social standards of the day, "nobody," because he is the child of Irish peasants. At the same time, the statement articulates a thoroughly Enlightenment-based idea about human beings—that everybody is born nobody because everyone is born blank and subsequently acquires through experience the characteristics that will form his or her identity. Indeed, it is, according to this line of Enlightenment thought, precisely because everybody is nobody that anybody can become somebody.

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In a world of self-fashioning, a world of doing not just of being, education has so powerful a transformative potential that even Glenthorn can work hard enough to become somebody.

As it goes for Glenthorn, so it goes for the nation he represents in the parable about his life, a parable that maps personal history onto the nation. The Ireland of the past, as represented by Lord Glenthorn's life up to the revelation of his birth, is an Ireland that blends romance and fairy tales with harsh economic reality. The Ireland of the future is one that leaves both romance and fairy tale behind in order to embrace the enlightened realism of educational promise and widespread prosperity. Glenthorn in the end is a product of both worlds and both modes, a phenomenon demonstrated most vividly by a consideration of his parentage. Glenthorn's mother is certainly Ellinor—old Mother Ireland, as Myers has described her—a figure from the past, who conveys her histories through folklore, and who is inseparable from romance motifs and fairy tales. Ellinor, however, is not merely a folkloric figure. She's also the vehicle for an alternative history of Ireland, as Edgeworth uses her stories to convey the idea that the Irish have for a long time been a culturally and religiously mixed people. The family genealogies, historical references, and folkloric narratives of Ellinor all create a sense of Irish history built on religious inclusivity and resistance to English domination.[9] His father, metaphorically at least, is Lord Y, the enlightened Anglo-Irish gentleman who, like the father Edgeworth imagines in *Professional Education* (and much like her own father), teaches lessons of the professional middle class—lessons in the value of labor, self-worth, and individual merit. But Glenthorn is also a product of his own distinctive history, of a personal experience that encompasses most of the identities and combinations of identities available to a man in Ireland at the time: native Irish, Anglo-Irish, and Anglo-Norman; peasant, aristocrat, and middle-class professional.

One of the most important aspects of Glenthorn's journey through Irish identities is the emergence of a new understanding of the relationship between history and individual character achieved through Edgeworth's manipulations of elements of romance and realism. In tying aristocracy to romance, and in using romance conventions to undermine aristocratic assumptions of inherited worth, Edgeworth dispels the idea that identity is predetermined and unchanging, which is an idea that maintains the status quo and allows for the growth of discontent and class-based animosities. By conveying the ideals of middle-class professionalism through modes of realism, Edgeworth brings Enlightenment pedagogical and economic theories to bear on the Irish situation. If Irish identity is like Glenthorn's—fluid, historically inflected, and ultimately malleable—then a program of reeducation could, the narrative suggests, over time transform Ireland from a restive and backwards country into a nation of active and industrious people, all forming their identities and proving their worth through individual exertion. As the allegory of Glenthorn's

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life implies, these acts of agency would have real material results, ultimately turning a nation of Protestants and Catholics, aristocrats and peasants, into a unified whole that is peaceful and progressive because everyone shares the values of the professional middle class. Edgeworth's protagonist calls this text a "romance of real life," but perhaps a work of fiction, written in a time of violence, and expressing so much faith in education and such confidence in the professional middle class, ought instead to be considered an Enlightenment fairy tale.

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NOTES

I would like to thank my colleagues Fred Whiting and Albert Pionke, as well as the anonymous reviewers for *Studies in the Novel*, for their advice on previous drafts of this article.

[1] In discussing this novel, it's difficult to decide what to call the protagonist, whose memoirs we are reading. Once the switched-at-nurse plot is revealed, he reassumes the identity he was born with—Christy O'Donoghoe. But the protagonist is rarely referred to as Mr. O'Donoghoe, and although he takes his wife's name at the end, he is neither referred to nor describes himself as Mr. Delamere. For the purposes of simplicity, I will refer to him as "Lord Glenthorn" up to the revelation of his true birth. Thereafter, I will primarily call him "Glenthorn," unless I need to add the name he is using at the time for additional clarity.

[2] In his preface to the *Tales of Fashionable Life*, of which *Ennui* was the first installment, R. L. Edgeworth explicitly links *Ennui* to *Professional Education*. In this manual devoted to male education, the Edgeworths include the "Country Gentleman" as one of the five professions under discussion, and they describe this gentleman's education in a way that very much resembles the lessons on estate management Lord Glenthorn receives from Mr. M'Leod.

[3] "What do you do in Pozdam?" I asked Prince William one day. "Sir," he responded, "we pass our lives conjugating the same verb: I am bored, you are bored, he is bored, we are bored, you are bored, they are bored, I was bored, I will be bored, and etc." (My translation).

[4] The importance of this use of a romance motif to undermine aristocracy is perhaps attested to by the fact that it has been noticed by so many commentators on this novel. All critics who take note of the phenomenon are agreed that the switched-at-nurse plot serves to assert the impact of education on the formation of character. These include Brundan, Butler, Myers, Ó Gallchoir, Trumpener, and Wohlegemut.

[5] McKeon has discussed at length the deep connection in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries between romance as a fictional form and what he calls the "aristocratic ideology"—essentially, the idea that "honor as virtue is an inherited characteristic." Aristocrats, he explains, were believed to possess worth and virtue by birth, which was manifested outwardly by their status and wealth (131-32).

[6] Wollstonecraft frequently compares women of sensibility to aristocrats in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and Godwin, in *Caleb Williams*, makes honor the lynchpin of Falkland's murderous obsessions.

[7] In "Irish Culture and Scottish Enlightenment," Butler emphasizes Edgeworth's tie to the Scottish Enlightenment, which she believes helped Edgeworth establish concepts of tolerance, cultural accommodation, and progress through education. Easton also focuses on the Scottish Enlightenment, arguing that in all her Irish tales, Edgeworth applies theories derived from Adam Smith to the social and political problems of Ireland. And Ó Gallchoir calls Edgeworth "one of the major interpreters of the Scottish Enlightenment in Ireland" (*Maria Edgeworth* 6).

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[8] A discussion of Lady Geraldine's important role in the narrative has been outside the scope of this paper, but an investigation of Edgeworth's complex relationship to Irish identity would have to take Lady Geraldine's characterization into careful consideration. Not least of all, Lady Geraldine's name points directly to the Fitzgeralds, an old family of Anglo-Norman rulers who joined with the native Irish to fight Queen Elizabeth (Myers, "Completing the Union" 56). Lord Edward Fitzgerald was a noted radical and leader of the 1798 Rebellion who died in prison from wounds received during his capture. Any contemporary reader, aware of the situation in Ireland, would have made the connection between Lady Geraldine and Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

[9] Among other references, Ellinor tells Lord Glenthorn the story of O'Neill, the "Irish black-beard," whom Butler identifies in her notes as Hugh O'Neil, 2nd Earl of Tyrone, a leader of the Irish resistance against Elizabeth's reign (*Ennui* 355, note 19). Edgeworth also includes a footnote that refers to Lord Thomas Fitzmaurice, another Elizabethan-era rebel.

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