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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Cultivating Civilized Subjects:  
British Agricultural “Improvement” in Eighteenth-Century Ireland

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Kathryn Lee Webber

September 2012

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Carole Fabricant, Co-Chairperson

Professor David Lloyd, Co-Chairperson

Professor Parama Roy

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The Dissertation of Kathryn Lee Webber is approved:

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Committee Co-Chairperson

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University of California, Riverside

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*In loving memory of*

*William Joseph Hopewell (1926-1989)*

*and*

*Michael John Ferrante (1947-2010)*

*Only the good die young. Raise a glass for me, wherever you are.*

*Sláinte!*



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultivating Civilized Subjects:  
British Agricultural “Improvement” in Eighteenth-Century Ireland

by

Kathryn Lee Webber

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English  
University of California, Riverside, September 2012  
Dr. Carole Fabricant, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. David Lloyd, Co-Chairperson

This study argues that the rhetoric of improvement constituted a significant justification and motivation for British imperialism from the time of its early colonial projects, particularly those undertaken in Ireland. As the first chapter discusses, British interest in husbandry and agricultural science was spurred on not only by the profit-potential of its colonial acquisitions but also by the potent conviction in British cultural superiority. Jethro Tull’s husbandry manuals, amongst others, demonstrate that agriculture and the attendant logic of rationalized economics encapsulated British beliefs in specific modes of labor and socialization. Plantation, in Ireland and elsewhere, was simply the physical manifestation of the ideology of improvement while efforts to “rationalize” native cultures and economies, as with Ireland’s *clachan* system, served as its civilizational counterparts. The remainder of the dissertation looks closely at the role of improvement in Anglo-Irish relations with the Catholic Irish peasantry. The early part of the eighteenth century witnesses the rise of Anglo-Irish “patriotism” whose espousers

were conflicted, on the one hand, by their growing awareness of their own subordination to British colonial policies and, on the other, by the prevailing belief in the inferiority of Gaelic culture. Anglo-Irish patriots like Jonathan Swift were forced to confront the violence of colonialism and the failure of improvement in Ireland in the form of recurrent famine. Their often ambivalent responses to such crises witness the complex relationship between the emergent theories of political economy and identity constitution. At the close of the century, Maria Edgeworth's writings and those of her father's illustrate the troubling extent to which British colonialism linked improvement and civility; as liberal advocates of the British Empire, the Edgeworths perceived it as the conveyor of an enlightened capitalized sensibility. Yet, their writings also evince concern about the refusal or failure of the peasantry to improve, presaging the concretization of identity occasioned by the increasingly transparent rhetoric of political economy coupled with the biologization of difference in the form of racial theories. In tracing the genealogies of improvement rhetoric and political economy, *Cultivating Civilized Subjects* locates British imperialism's attempts to naturalize difference within the discourse of capitalist development.

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## Introduction

Over one hundred years prior to the Great Irish Famine, in 1723, Robert Viscount Molesworth, former Privy Councillor of Ireland, published *Some Considerations for the Promoting of Agriculture and Employing the Poor* (1723) which centrally asserted that “[t]hat the whole of the Economy of Agriculture is generally mistaken or neglected in this Kingdom [of Ireland]” (3, italics original). For Molesworth, “improving” the state of Irish agriculture was much more than a technological matter. Indeed, it required a radical shift in nearly every aspect of Irish society. It was not simply that the Irish were “universally Ignorant of the *English* manner of managing. . . Tillage and Lands” (4); the stark differences in agricultural economy between England and Ireland were caused by deviations from proper behavior by Irish farmers. Molesworth notes that “an *English* Farmer on a small Holding (sometimes not exceeding twenty Acres) shall live clean and comfortably, Cloath himself Wife, Children, and Family decently; eat warm Victuals once every day, if not oftener; pay his Rent punctually; whilst the condition of the *Irish* Farmer on a *large Farm*, is the very reverse of all this” (5). By virtue of “his Laziness, his Ignorance, or Dishonesty,” the Irish farmer, as Molesworth sees him, is lacking in not only efficient farming methods, but also the civility of cleanliness, warm food, and punctuality. The product of an Anglo-Irish family that greatly benefited from the Cromwellian invasion, Molesworth was invested in the “improvement” of Ireland, but essentially believed that progress in economic and agricultural terms could only come by leaving a large part of Ireland behind.

What is striking about Molesworth's tract and many others like it is the pervasiveness of their claims linking an excess of indigence and a lack of diligence with the stalled "improvement" of agricultural science. Molesworth is here invoking an argument about progress that will be echoed continually in Ireland and throughout the colonized world. This narrative of improvement is one that exercises its rhetorical force by speaking in a language of "rationality," a rationality that is based equally on Enlightenment philosophy and political economy. Its claims to rationality enabled "improvement" to be commonsensical. For this reason, the logic of improvement is a large part of the inheritance of colonial ideology and one that emerged alongside economic thought. In this system, colonization masks itself as being without agents, run only on the ideologically-neutral machinery of commodity markets and agricultural science.

In Ireland, the rhetoric of improvement was perhaps most effectively mobilized with regard to the Great Famine. At the onset of the Famine, the potato quickly became vilified as the symbol of Irish laziness, squalor, and backwardness. Yet, it was the twin forces of crop commodification and rack-renting, both set in place by the plantations of Ireland some two hundred years earlier, which led to Irish peasant subsistence on the commercially unviable potato. Colonization only superficially integrated Ireland within Britain's market system. While British demand conditioned Ireland's specialization in particular foodstuffs, such as beef, profits returned solely to landlords. The peasantry, in turn, were forced to subsist on undesirable crops, leaving marketable staples to pay rent. Echoing their cultural exclusion, peasant subsistence in Ireland was only possible via

their access to marginalized foodstuffs. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the potato provided the primary source of food for the majority of the peasantry (Cullen 73-74). Thus, the potato aided the intensification of trade and the increases in rent rather than being a source of economic instability. As David Lloyd convincingly argues, the Great Famine occasioned the radical re-writing of the potato's role in commodity culture; it had been hailed by political economists directly prior to the crisis as *the* solution to feeding a substantial peasant workforce by way of an extra-economic (cheap) staple (Lloyd, "Potato" 317-18). The conflation between the newly-morally-suspect potato and the Irish themselves occurred when pre-existing notions of Irish incivility solipsistically justified their starvation. Lloyd explains this as the moment when "[t]he economic collapses into a political anthropology" ("Potato" 320). This collapse is possible because political economy/anthropology sees behavior as inherently productive of identity. In other words, the shift in the semiotic coding of the potato following the Famine allows a glimpse into the systemic contradictions of scientific discourse; it is a reversal that "throws into relief the failure of political economy to accomplish its scientific ends in separation from the ideological and cultural formations that are secreted in its universal laws" (Lloyd, "Potato" 321). Here, Lloyd emphasizes the importance of political economics in the creation and discipline of the individuated modern subject for the purpose of capitalist production. In fact, it is the shift in the disciplinary methods of political economy, from brute force to individuation through ownership, that Lloyd suggests constitutes modern efforts to inscribe the Irish peasantry within the bounds of capitalism ("Potato" 328).

If modern political economy's calls for a more complex embedding of the subject in capital represent a turn away from earlier modes of discipline, then agricultural science certainly represents the disciplinary model of earlier capitalistic workings. No less than economics, agricultural science encodes the cultural as universal. Indeed, I argue that it is the logic of *agricultural* improvement that undergirds claims of Irish inferiority from its plantation through to the Great Famine. It is the reason that the potato could so easily be re-written as a pre-modern holdover. In the end, perceptions of the Great Famine were largely conditioned by agricultural and economic science that named traditional Gaelic farming practices backwards, inefficient and lazy. J.S. Mill suggests as much even while he rejects "improvement" as overly mechanistic: "Those who. . .take as their sole standard of social and economic excellence English practice, propose as the single remedy for Irish wretchedness, the transformation of the cottiers into hired labourers. But this is rather a scheme for the improvement of Irish agriculture, than of the condition of the Irish people" (Mill 326-7; qtd. in Lloyd, "Potato" 327). Mill here cites agricultural improvement, particularly *English* agricultural improvement, as a persistently-advocated solution to the Irish question. Mill may discard agricultural improvement at this moment, but it has a long history in Ireland as part of the civilizing mission. Thus, in the sixteenth century, Sir Francis Walsingham can claim that Elizabeth I should only grant escheated Irish lands to English "men of ability" who are guaranteed to improve Ireland's farms since "the natives of the country. . .will not manure them but [use them] in such idle manner as hath been used before" (Walsingham 1574-85: cxxvii; qtd. in Canny, *Making Ireland British* 129).



What I am suggesting here is that British colonial ideology did not need to re-write the Famine in order to make it palatable to its administrators and public. It simply needed to mobilize the same discourses that had been operative since at least the time of the initial plantations of Ireland. The discourse of agricultural improvement played an active role in shaping the perceptions of the Irish, especially the Gaelic peasantry, in colonized Ireland. Its significance to Irish history demands that greater attention should be paid to longstanding colonial attitudes towards Irish farming and land use. The task is to trace the development of agricultural science as an intrinsic part of colonial epistemology, a system of thought which codes both the cultural and the scientific in ways which *naturalize* (a key term in this study) the exploitation of land and people. While I argue that agricultural science and the deployment of narratives of “improvement” operate in all British colonial territories, my work focuses on Ireland as a testing ground for colonial practices and an occasional anomaly in colonial logic.

Building on the work of postcolonial scholars, like Dipesh Chakrabarty, who have located the rise of capitalism within the pursuit of colonial territories and markets, I would like to argue that a significant aspect of the development of capitalist economics can be traced specifically to agriculture and the concurrent advance of agricultural science. The effect of such an undertaking is to foreground “development” as predicated upon the control of colonial territories and agricultural markets. In other words, “development” becomes problematized as a historical narrative that necessarily occludes the dependency of metropolitan cultures upon colonial expansion to feed its drive for markets, land, and labor. This study additionally seeks to show how narratives of

“development” and “improvement” were mapped not only onto the Irish landscape but also onto Irish bodies. The project aims to note the ways in which these enlightenment scientific developments encoded “objectively” proper ways of being. By utilizing diverse sources, from political pamphlets to farm handbooks and literary texts, I will demonstrate the reach of agricultural “improvement” in British colonial culture and the belief in its effectiveness as a method of civilizing Ireland and other colonies.

While colonial histories demand attention to broader contexts that cut across time and geography, Ireland’s position is unique in the extreme intimacy of its history with England’s. Because of its proximity, Ireland acted more like a supplemental garden from which England could pick produce cheaply and (sometimes) easily. Many of the English planters of the seventeenth century were part of a special group of frontiersmen who saw themselves as “improvers.” Irish land provided them with the clean slate they needed in order to carry out their agricultural experiments. However, their attempts in Ireland do not frequently appear in the pages of English agricultural history even though their plantations often served as continuations of plans begun on English land. English/British agricultural history sees the revolution as something that occurred exclusively on English land through the efforts of a kind of scientific farmer. In other words, questions of power and dominance are held apart from the study of agricultural science itself. In practice, as well as in theory, such historiography serves to reinforce notions of agricultural history as ideologically pure, the fruits of a romanticized peasantry who toil in an idealized, localized English landscape. It reifies agricultural production and furthers the belief that such production serves as an index of civilization. These images of English agriculture

continue to be prevalent, I would like to suggest, because of the deep-seated connection of “land” to central aspects of the British (as well as the Euro-American) cultural imaginary. Even taken within the confines of a narrowly-defined “British history,” this version of agricultural science occludes labor and class histories, studies of the development of agriculture as a scientific discipline, and considerations of agriculture’s imbrication in social and governmental controls and the rise of capitalist economics. Thus, this project will serve as a corrective to a distinctly “British” understanding of “the Agricultural Revolution.” Their interdependence makes a history of the agricultural revolution impossible to discuss without both England and Ireland. More extensive research on farming, cultivation and ‘improvement’ is needed, suggesting their continuing ideological role in colonization, particularly in Ireland, which arguably served as an experimental laboratory for later British colonial projects.

### **The Birth of the Plantation System in Ireland: Agriculture and Colonial Control**

The history of agricultural science and its connections with the development of capitalist economics and colonial policy largely remains to be discussed in the context of Ireland. Tracing this history requires the recognition of agricultural science’s roots in the initial stirrings of English colonial expansion. Indeed, it was a desire for land as well as control that motivated the initial ‘plantation’ of Ireland in the early seventeenth century. As Mark Netzloff suggests in his article “Forgetting the Ulster Plantation,” the English experience with colonization in Ireland was instrumental in shaping colonial power relations in the Americas and beyond (313). However, Netzloff contends that, despite its

seemingly enormous historical impact, the plantation of Ulster “resists mythologization,” “seems to lack myths of origin, initial settlement, and survival,” and thus “was known, and then forgotten” (314). Rather than representing a failure of colonial power, this resistance to historical narrative constitutes an erasure of colonial history in Ireland that allows for the constitution of “always already” Britishness, newly cast with a faux ancient patina during James I’s reign (Netzloff 319-321). Unearthing and reconstructing the colonial narratives surrounding land in its symbolic and practical importance thus serves to delegitimize English claims to Ireland. Furthermore, while work on this period has tended to separate the governmental/official/political ends of plantation from its local/individual practices such as farming and tenantry, I would like to see these seemingly disparate narratives placed in a productive tension with one another. This tension promises to yield an understanding of the symbolic place of the transformation of nature in religious and political ideologies that became increasingly interconnected within the matrix of colonial policies.

The initial phase in the plantation of Ulster (as well as the less discussed, and perhaps ideologically distinct, plantation of Munster), comprising the period from 1600 until just before the English Civil War and Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland in the 1640s, has typically been seen as either strictly political or economic in its motivations. However, in addition to the Crown’s concerns with security and early adventurers’ interests in profit, Nicholas Canny has shown that, even in this early period, ideas about Irish cultural difference and the ability of colonization to spread English norms were repeatedly invoked as justification for Irish plantation schemes. Both Nicholas Canny, in

terms of Ireland, and Richard Drayton, in terms of British imperialism more generally, argue that the notion of plantation stemmed from long-standing English preoccupations with cultivation as an expression of Protestant theologies of nature. Work and production were perceived as the physical exercise of a spiritual relationship between God and humanity. Nature acted as God's gift to mankind, compelling humanity to embrace nature's production as an expression of its gratitude. In such a view, agricultural production existed simultaneously on both spiritual and economic planes. The fruits of production witnessed both humanity's obligation to make use of nature's bounty and God's favorable judgment of humanity's efforts. The extent to which such traditional belief structures continued to overtly influence English culture and especially those planters for whom profit was a primary goal in the early modern period could be debated. However, it is apparent from the texts studied here that this logic, which largely informs that of "improvement," continued to be mobilized whether in early plantation literature, as Canny and others note, or much later in agricultural manuals and other novels concerning colonization. Moreover, such deeply-embedded archetypal imagery became wed to emergent theories of Petty's "political arithmetic," furthering the linkages between work, morality, and reward.

### **British Agricultural Writing and the Impact of Jethro Tull's *Horse-Houghing Husbandry***

The opening chapter takes up questions of improvement by looking more closely at agricultural writing within the British metropolis in the early part of the eighteenth

century. A revered cultural figure, Jethro Tull has long represented British innovation and the productivity of its humble yet stalwart yeomanry. As the chapter indicates, Tull's seed drill continues to play a large part in discussions of the so-called agricultural revolution. Despite significant challenges to the perception of eighteenth-century British farming as the purveyor of cutting-edge technology, achieving remarkable increases in agricultural output, the formulation of Britain as a unique and dominant center of culture and capital stems largely from the aggrandizement of this period in its history. Jethro Tull's *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* provides insight into the conglomeration of ideology and technology within British agricultural writing. This chapter also notes the role of Britain's self-appropriation of "modernity" in the development of imperial ideology. Tull's writings indicate that the emergence of experimental science and its claims to represent "real" or objective phenomena formed an integral part of British self-definition as both modern and free. Indeed, the early-eighteenth century was exceedingly important in Britain since, as Linda Colley has argued, it was following the Scottish Union that "Britishness" was seen as coming into its own. From its political re-definition to its cultivation of scientists and inventors, "Britain" saw itself as a superior modernizing force whose success was marked by its wealth, agricultural productivity, and exceptional culture. Moreover, the formulation of this "agrarian patriotism," as C.A. Bayly names it, was inevitably shaped by Britain's relationship to its colonial acquisitions. Although the consumption of imported foodstuffs did not overtake that of domestic production until the early nineteenth century, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the transfer of foreign produce undergirded the British economy and, in its amassment of nature's

diverse bounty, underwrote the idea of British superiority. Britain's triumphal agrarianism was not in fact a rural idealization; it was the product of a relentlessly normative gaze which appraised the civility of colonial territories according to its divergence from British agricultural practices. Despite its more fluid conceptions of cultural identity and its complex ideas about the interactions of climate and history in the production of such identities, agricultural writings of early eighteenth-century Britain nonetheless contain many of the seeds of economic rationalism which could have fallen on barren ground, but which, with time, blossomed alongside more rigid technologies of the self.

### **Framing Famine**

Moving from a more general consideration of British imperial ideology to a closer view of its impact in Ireland, the second chapter explores the birth and inception of a political class in Ireland and their attention to matters that concerned Ireland's well-being, such as trade, taxes, and the state of Irish agriculture. Agricultural science and its application, or lack thereof, in Ireland was an important conversation of the day and one that was certainly linked to discussions about Irish economics. To many in the English government, the failures of the Irish economy were not only the result of a "backward" Gaelic peasantry but also the result of failed plantation policies by Anglo-Irish landowners. Their failure to civilize the peasantry was seen as not only cultural and religious, but also agricultural, extending to the lack of English farming methods and improvements to the land. By the turn of the eighteenth century, Ireland had formed its

own intellectual class of which the greater part was Anglo-Irish; despite ethnic and religious similarities, the Anglo-Irish differed in their views of the political future of Ireland and its people. In order to bring these differences into focus, this chapter will attend to Jonathan Swift and his contemporaries. While much important work has been done regarding Swift's views on Irish consumption, as well as Wood's Halfpence, his views on Irish agriculture and land use have been little-investigated. Considering that Swift repeatedly emphasized agriculture's importance to Ireland's well-being, saying in 1729 that "[t]here is not an older or more uncontroverted maxim in the politics of all wise nations, than that of encouraging agriculture" (*An Answer to Several Letters Sent Me from Unknown Hands*), connecting his writings with those of his contemporaries will yield valuable insight into the agricultural concerns of the Anglo-Irish political class. Swift's positions are indicative of those of many Anglo-Irish thinkers, caught amongst a deeply internalized rhetoric of improvement, fear of Catholic "despotism," and a desire for the advancement of Ireland as a whole.

"Framing Famine" focuses on the famines of the early eighteenth century in Ireland. Relying on the insights of famine scholars such as Amartya Sen and David Arnold, the chapter contends that the rhetorical framing of famine is indispensable, for both its immediate contemporaries and for modern scholars, to conditioning responses to scarcity. In spite of their less prominent historiographical position, the famines of this period in Ireland are significant in their scope and offer surprising insight into their contemporary figurations. As the chapter points out, the extreme scarcities of the 1720s and 1740s in Ireland were distinctly *political*, rather than environmental or religious,



events for many of their witnesses. In contrast to the equivocations of observers of later famines, from the Great Famine of nineteenth-century Ireland to Indian famines like those of the 1770s or 1870s, regarding the responsibilities of government (colonial or otherwise), Anglo-Irish writers of the time such as Jonathan Swift expressed indignation about the failure of the policies of the government and the gentry, arguing that both contributed to famines' multiple appearances in Ireland. Especially for Swift, the 1720s famine could only be seen as the inevitable outcome of oppressive British policies not only in their suppression of aspects of the Irish economy but also in their complete exclusion of a majority of the population. While the Anglo-Irish continued to endorse improvement as a means of ameliorating poverty and assimilating the peasantry, those labeled 'patriots' recognized that Ireland's instability could be traced to its colonial status. Representing extreme human suffering, the famines of this period sometimes challenged the Ascendancy to question economic rationality and to perceive the rhetoric of improvement as masking a more complex reality. In particular, Swift's realization that the supposed inferiority of the Irish peasantry could be attributed to historical and economic factors offered the possibility for changing policies and relations between the Anglo-Irish and their Catholic counterparts.

### **The Edgeworths and the Rhetoric of Improvement**

As J.H. Whyte submits, "Irish problems" in aftermath of the Act of Union were many, but "[t]he most serious of these problems. . . was the question of the land" (204). Many of these problems, such as the debates about the role of the peasantry and

agricultural improvement, were inherited concerns that had only intensified since Swift's time. Others were brought to light by an increasingly influential element of the intellectual class—political economists. In particular, the rapidly increasing Irish population troubled political economists who believed that their swelling ranks defied the logistics of subsistence. Of course, David Lloyd reminds us that the larger problem, which troubled political economists and policy-makers alike, was that of a thriving Irish peasantry which endangered hopes for the “improvement” of Ireland (“Potato” 316, 318). It was not the threat of famine that haunted political economy but the “social and political impact on Britain of an increasing Irish population with cultural habits that are not only alien but, in many respects, antithetical to the values that a burgeoning capitalism sought to reproduce in its own working classes” (Lloyd, “Potato” 316). Lloyd suggests that the Famine was thus a relief to many policy-makers, such as Charles Trevelyan, for whom the Famine represented a solution to the problem of land reorganization for capitalistic farming.

At the same time, the Anglo-Irish were struggling to maintain their position in an Irish society which was expanding the rights of the Catholic majority. The perspectives of the Protestant Ascendancy were not as brute as those of Trevelyan with regard to the Irish peasantry. As Maria Edgeworth's novels demonstrate, the landowning class was often sympathetic to the plight of their tenantry, blaming conniving middlemen or the corruption of politics for the problems of Irish society. Edgeworth's novels also tend to view the Anglo-Irish as continuing traditional practices by superseding them with more just or responsible variations. In her views and in those of her father's, the solution to

such mismanagement is not the destruction of the colonial system itself but the replacement of the ancient, degraded landowners (whether they were Catholic or dissipated members of the Anglo-Irish contingency) with a rational, modern class. The social landscape of Edgeworth's novels tends to advocate reform while carefully weighing the position of the Catholic peasantry. The concluding chapters, "The Edgeworths, Imperial Pedagogy and the Inculcation of (Economic) Virtue," and "Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui* and the Gift of Agricultural Improvement" will examine the extent of the Edgeworths' embrace of utilitarianism and as well as that of "improvement" in both moral and economic terms.

The first of these, "The Edgeworths, Imperial Pedagogy and the Inculcation of (Economic) Virtue," is concerned with the Edgeworths as collaborators in developing early pedagogical theories. Turning to the oft-overlooked *Essays in Professional Education*, the chapter focuses on Edgeworthian theories of gentlemanly education particularly as they relate to political economy. Proper behavior was inextricable, according to the Edgeworths, from respectability and proper financial management. Moreover, *Professional Education* points to the role of the *colonial* gentleman, in particular, and to the cultivation of a specific type of paternalistic relationship between himself and his tenantry. The chapter argues that, contrary to many critics of her fiction, Maria Edgeworth and her father were very pragmatic in their outlooks. Their philosophy grew out of the aspirations of Enlightenment humanism tempered with economic rationalism. Additionally, the Edgeworths were also very aware of their role as colonial gentry as indicated by the discussion here of *Professional Education's* sources. This

reconsideration of their lesser writings suggests that the Edgeworths were active participants in and supporters of British Empire, advocating the spread of civility both inside Ireland and throughout the British colonies.

Following from this, the final chapter, entitled “Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui* and the Gift of Agricultural Improvement,” turns toward her fictional work for a closer look at Edgeworth’s perspectives of the interrelations amongst the strata of colonial Irish society. Like *Professional Education*, *Ennui* demonstrates the strength of Edgeworth’s conviction in the importance of improvement as a revolutionary economic and cultural force. The process of improvement, as represented in *Ennui*, is one which binds the Anglo-Irish together with the Catholic tenantry, enmeshing them in a series of mutual obligations and responsibilities. In some ways, it is reminiscent of the “feudal” (i.e. *clachan*) system which colonization was meant to displace, but, in Maria Edgeworth’s figuration, it is the capitalized economy in addition to the personal affections of its participants which ensures the integration of the peasantry. She envisions a rationalized economy as conveying rewards to a properly industrious tenantry, allowing the purchase of small luxuries and establishing domestic habits of cleanliness and sobriety. *Ennui* depicts improvement as a process which humanizes both landlord and tenant, disciplining both toward the habits of a proper bourgeois sensibility.

In fact, improvement serves as an alibi for the Anglo-Irish in Maria Edgeworth’s fiction; while the reform of the gentry is often the ostensible object of her writing, it is the reinforcement of Anglo-Irish hegemony that is its most significant outcome. In *Ennui*,

Edgeworth offers images of revolution, both personally and politically, that convey the impression of widespread change and even radical inclusion. However, the chapter argues that this is a complex rhetorical gesture on Edgeworth's part which deflects attention away from its deeply conservative entrenchment of both cultural and class differences.

## **Conclusion**

*Cultivating Civilized Subjects* examines the penetration of capitalized economics into Irish society as an effect of British colonization, arguing that, beginning with plantation, economic rationality extended beyond the marketplace and toward the assimilation of Gaelic habits and culture. By tracing the rhetoric of improvement in eighteenth-century Ireland, this study demonstrates that the imposition of English/British agricultural practices was an important manifestation of the dual logic of profit and propriety.

The successful colonial deployment of capitalism depended upon the admixture of early agricultural science, political economy and British cultural norms. While these forces are more marked in Britain's later colonial ventures of the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, *Cultivating Civilized Subjects* argues that greater attention should be paid to the early modern period and to Ireland, in particular. Without suggesting an inevitable teleology of Western imperialism, it is nonetheless apparent that even these early ventures in Ireland, the West Indies and America, make use of the rhetoric of improvement along with the exercise of colonial power. It is only by looking more

closely at these ideologies and technologies of power in their early stirrings that scholars can avoid unwittingly contributing to the West's self-aggrandizement as a modern, self-contained force whose intrinsic superiority allowed colonial domination. The history of Irish colonization witnesses enormous shifts in the structures of Western culture from science to technology to agriculture. By the time of the Irish Famine, these technologies coupled with scientific discourse increasingly shaped not only the economic lives of those in metropole and colony but also their perceptions of "rational" behavior, behavior coded by its economic validity. At the heart of the developing technologies of the industrial age was a body of knowledge garnered through the exploitation of land with ever-more efficient methods of production. Agricultural science was the backbone upon which both colonization and capitalist expansion relied; agriculture demanded the submission of both nature and labor to its controls. This project demonstrates the centrality of agricultural improvement to the cultivation of a "civilized" subject through economic and moral discipline.

Jethro Tull's *New Horse-Houghing Husbandry*:  
The Role of Modern British Agriculture in the Deployment of a Civilized Subject

There certainly never was a time when the study of Agriculture was so universally attended to as the present. Societies in all civilised countries are formed, or forming, for its improvement; and the labours of the most ingenious and learned men in Europe are at this time directed to the cultivation of an art which was formerly abandoned to the rude practice of the most illiterate class among the people. . . The ingenious Mr. Jethro Tull was the first Englishman, perhaps the first writer, ancient or modern, who has attempted with any tolerable degree of success to reduce agriculture to certain and uniform principles; and it must be confessed, that he has done more towards establishing a rational and practical method of husbandry than all the writers who have gone before him. . . (D.Y. of Hungerford, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1764, 522-3)

The renewed interest in the agrarianism of eighteenth-century Britain has yielded compelling ways of situating the domestic within the context of imperial expansion. No longer isolated in the idyllic English countryside, studies of the georgic and of the natural and agricultural sciences, amongst others, have revealed their complex global underpinnings. These studies have fruitfully involved the deconstruction of traditionally opposed notions such as rural and colonial; scientist and colonial agent; poetic and imperial; and the technical and literary. For both British and postcolonial scholars, the reorientation toward agrarianism has taken an important step towards the idea that “domestic and imperial history cannot be assigned to separate, hermetically sealed boxes” (Gascoigne 577). C.A. Bayly has pointed to Britain’s improvement culture in particular as constitutive of empire: “Agrarian improvement was a moral crusade, the inner heart of English expansion; indeed, it was seen as the domestic precondition of overseas empire” (80-1). The significance of Bayly’s understanding of “agrarian patriotism,” as he terms it, is that it functioned not only technically, in economic, social and scientific models, but

also ideologically, as an ethos that was inextricable from its technical workings. In this vein, literary scholars have sought to displace the georgic from its firmly entrenched rural space by highlighting its relationship to British consolidation and expansion. In particular, the significance of the georgic's textuality as a vehicle of bourgeois communication which, via the growth of print readership, bridges the presumed gap between country and city life in the eighteenth century has served to expose the fundamental interconnections between the reclamation of rural life and the parallel encroachment of colonial territories. Karen O'Brien's notion of the "imperial georgic" underscores that territorial expansion was a central aspect of the georgic ethos from the late seventeenth century onward despite the tensions between country life and empire which it frequently presented; indeed, O'Brien reminds us that these same contradictions echo the Roman context of Virgil's *Georgics* (163). Similarly, Rachel Crawford sees the development of the English georgic form as inextricable from British internal colonization, in the shape of the Act of Union of 1707, and concurrent overseas expansion, especially that of North America ("English Georgic" 126, 129).<sup>1</sup> Missing from recent scholarship, however, are studies which follow Crawford's instructive point that the georgic is only a small manifestation of the general enthusiasm with which all things agrarian were received in eighteenth-century Britain ("English Georgic" 133-4). Paul Johnstone has gone so far as to characterize eighteenth-century agrarianism in Europe, but especially in England, as a "fad" which "at times reached the intemperate

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford is also one of the few scholars, along with Frans de Bruyn, who gives particular attention to agricultural treatises as text. See *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (Cambridge UP, 2002), especially the chapter "Altering the prospects: Switzer, Whately, and Repton."



proportions of a craze” (151, 162). Readership of agricultural prose as well as natural history grew enormously during this period, in fact, exceeding interest in the georgic (Crawford “English Georgic” 133; Rousseau 202). G.S. Rousseau notes that “by 1750 or so natural-philosophy books. . .[were] the most sought after of all printed books” (209). What follows from this growing understanding of eighteenth-century readership is that the exclusion of agricultural manuals in particular and natural philosophy more generally from discussions of improvement culture in Britain reduces the dimensions of its impact on the popular consciousness. Not only does this omission occlude the extent of the populace’s engagement with the ethic of improvement, but it also imposes anachronistic and artificial distinctions between scientific and literary genres which often serve to reduce natural philosophy to the merely technical, unfettered by ideology. This chapter re-locates the significance of treatises of husbandry within the broader context of improvement culture and colonial expansion through a reading of the work of one of Britain’s most important agricultural innovators, Jethro Tull. By engaging with Tull’s texts, I seek to emphasize the intertwinement of modern agricultural practice with the ideology of improvement and the deployment at home and abroad of a civilized subject.

Before attending more specifically to Tull’s *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry*,<sup>2</sup> it is necessary to provide an overview of the historical context from which it emerged. The origins of the eighteenth-century vogue for the agrarian are rooted in the complex cultural and economic shifts which England, and later Britain, witnessed during

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*, the “New” having been dropped with the 1733 edition, and referenced by either the 1731 or 1733 editions.

the early modern period. Briefly stated, this period, from about the late fifteenth century, was marked by the decay of feudal culture and the subsequent rise, however gradually, of capitalized agriculture and commercial trade. As these incremental changes accelerated in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the emergent notions of individual wealth and property transformed land and its products into the universal currency.<sup>3</sup>

Improvement in its agricultural valance was the immediate result of “rationalized farming” or a mode of food production driven by supply and demand rather than subsistence; this mode of farming was made possible by the increased imbrication in a market economy. Instead of being discrete processes pitting country farmers against urban merchants, capitalized agriculture and commercial trade developed in tandem with one another, reinforcing the production of agricultural goods; the demand for diversified foodstuffs and luxury products; and the desire for land ownership and greater profits. By the seventeenth century, England’s market economy necessitated continual advances in farm efficiency which took the form of crop rotations, fertilizer, irrigation ditches, fenced arable land and other experiments (Patriquin 59-61). Many of these changes were ongoing well into the eighteenth century and it would be a particular overstatement to suggest that more traditional cultural forms had been entirely eclipsed (Patriquin 55). Yet, these alterations in landed social structure literally marked the English landscape in dramatic fashion. The physical demarcations which signified the emergence of enclosures and private property were matched by pervasive transformations in social relations.

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<sup>3</sup> I am conscious of the fact that the concentration of power and wealth in land, very specifically, represents a brief historical moment and that, even during the early eighteenth century, commercial wealth threatened to outweigh the significance of landed wealth. However, my argument is that despite these realities, the real and imagined importance of land and its production continued to shape conceptions of self, nation, and other in Britain and its colonies.

Concerns with the maximization of time, wage labor, transportation, the marketplace, inheritance, poverty, common grazing and common agriculture were largely ushered in by these underlying shifts in English culture (Thompson 56-97; Hopcroft 1559-95; Patriquin 62-65). At the same time, England's internal metamorphosis was paralleled by its external expansion first into Ireland and then into the Americas and beyond.

Rationalized farming in the domestic sphere created greater demand for land and for cheaper agricultural products which, in turn, drove territorial expansion. Viewed in this light, the conquest and subsequent plantation of Ireland was an early experiment in the use of agriculture for cultural and economic ends that marked the beginning of English attempts to civilize native populations. Hence Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to Elizabeth I, could declare in the late sixteenth century that:

the best way to draw men into Munster [was] for Her Majesty to grant such estates in the escheated lands as may encourage men of ability to go over from hence to inhabit there who may be able to sustain the charges of first planting and tarry for their grain till after some years, for if the lands be otherwise disposed upon such as shall not be so qualified they will farm out the same to the natives of the country who will not manure them but in such idle manner as hath been used before. (Walsingham 1574-85: cxxvii; qtd. in Canny, *Making Ireland British* 129)

Walsingham's rhetoric demonstrates the extent to which England's political goals in Ireland were bound up with its desire to civilize Irish land and people through the imposition of English rationalized agriculture. Even in its early stages, agricultural improvement was equally concerned with the cultivation of profits and civilization. Thus, the internal changes in England's culture and economics cannot be marginalized from its colonial history; tracing the spread of the improvement ethic reintegrates colonial history with that of the domestic in the recognition that "agricultural improvement was a

grand project of global ecological and landscape homogenization in the name of enlightened empire” (Zilberstein 12).

It is impossible to understand the emergence of what became agricultural science without attending to this historical context. A burgeoning interest in husbandry paralleled the socioeconomic changes detailed above, a trend which was attested to by the appearance of texts that catered to the needs of landowners in the form of manuals of husbandry and household management,<sup>4</sup> and, following the growth of experimental philosophy in the seventeenth century, observations and analysis of the natural world. From their beginnings in the early sixteenth through the seventeenth century, agricultural books discussed “practical farming,” often specifying planting times, rotations, and domestic tasks, sometimes in almanac form. These manuals also tended to contain highly repetitive and derivative information; when not plagiarized directly from other sources, agricultural texts before the spread of early scientific principles largely disseminated the theories of ancient authors such as Virgil, Columella, Cato, Varro, Pliny and Horace (Fussell, *Farming Books. . . 1523 to 1730* 19-20; Johnstone 152) . However, the influence of an increasingly capitalized economy combined with the development of experimental philosophy promulgated by Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle, contributed to the quickening pace of agricultural publishing in the seventeenth century. Not only was there increased interest in husbandry in particular, but also the English populace became

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<sup>4</sup> While noting the difficulties inherent in identifying and labeling an exclusively “agricultural” (as opposed to a herbal, economic or legal) text, G.E. Fussell dates the first “English book on farming” to 1523 with the appearance of Sir Anthony Fitzherbert’s *The Boke of Husbandry* which details “the best principles of arable farming of the time, describe[d] the tools and discusses the capital required, and is moreover a conspectus of the life of a contemporary farmer and his family and servants. . .” (*Farming Books. . . 1523 to 1730* 4-6).

intrigued with natural observation and experimentation more generally. Among those in the early scientific community who devoted some of their attention toward agriculture were Samuel Hartlib and John Evelyn. However, despite their significance to the history of science and to the foundation of the Royal Society, G.E. Fussell claims that neither published very much, if any, original information about farming techniques or theories (*Farming Books. . . 1523 to 1730* 41-48, 57, 66-67). This is not an impugment of their contributions, but rather an indication of the continuing traditional and communal character of agricultural writing even with the experimental influences of the time.

Therefore, when Jethro Tull's *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry: Or, An Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation* appeared, it was one of the first texts to attempt the study of agriculture in a systematic form, propagating theory while reporting experimental results. Tull's manual participated in the unprecedented demand for such texts that peaked in the 1730s but continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that was paralleled by the spread of agricultural societies throughout Britain and Ireland (Johnstone 159-162; Crawford "English Georgic" 131-5). While Jethro Tull's fame continues over two hundred and fifty years after his death for his invention of the seed drill, his importance as a historical figure extends well beyond his development of one of the earliest modern agricultural machines. It was through the publication of Tull's text and the embrace of his methods that the seed drill became known. The first edition of *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry: Or, An Essay on the Principles of*

*Tillage and Vegetation* was printed in 1731;<sup>5</sup> it was quite a bit shorter than subsequent editions of the text at less than two hundred pages. The edition begins with a preface outlining Tull's concern to present a text which is "different" from the other "Books of Husbandry" that had gone before. While acknowledging that agriculture had been the focus of many authors both "ancient and modern," Tull nonetheless questions their style, "so elegantly written," as well as their value, "so little to the Purpose" and "hav[ing] done nothing but Mischief" (iv). With this rather recalcitrant beginning, Tull sets out to issue a system of husbandry whose "Design of the whole is, to increase the Profit of the Land" and which is "founded upon Principles. . .not extant in any Author, that [he] can find, or hear of" (1731: vi). In the chapters that follow, Tull addresses an eclectic mix of topics that could later be categorized as botany ("Of Roots," "Of Leaves," "Of the Food of Plants"); agriculture ("Of Dung," "Of Houghing"); and also anthropology as in the "Of Ploughs" chapter which outlines the history of agricultural implements as well as agriculture itself. As a whole, the first edition of *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry* presents Tull's cultivation methods, which he believed were tested by experimental means and were thus proven principles in producing greater profits. His famous seed drill is central to Tull's entire method: through it and a modified type of plough, Tull reduced the amount of seed and the labor<sup>6</sup> required to plant it. Tull believed that, with

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<sup>5</sup> G.E. Fussell notes that Tull's first publication was a brief quarto in 1731 which was followed by separate London and Dublin editions in 1733 (without "New" in the title) that also contained *A Supplement to the Essay*. Following this, editions were published in 1740, 1743, 1751 and 1762; William Cobbett also re-issued *The New Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* in 1822 which included Cobbett's preface (*More Farming Books. . . 1731-1793* 4).

<sup>6</sup> While the seed drill reduced the labor required for planting, it is not clear that Tull's method actually reduced labor overall (although his servants believed it did because they sabotaged his prototypes) since it consistently calls for repeated hoeing and weeding.

the precision of the seed drill, less seed would be wasted and, by planting in wider rows, greater space with which to till the soil would be gained. In addition to the new and specific usage of these two farms machines and the unorthodox use of wide planting rows with high ridges, Tull advocated a fanatical concern with hoeing (termed “tillage”) for the purposes of “pulverizing” the soil in the furrows, freeing essential nutrients for plants and, concurrently, ridding the field of weeds.

Subsequent editions, beginning in 1733, were greatly expanded and included a new and lengthier preface, detailed woodcuts for the design of the seed drill, and extensive notes along with *A Supplement to the Essay*. The inclusion of the design for the seed drill was an important redress to the first edition for Tull; he considered their exclusion for lacks of funds detrimental to his purpose of providing a practical set of plans for its construction (1731: xvi, xxi). While they largely followed the contours of the original, the later editions allowed Tull not only to explain his practices and report the results of his experiments in greater detail but also permitted him to address the concerns and criticisms of his readers, a topic which shall be elaborated upon later in the chapter.

In viewing the whole of Jethro Tull’s work, it becomes apparent that he sought to introduce an entire system of cultivation of which the seed drill was a central, inextricable, part. Indeed, while he later became synonymous with his seed drill, Tull went to some lengths to convince his audience that profits from his methods would exceed the cost its production, and it is not clear that the seed drill attracted the immediate attention of Tull’s audience (1731: xx-xxi; 1743: 122-125). Even as late as

1784, Tull continued to be associated with his “New Husbandry” rather than his invention; his supporter Francis Forbes discussed the “peculiar excellence of Tullian husbandry” as a whole and its technique of cultivating wheat in particular (Forbes 296). Later writers also referred to his entire system as a type of “clean farming” in reference to Tull’s emphasis on weed-free cultivation (Cathcart 33). Twentieth-century agricultural historian G.E. Fussell aptly describes:

Tull’s work, both in the field, and his ideas and their record in his words, [as] form[ing] the beginning of a new epoch in farming history[;] . . . this mechanical operation of drilling seed coupled with his theories of planting in wide rows so that his other invention, the horse hoe, could be used to keep the land clean, free from weeds, and well aerated between the rows was the perfection, crude though it was, of a new epoch in farming practice (*Farming Books. . . 1523 to 1730* 125).

Therefore, it was not simply the seed drill for which Jethro Tull was credited by his contemporaries; he was also associated with the introduction of new methodologies.

Outside of the pages of agrarian history, Jethro Tull may be seen as a somewhat obscure presence, but it is difficult to overstate the significance of Jethro Tull as the figure of a practical farmer in the later eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. While the specifics of *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry*’s reading audience are difficult to ascertain, there is evidence that the influence of his theories and methods was strongly felt amongst the “projecting” set of the English elite. George II was said to be an admirer of Tull’s theories while Queen Caroline was a subscriber (Johnstone 160). In addition, Tull’s experiments gained the favorable attentions of some of his aristocratic neighbors such as Charles, eighth Lord Cathcart, whose diary noted his acquaintance with the improver (Fussell, *Jethro Tull* 10-12; Cathcart 4-5). Furthermore, *The New Horse-*



*Houghing Husbandry* became the object of controversy when the popular agricultural writer Stephen Switzer and his colleagues began to attack Tull, mainly with regard to his views on ancient farming knowledge, leading to a heated printed debate. Later in the century, the well-known agriculturalist Arthur Young made a “pilgrimage” to the site of Tull’s farm (Fussell, *Jethro Tull* 22-23). However, like many agriculturalists of the time, Tull’s theories were almost as frequently derided as lauded. Some texts disputed Tull’s claims for increased crop yields; others decried his adoption of wide planting rows. The most common challenge to Tull’s ideas which continues until this day involves the design of his seed drill and whether he can rightfully claim to be the originator of this machine. This is an interesting question which constitutes part of the debate about the significance of medieval and early modern farming technology that, it has been argued, is undervalued because of its pre-modern and pre-capitalist origins. Unfortunately, there is not adequate space here to delve further into the matter, but, in summary, it appears that, like most inventions, Tull’s drill was a conglomeration of earlier machines that were not widely adopted. Regardless of these contestations, Jethro Tull’s theories and methods have been widely extolled as “revolutionizing” farming practice. Examples of the force with which his supporters have written can be found from the eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries. In 1784, Jethro Tull was described as “a gentleman of learning, candour, and probity. . .[who] struck out a new path,. . .reduced [agriculture] to a science[.]. . .practised the art himself with great skill and success, and led the way to improvements in agriculture in every part of the world” (Forbes 177). Tull was also “the great English cultivator,” an “earnest reformer” (Mitchell 195, 198) as well as “no ordinary farmer;

rather he was among the first highly cultivated men whose attention was turned by destiny, or providence if you will, to principles of agriculture” (Moncrieff 286). And, in an article entitled “Jethro Tull: In Memoriam” published in 1941, Charles Shull proclaimed:

In the light of our day, TULL stands out as one of the really great benefactors of mankind, whose principles now form the basis of all intelligent and successful cultivation of the earth, and of man’s escape from the gloomy predictions of MALTHUS. The breaking of the soil, the drilling of the seed, the fruitful yields of the fertile earth form a perpetual and enduring monument to his genius. May we never forget how much we owe him. (226)

These and many other reactions indicate that Jethro Tull’s influence on modern agriculture stems as much from his text as from the seed drill itself. Moreover, their intensity provides a glimpse of the complex ideology that agriculture and its improvement symbolized during the long eighteenth century and into the present. Jethro Tull’s engagement with the idea of “modern British agriculture” will be foregrounded by re-reading *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry* with rhetoric as the central focus,

### **Jethro Tull and the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns**

It is immediately apparent to the reader of *The New Horse-Houghing Husbandry* that Jethro Tull intended to inaugurate a new era in English farming practice. The text not only detailed Tull’s plans for the construction of the seed drill but also propagated an entire system of agriculture which represented, Tull declared, the establishment of an emphatically “rational” set of practices brought about via experimentation and which sought to sweep away the cobwebs of classical agricultural writings. Tull’s raillery against the existing literature and practice of husbandry begins in the first edition’s

preface as he relates the tale of a “late Great Man” who, having read many books of husbandry by “ancient and modern Writers,” orders them “notwithstanding their Eloquence, to be carried upon a Hand-Barrow. . .and thrown into the Fire” (1731: iii). For his eighteenth-century readers this was a clear signal that Tull would reject the traditions of classical agriculture and instead engage with the precepts of the emerging “new science.” It was this central claim of Tull’s that would engender the controversy which ensued involving the popular agricultural writer, Stephen Switzer. Like the adversaries in Swift’s *The Battle of the Books*, Switzer and Tull engaged in the vitriolic culture wars of the time which pitted supporters of ancient learning against proponents of modern knowledge. There were two interrelated strains of thought that Tull and Switzer confronted in their debate regarding the Ancients and the Moderns: knowledge and form. The former, addressed below, concerns the contrasting ways in which “truth” was formed for the Ancients and Moderns: as either an inheritable set of precepts tested by virtue of their antiquity or as a new understanding of the world derived from the creativity and innovation of contemporary thinkers. The latter aspect of Tull and Switzer’s debate, form, will be expounded upon later in the chapter; it details Switzer and Tull’s self-conscious concern with rhetoric while also suggesting the relationship between the Battle and the nature of “writing” in a Derridean sense.

#### *The Framework of Knowledge in the Quarrel*

While the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns is so well-known as to be considered cliché (Patey 34), an abbreviated rehearsal of the stakes of the debate is

worthwhile if only to frame its relevance to Jethro Tull's writing. The Quarrel is generally regarded as originating in France with its most renowned figures being Charles Perrault and Bernard de Fontenelle. In its slightly later English guise, the Quarrel took the form of dueling missives known as the Battle of the Books; the Battle's initial participants were William Temple and William Wotton, but the Battle continued well into the eighteenth century with their causes being taken up by other scholars, mostly notably Jonathan Swift, whose text became synonymous with the debate itself (Levine, *Battle* 7, 17; Patey 33-4). The debate could succinctly be described as "the Moderns' rejection of the authority of the Ancients" (Patey 32), but, as the important critic Richard Foster Jones understates, "it is hard for us to appreciate" the "ardent worship of the great classical minds" and the "despotic sway over human opinions" that ancient learning represented (4). This perspective underscores the difficulty of approaching the Quarrel with the unshakeable burden of our "modern" perspective. Another approach to the viewpoint of the Ancients is to explain that "[f]or the educated elite of the eighteenth century, ancient history provided a cognitive model within which they could make sense of contemporary events and personalities and even predict the course of future developments" (Vlassopoulos 32). In other words, the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns constituted a self-conscious deliberation on the genealogy of knowledge which impacted nearly all facets of the way that Europeans imagined themselves.

The conflict between Jethro Tull and Stephen Switzer is therefore suggestive of much more than differing views on Virgil's *Georgics*. In what follows, it is clear that their positions were representative of England's grappling with a changing global and

cultural landscape. Tull's chapter "Remarks on the Bad Husbandry that is so finely express'd in *Virgil's First Georgic*" was the main incitement of Stephen Switzer's indignation, which compelled him to come to the defense of the Ancients in his publication *The Practical Husbandman*. Not one to mince words, Tull had declared: "Must vain and idle Superstition be thought Truth and Natural, because 'tis *Old*, tho' we know it must be False, and consequently against Nature? I'm sure 'tis far from shewing that the Foundation of the whole Georgic is Truth;. . .For indeed I cannot find, One *new* useful Truth discover'd in all the Pages of the Georgic" (1733: 43). Tull's pronouncement placed him squarely in the camp of the Moderns and cut straight to the heart of the Quarrel. From his attack against the Ancients' embrace of the classics to his aspersion of the *Georgics* "truth," Tull's caustic indictment of Virgil was designed to be a radical challenge to the entirety of traditional agricultural practice. From Tull's perspective, Virgil's writings represented the slavish adherence of his contemporaries to the error-riddled, superstitious, and irrational thought of the Ancients which earned them the title of "*bigotted Virgilians*" (1743: 218). Tull's critique of the Ancients is featured prominently in the preface of his second expanded edition wherein he asserts that "No Canon having limited what we shall think in Agriculture, nor condemned any of its Tenents for Heresy, every Man is therein a Free-Thinker, and must think according to the Dictates of his own Reason, where he will or no" (1743: ii). This statement encompasses many of the central tenants of the Moderns' position. First, Tull's mention of "the Canon" refers to the Ancients' belief that the scholarship of their contemporary moment was inevitably overshadowed by a complete set of knowledge inherited from classical

learning; the famous image of a dwarf (modernity) standing on the shoulders of a giant (antiquity) was evoked by William Temple in support of this precept. Thus, Tull resents the idea that their historical epoch has been shut out from contributing to the store of knowledge and doomed to the repetition of the past. Tull's invocation of "heresy" is not simply a rhetorical flourish. Since classical learning served as the lens through which the Ancients constructed their worldview, an attack on ancient knowledge was a blow to their entire system of thought. New knowledge could be acquired by the use of reason, a term which Tull opposes to the idea of superstition; in this model knowledge is not simply inherited and implicitly relied upon; knowledge must be proven. In place of the Ancients' worldview, Tull puts forth a presentist and individualized notion of knowledge formation which presumes the right, indeed the obligation, of each "man" to reason for himself.

Therefore, *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* proudly carried the mantle of the Moderns through its clamorous rejection of Ancient knowledge; declaration that the Canon was not foreclosed to the Moderns; staunch adherence to the principles established by emerging scientific thought; and denunciation of superstition as a barrier to rational improvement. The impact of Tull's text was substantial in that his assertion of the supremacy of modern learning threatened to sweep away traditional scholarship, which functioned through the continuation and imitation of ancient knowledge. While the aforementioned were key features of the debate, a closer look at Tull and Switzer's texts points to the fact that the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was one that was primarily concerned about the role of language in the dissemination of knowledge.

*The Uncertainty Principle: Science as Writing*

For the Moderns of the natural and experimental philosophies, particularly for Francis Bacon and his followers, language itself was an object of suspicion and it was as much the means by which the ancients communicated as the knowledge that they conveyed that was the focus of the Moderns' scrutiny. In one of the few articles which considers Jethro Tull's writing as a text, Frans de Bruyn points to the ways in which Switzer and Tull's debate engaged with questions of rhetorical form and knowledge. Their conflict shifts the framework of the Quarrel towards broader concerns of new science; specifically, they were concerned with the appropriate type of rhetoric for experimental philosophy (de Bruyn 664). Switzer and Tull's debate, de Bruyn argues, was perhaps the first in what would later be termed agricultural science to confront modern scientific writing. The question was whether agricultural science would share the characteristics of the ancients' writing style, seen as a blend of the literary and didactic deriving from common experience, or whether a new form would emerge which rejected these classical precedents and elevate the authority of first-hand observations (de Bruyn 664, 667-72, 682). De Bruyn suggests that Switzer approached Virgil's *Georgics* strictly as a literary text and, as such, one that was aesthetically pleasing rather than instrumental (664). In contrast, Tull's approach to the *Georgics* was an evaluation of its utility; his critique effectively undermined the *Georgics*' function as a manual of husbandry (de Bruyn 664). The Ancients believed that a text accrued truth-value through a kind of cumulative consensus. For those like Switzer who supported the *Georgics* as a farming manual, they believed that the continuous repetition and general acceptance of its

methods granted it validity (de Bruyn 667). However, the Moderns valued newly-developed ideas about verification; they rejected the methods of scholastic learning which they viewed as an attempt to build maxims on the unstable ground of untested theories.

Their concern with establishing the validity of knowledge was directly connected to questions of rhetoric. Form mirrors function, and, for the Ancients, the function of rhetoric was the transmission of information in an “eloquent” way; chronology and detailed argumentation were sacrificed to the broader concern for the presentation of a coherent body of knowledge (Levine, *Battle* 267-271). The distinctions between the Ancients’ and Moderns’ mode of writing was most obvious in the field of history, but the same issues underwrote Switzer and Tull’s conflict and scientific rhetoric at large. For both history and natural philosophy, there was an object (the past and natural phenomena respectively) which the scholar attempted to access and then report about. The Ancients’ access to the past or to natural phenomena was conditioned by classical knowledge (an unacknowledged solipsism), the “truth” of which lay not in the details but in the distillation of experience through time (Levine, *Battle* 270). Obviously, the Ancients’ process of accessing an object of inquiry was the antithesis of the Moderns’ knowledge-formation. Access to knowledge, either of the past or of nature, was through the use of observation and experiment which the Moderns called “experience.” For the Royal Society, “experience” was very specifically defined as “a report of a discrete event, that is, of one specific instance showing how an aspect of the external world behaves” (de



Bruyn 671).<sup>7</sup> Thereafter, the report of an experience even in this controlled scenario became a matter of great concern for the Moderns: writing was viewed as a removal and a contaminant of the event itself. In summary, the Ancients viewed rhetoric as the appropriate vehicle for the transmission of information about an object of inquiry; from their perspective, language was simply a mirror of knowledge as both were inherited and communally-sanctioned. The Moderns, on the other hand, viewed both the process by which the Ancients accessed an object of inquiry and their means of reporting it as unstable and untrustworthy. Through the establishment of a strict method, the Moderns of new science believed that they could successfully access nature as an object of inquiry. However, despite their compulsion to report about the object, the Moderns distrusted rhetoric as a vehicle; the ideal of new science was to construct a “universal *mathesis*” or a scientific language based strictly on mathematics because only its symbology could produce “self-evident, certain knowledge” (Reill 27).

In terms of Virgil’s *Georgics* and its relevance to modern agricultural science, Switzer did not see Virgil’s rhetorical style as an impediment to truth, whereas Tull believed that both Virgil’s “experience” in farming and his linguistic means of reporting were a menace to truth. As I have suggested, Tull’s distrust of language was typical of natural philosophy during this period. In the English context, its origin can be traced to Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle. Bacon believed that words were by nature imprecise and introduced confusion even in the elaboration of experiments (Jones 48). As the

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<sup>7</sup> Please see de Bruyn 668-672 for an excellent and more detailed explication of “experience” in Tull’s text and in the eighteenth century more generally.

scientific method became increasingly standardized, largely due to Newton's influence, it was believed that the method's exactitude was able to overcome or compensate for the inaccuracies of language (Reill 27-8). Jacques Derrida has discussed the gradual belief in natural philosophy's direct access to its object of inquiry as a pivotal moment in the development of scientific thought in the essay "Grammatology as a Positive Science." He describes this space as one in which "proper scientific work had constantly to overcome the very thing that moved it: speculative prejudice and ideological presumption" (75). Science's quest to overcome speculation was registered by a concern with writing itself. Language, the inevitable vehicle of scientific transmission, was examined in an attempt to free it from history, making it universal. René Descartes thus sees "[t]he discovery of such a universal language [as] depend[ing] upon the true order of philosophy. For without that philosophy it is impossible to number and order all the thoughts of men or even to separate them out into clear and simple thoughts, which in my opinion is the great secret for acquiring true and scientific knowledge" (5-6; qtd. in Derrida 78). Similarly, Gottfried Leibniz describes "characteristic" as a universal language or "science that gives speech to languages, letters to speech, numbers to arithmetic, notes to music; it teaches us the secret of stabilizing reasoning, and of obliging it to leave visible marks on the paper in a little volume, to be examined at leisure: finally, it makes us reason at little cost, putting characters in the place of things in order to ease the imagination" (98-99; qtd Derrida. in 78). In seeking a condensed core of writing, early scientists sought to supersede language itself and discover a "link with the non-phonetic essence" (Derrida 79). Thus, while science may have been a turn away

from explicitly theological forms of knowledge, it nonetheless sought to uncover ‘Nature’ as an essence beyond language and writing. The belief in an essence beyond language/writing is what Derrida describes elsewhere as “pure intelligibility, absolute logos” (13) or the “absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being” (12). Scientific inquiry of this period thus witnesses an anxiety about the ability of language to transcend the perceived gap between “experience” and “writing.” In their quest to control and to make language more precise, Descartes and Leibniz unwittingly demonstrate their unease not only with the means of scientific communication, but also with the nature of science itself. Science purports to be a direct transcription of truth/experience, but it is necessarily caught up in language/writing for the purposes of transmission. Therefore, according to early scientific culture, scientific writing is always already a degeneration from experience and consequently from truth. Natural philosophy’s suspicion of writing as a deviation from truth undermined its own premise. Yet, since its functioning depended upon language, science had to repress the anxiety about writing in order to declare itself as a space of objectivity and absolute knowledge.

It is in this context that Jethro Tull opens his *New Horse-Houghing Husbandry*, of 1731, with the declaration that “*Writing and Ploughing are two different Talents*” (1731: i). Tull goes on to elevate experience over the act of writing and reading, “*he that writes well, must have spent in his Study that Time, which is necessary to be spent in the Fields, by him who will be Master of the Art of Cultivating them*” (1731: i). Tull’s true agriculturalist is the one who eschews writing in favor of practicing his art. The denigration of his writing serves to promote Tull’s mastery over ploughing: “*To write*

*then effectually of Ploughing, one must not be qualified to write Learnedly”* (1731: i).

This opening of the first edition serves a few contradictory purposes. At least on the surface, it follows the classical tradition of opening a text with an assertion of authorial modesty. In the classical context, typically a legal forum, the genuflection of the author before his audience is intended to convey transparency, asserting the truth of the text over and against the humble position of the speaker (Dunn 6). Yet, even in the classical model, and certainly in Tull’s case, such claims of modesty work paradoxically to assert the authority of the author (Dunn 4-6). This is readily apparent in Tull’s dialectic since the effect of belittling his writing is the confirmation of his authority as an agriculturalist. Tull’s remarks about writing can be seen as part of a growing trend in eighteenth-century publications, to market oneself through prefatory “puffs” (Mason 6). With the rapid growth of print culture in the eighteenth century, advertising techniques grew in number and complexity in order to reach more specific audiences (Mason 6-8). Tull’s rhetorical style in his prefatory material indicates that he saw the need to appeal to a particular audience, one which would not necessarily be influenced by traditional appeals to education and erudition. At the close of the 1731 preface, Tull speaks directly to his audience, both apologizing to and identifying with them:

*I NEED not say Writing is none of my Business; but I hope the Farmer will not regard the Roughness of the Stile; because he knows a Plough will go never the better for being polish'd, though much the cheaper, for not being besmear'd with Dung: Yet I must confess, that I have much less Aversion to Dung in the Field, than I have to the Expence of Buying and Carrying it thither. And I don't doubt, but many Farmers will hate that as much as I do, when they are convinc'd by their own Experience, they can go on very well without it: And if Hopes of Profit have so much Influence on their Inclinations as to put them upon making Trials, I wish them Success. (1731: xxviii-xxix)*

Tull's closing, addressed emphatically to the farmer as practitioner, asks that the text's "Roughness of the Stile" be excused. In a rhetorically adept move, Tull compares his supposedly rough writing style with an unpolished, untainted plough. Tull reasons that a farmer will understand that, like writing, a plough is not more effective when polished. Since the polish on the plough Tull speaks of is the dung of manure, a substance he regards as both unclean and excessively used, the metaphor of the unpolished plough for his rough style suggests that Tull's rhetoric is 'clean' since not "besmear'd" with elegance or complexity. Learned writing is thus cast as both ineffectual and tainted. Lest the reader be distracted by this complex flourish, Tull collapses his metaphor from its figurative meaning into the actual by confessing directly to the audience ("Yet I must confess") that his "aversion" to dung in a literal sense lies in its expense and nuisance. Tull's confession allows him to draw himself closer to his audience, by suggesting that their concerns are the same: business and profit. Tull underscores that "the real" lies elsewhere by continually directing his audience away from rhetoric and outside of the text toward experience. He thus insists that he has no real interest in writing since it is not his "Business," thereby pointing to ploughing as the place of real profits. Tull also directs his readers off the page and into the fields by encouraging them to undertake their own "Trials" so that they will be "*convinc'd by their own Experience.*" Of course, the force of Tull's 1731 preface lies in his insistence that writing is not experience and that the "roughness" of his style is an inverse measure of his effectiveness. It is often the very moments when Tull is attempting to maintain the gap between learned, polished writing

and true, practical experience that he indulges in elaborate and witty rhetoric. The text thus belies Tull's insistence on the poverty of his own writing.

Jethro Tull's paradoxical dispersion of writing would be less compelling if it did not allow him to mobilize a complex authorial persona that not only warranted commentary over a hundred years after his death but was also intimately connected with his claims to verifiable scientific evidence. As suggested earlier, Tull's espoused aversion to writing allows him to claim kinship with his audience, whom he invokes as "a common Farmer" (1731: viii); Tull's identification with the farmer through the lens of experience advances the authority of his text as that which is practical rather than "speculative" (1731: vii). In several instances, he accuses the scientific and agricultural community of accepting theories that, as he claims, experience clearly shows to be false. Similarly, as in the case of idea of "change of species,"<sup>8</sup> Tull attacks the adherence to arguments from respected authorities because of the "*mere ipse dixit*" (1931: vii) of that authority, here "Doctor Woodward" or John Woodward (1665-1728), professor of geology. Tull's criticism of other agricultural writers is centrally a concern with textuality, not only in the sense of the literal meaning of *ipse dixit* as "he himself said it," but also in his scorn for the repetition of incorrect information through writing: "[Woodward's text] seems to have been of Sufficient Strength to draw after him Mr. Bradley, Mr. Mortimer, and I know not how many other Writers, into his Opinion" (vii). Tull's emphasis here seems to be on the word "Writers." Woodward's text, like all text,

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of "change of species" paralleled the idea of crop rotation; in other words, a particular variety of wheat should not be overused on a specific patch of ground and should be exchanged with another type of wheat at intervals in order to ensure its success.

was so forceful that it had the ability to convince other Writers amongst whom Tull clearly does not count himself. Tull had railed against agricultural writers earlier in the preface. The danger of “writing” in Tull’s formulation is that it allows words (the “*mere ipse dixit*”) to stand in for the “Experiments” and “Observations” that Tull claims to practice in order to “prove those Principles in Theory.” However, his criticisms of respected members of the early scientific community, like John Woodward, who also conducted experiments, suggest that, in some sense, Tull recognizes that there is no way to ensure validity.

In dwelling on the particulars of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, its manifestation in the work of Jethro Tull, and its relation to the development of the new science, this chapter has been engaging with the Derridean project of following the trace of science’s ideology constructed via the cultivation of a type of rhetoric that attempted to disavow its subjective origins. Tull’s crafting of a new “scientific” or “technical” language, Frans de Bruyn contends, was part of the process by which the cultural authority of the classics, and of “the humanities” in general, was dethroned as the arbiter of “truth” and instead ensconced in the “realm of the imagination and the aesthetic” (664).

Tull’s quest for a language which is “stripped of its tropes and figurative language” (de Bruyn 683) was more than simply seeking a delineation between prose and poetry; in holding didactic rhetoric to “a standard of factuality that the poet is not customarily required to satisfy,” Tull and other natural philosophers sought to establish

science and its attendant rhetoric as *the* sign of truth (de Bruyn 685). Rhetorical simplicity is thus constructed as the marker of self-evident truth. Furthermore, Tull's description of his rhetoric as being in "plain Dress" (1733: 43 n.3) is fitting in illustrating that scientific writing is meant to contrast not only with the eloquent, adorned style of the Ancients, but also in its plainness suggest that it is unburdened by ideology. Tull implicitly makes this assertion when he cajoles his audience, "we owe no Veneration to Falshood for the sake of its Antiquity, or of the fine Language in which it is written; though both these Advantages have a powerful Influence on Vulgar Minds, especially such as have more respect for *Sound* than for *Sense* and *Truth*" (1733: 229). Or, similarly, he castigates: "we should therefore not Judge of [crops] then by our Imagination, but as we do of the Sun and Moon nigh the Horizon, *viz.* by our Reason. Imagination often deceives us, by Arguments False, or Precarious; but Reason leads us to Demonstration, by Weights and Measures" (1733: 63 n.1). Tull connects the classics with ornamental language the danger of which is its persuasive ability; ornamental language signifies the work of the imagination for Tull, and imagination is deceptive. In other words, Jethro Tull seeks a language which is transparent, allowing the reader to glimpse "Truth" directly through the text, unmediated by the figure of the natural philosopher himself. Tull's text also creates a chain of associations among classical learning, eloquent rhetoric and imagination that confines the work of the imagination to the realm of the purely aesthetic ("sound" rather than "truth"). As de Bruyn expresses, "poetry was forced more and more to relinquish its cognitive claims" (664). In fact, Levine suggests that the increasing differentiation of poetry from the natural sciences was a feature of the Quarrel



with the Moderns granting “most of literature and the arts” to the Ancients while maintaining the superiority of modern natural philosophy (Levine, *Battle* 39-40). So that, despite the advancement of the “new science” in English culture of the late seventeenth century and the errors which it highlighted in ancient learning, support for the Ancients still held great sway and the Battle was extremely contentious. With “the humanities” relinquished to the Ancients, Levine sees the Battle as the gradual relinquishment of “modernity” on the part of the Ancients: “it was only when that delicate balance between a real and imagined affinity of ancient and modern worlds disappeared, when the tension between the facts of political life and the classical ideal grew too great to bear, that the ancients lost their cause and finally gave way to modernity” (7).

History demonstrates that the Moderns survived the Battle, ensconcing the values of modernity into European culture; however, the equally strong imaginative pull of the Ancients’ image of English culture cannot be underestimated. Levine emphasizes that since the Ancients used classical culture as a lens through which to view contemporary events, their perspectives were shaped by contemporary events to a greater degree than they and later scholars have admitted (4,6). Philip Ayres has traced support for the Ancients following the Restoration to elite Englishman who tended “to image themselves as virtuous Romans:” he argues that the English aristocracy’s embrace of the Ancients constituted “the conscious effort of a newly empowered oligarchy to dignify and thereby vindicate itself and the recently established principles of constitutional liberty through association with an idealised image of republican Rome” (xiii). These views of the affinities between Britain and, particularly, Roman culture would persist and even gain

ground well into the nineteenth century. However, despite the endurance of Roman iconography in British culture, its antagonism to the idea of modernity would eventually be resolved. The cultural authority of the classics would eventually be subsumed by that of Modern Britain.<sup>9</sup>

While it may be true that the Quarrel, in the form of debates about the roles of classical and contemporary learning, had been ongoing from the Middle Ages (Paetow 5-12), it is nevertheless the case that its manifestation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was distinctive because of the Moderns' own belief in the particular auspiciousness of their historical moment. To follow the guidance of Laura Brown's work on modernity, this particular appearance of the Quarrel is unique in that it was "centered in the triumph of capitalism in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (7). The economic and cultural impact of these changes has been partially explicated earlier in relation to the development of capitalized agriculture. In the English cultural arena, the growth of new knowledge prompted by experimental philosophy as well as global travel and colonization, coupled with the belief in the preeminence of English liberty, ushered in by the Restoration contributed to the idea that the English nation stood on the threshold of history. Following Foucault, Brown has emphasized the importance of the idea of "modernity" as a self-conscious and imaginative fashioning of a "new" epoch, or episteme. Modernity is then a kind of quickening or as Jameson suggests

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<sup>9</sup> It is beyond the scope of the study to trace the convergence of classical imagery with that of modernity as it developed in Britain through the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, Levine's text offers an excellent understanding of the complex interactions between the Ancients' and the Moderns' versions of historiography which eventually became resolved through the development of British anthropology. Similarly, *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*. Ed Mark Bradley NY: Oxford UP, 2010, especially Vlassopoulos' article cited here, offers a related explanatory model.

“the conviction that we ourselves are somehow new, that a new age is beginning, that everything is possible and nothing can ever be the same again” (310; qtd. in Brown 9). In this understanding of modernity, its embrace necessarily involves a simultaneous self-fashioning and differentiation; for the Moderns, this differentiation functioned temporally in terms of a belief in the usurpation of the ancient past by an ever-progressing present. Belief in the “newness” of the eighteenth-century present was constructed over and against not only the Ancients, but also the Medieval which was (and is) overwhelmingly characterized by the Moderns as a dark period of limited intellectual engagement that merely copied Ancient learning (Levine, *Battle* 23-26; Paetow 13-14). Thus modernity emerged as “an act of historical differentiation, an attention to the novelty of the present and its distance from the past, which makes possible ideas of progress, improvement, and change” (Brown 7). Equally important was the spatial differentiation of an English, later British, nation against a global other, an aspect of this self-fashioning which will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

### **Jethro Tull and the Ideology of Modern British Agriculture**

While the broad social changes discussed above contributed to Europeans’ growing awareness of a significant break with the past, for Britain, the Anglo-Scottish union was perhaps the single most important event that intensified the consolidation of modernity as well as that of Britishness. With Anglo-Scottish union, Britain’s transition to “modernity” was fully realized. A history-rupturing event which changed the cartography of the British Isles, the creation of Great Britain confirmed the impression of

an innovative self-fashioning that differentiated the new nation in geographic and chronological terms. Rachel Crawford describes the events of 1707 in this manner: “the Act of Union . . . created Great Britain, bounded now on all sides by the ocean, rising like Botticelli’s Venus out of the foam” (Crawford 94). Expansionist imagery was part of the popular representation of Britishness at the time; from georgic poetry to gardening treatises, Britons themselves envisioned their properties as analogous to the national landscape: boundless and ripe with future promise (Crawford 4, 14-15, 91-113). An emergent Britishness was therefore inseparable from its expansionist aspirations: “an image of a small nation defined on all sides by the sea which formed a vital core of a centrifugal power, a vigorous heart pumping lifeblood outward into the extremities of a Britannizable world” (Crawford 4). Anglo-Scottish union birthed the image of a modern, dynamic nation which looked toward its global horizons.<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of the British polity clearly could not claim to resolve all of the internal differentiations of the British Isles (the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 being the most pertinent example); nonetheless the events of 1707 did serve to crystallize identification with Britishness amongst many of its citizens. Elements of this nascent identity were not entirely new-sprung from the Act of Union, some aspects of this configuration having been features of the English cultural milieu since at least the time of the Restoration. In particular, both the ideas that English, now British, government was a special purveyor of liberty by virtue of its constitution, and the sense that commerce and profit were the

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<sup>10</sup> As Crawford points out, these global aspirations were even further reinforced by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 (5). Here, the chapter follows Crawford and Colley in emphasizing 1707 as a distinctive moment in the development of Britishness, but it should be apparent that the discussion seeks to show this as a continuing process which intensified throughout the eighteenth century.

visible and rightful outgrowth of private property had their roots in the Settlement.

Similarly, the conviction that English liberty and commerce were markers of its exceptionalism and providentialism had long been hallmarks of English identity. The advent of Union solidified the confluence of patriotism, commerce, property, and liberty as intrinsic elements of British identity. Linda Colley's influential *Britons*:

*Forging the Nation 1707-1837* describes the importance of Britain's material gains to its national imagery:

In terms of its agricultural productivity, the range and volume of its commerce, the geographical mobility of its people, the vibrancy of its towns, and the ubiquity of print, Britain's economic experience in this period *was* markedly different from that enjoyed by much of Continental Europe. . . But even those Britons who scarcely benefited at all from these networks, even the very poor, could be caught up in the conviction that Great Britain was somehow richer and freer than its neighbours, Jerusalem the Golden. (43)

Economic success was certainly a unifying factor, but its equally necessary corollary was the populace's belief in the distinctiveness of their freedom and in its connection to prosperity. Together they gave "Britain" imaginative force. In this way, British patriotism was capable of forging a conviction in the direct link from the productivity of the individual to the success of the nation. As Colley explains, "True liberty consists in doing well. This was the authentic voice of the bourgeois patriot who believes that his individual prosperity and the country's good are forever twinned" (97). The spread of British identity was thus seen as the spread of improvement, of the transmission of higher cultural and economic ideals to its new citizenry.

Nowhere was this idea of Britishness more powerfully enacted than through the transformation of the landscape of an incorporated Scotland through agricultural

improvement. Scotland's inclusion within a British polity was especially significant because it also allowed many percolating socio-scientific ideas to be applied to the new annexation. Gradual integration into Britishness would parallel Scotland's economic and cultural improvement. Colin Kidd has detailed the ways in which the elite of Scottish society identified with many of these elements of Britishness following the Act of Union. He argues that, particularly in the early to middle eighteenth century, Britishness was embraced by some of its Scottish citizenry as a conscious adoption of its modernizing and civilizing discourse. In fact, Kidd contends that "[i]n this period, patriotism did not yet have a predominantly ethnocentric meaning," but that Britishness nonetheless suggested a "primary orientation towards England, based on a political and economic identification with English institutions" (362). In other words, "there was no convincing and comprehensive vision of British nationhood; Britishness, couched in predominantly English terms, was, in effect, tantamount to Anglo-Britishness" (Kidd 363-4). While the adoption of North Britishness was not without ambivalence, Kidd's point is that some Scots' desires for assimilation within a British polity were motivated by the promise of economic success seen as a direct result of England's distinctive cultural arrangements. It was believed that "the histories of English institutions, liberties and economic developments mapped out the pathway to the successful liberal modernity enjoyed by contemporary Britons" (Kidd 363). Agriculture's role in this process of assimilation was undeniable. Kidd contends that Scottish confidence in their cultural and economic systems had faltered, and, by the time of Union, they believed that English/British agriculture was superior in many ways to their traditional, often feudal, methods (367,

369). Thus, the cultivation of a North British identity was also an adoption of English cultural forms from bicameralism to natural philosophy to crop rotation. In spreading Britishness then, England's "internal colonization" of Scotland was connected in (much of) the public imaginary with the same modernizing impulses that characterized conflicts in England's intellectual realm. And, once again, it was in the shape of agricultural improvement that such modernization took place.

Agriculture and its improvement thus resonated deeply with an increasingly powerful notion of Britishness in the eighteenth century. Agricultural practice was politicized as an extension of the individual's participation in and furtherance of the British polity. Its power resided in its ability to coalesce elements of English/British identity such as individual liberty in the shape of private property, Christian edenic mythology, the progressive promise of new science, and, last but not least, economic success. In the case of Scotland's incorporation, the growing importance of agriculture to the inculcation of Britishness in its territorial acquisitions becomes apparent. The imposition of British agriculture was simply an extension of its cultural and economic ideology. Whereas the Irish had already been seen as resistant to such an imposition, much of the Scottish elite would not only embrace this version of Britishness, but also engage and extend it through the work of the Scottish Enlightenment, a development which will be examined in the next section.

One of the prevalent images which emerges from the Anglo-Scottish union is that of "Britain laboring in order to establish itself as a productive nation" (Crawford 96); in

other words, Britishness was largely understood as a kind of national project which entailed the collective participation of its citizenry. In Tull's text, his concern with agriculture as a central aspect of national prosperity witnesses the ideological reach of this concept of Britishness. Likewise, *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* echoes georgic poetry in its vision of an expansionist modern Britain. As Colley and others have argued, there was a strong participatory aspect to British patriotism of the period, and, in Tull's work and other agricultural manuals, it is clear that agricultural improvers in particular saw themselves as contributing to the nation through their work with both the pen and the spade. Tull's understanding of improvement functions in both a physical and metaphorical sense to transform the nation. Both aspects of this national engagement are present in Tull. In his chastisement of the continuing widespread use of Virgilian husbandry, Tull demands an ideological realignment towards modern agriculture, one which will be inflected by British cultural and economic sensibilities. His vision of this new British agriculture also implicitly invokes a Christian discourse of labor and production one that continued to inform agricultural writing throughout the eighteenth century (Drayton 51-2). As Richard Drayton describes it, husbandry echoed Christian edenic iconography, underscoring Britain's foundation as a Protestant nation. Together, the marriage of science and agricultural improvement formed "an eschatology which was as much scientific and patriotic as it was Christian" (Drayton 52). Improvers such as Hartlib had figured cultivation in spiritual terms as a manifestation of humanity's ability to "reclaim his corner of Creation;" religious imagery also joined that of economic in conjuring the image of "Adam the Toiler" who "was charged with perfecting the fallen



world with his skill and labour” (Drayton 50-2). Tull’s text takes up this idea in terms of its image of Britain’s citizens improving and, indeed, perfecting its agriculture. For Tull, agriculture is a national project that involves the evolution of the entire socius. For this reason, Tull sees his new husbandry as a corrective of the highest importance to Britain, worth the notice of even its monarch: “The Hoing Practice would profitably employ many more Hands, than the common Husbandry, and procure more Bread for them: But if. . .it cannot be frequent in South Britain, which seems to be the most proper Climate in the World for it; yet if it shall be useful to any other of his Majesty’s Dominions, I shall think my Labour amply rewarded by that Success” (1733: vii). Tull’s appeal to Britain’s king stresses agriculture’s connection to the state; from labor to profit to agricultural production, each citizen contributes to the project of state formation, directed by the monarch. Tull casts himself, as an improver and a writer, along with the agricultural “Hands” his method will employ, as laborers working towards national prosperity. Tull’s contention is that his method, over and against that of the “common husbandry” (understood as Virgilian), invigorates the health of the polity since it demands a more intensive labor. Furthermore, by alluding to King George II’s other “Dominions,” he connects agriculture to governance and improvement beyond England to the expanse of Britain’s internal and external colonies. In naming South Britain “the most proper Climate in the World” for his methods, Tull also subtly positions Britain in a global context as inhabiting an ideal, even chosen, location. The labor of agriculture is thus seen to exercise both an economic and moral role in shaping the British polity as well as its colonial acquisitions.

In fact, the centrality of labor to Tull's method is symptomatic of its importance as both a moral and economic imperative. At other points in the text, Tull associates Virgilian husbandry not only with a mental laziness, but also with a dangerous idleness. This is particularly true with regard to Tull's obsession with weeding and hoeing. He accuses his contemporaries of "encouraging the Sloth of Farmers to neglect the due Tillage of their Land for killing of Weeds" (1731: viii). The labor of hoeing or tillage is constantly demanded throughout Tull's theory since he saw the practice as increasing the size and health of plants. While Virgilian husbandry might plow the land once, Tullian husbandry sought to plow it many times, according to the density of the soil. This was one reason why Tull's methods were met with skepticism: plowing was a very expensive (in the use of animal and human labor) and time-consuming process. Tull's avocation of intense agricultural labor at nearly every level of his husbandry, from plowing to hoeing, curiously mirrors his idea that improvement itself was a continuous, interminable process. As a solution to the problem of plant nutrition, Tull puts forth the concept of "infinite or indefinite Division" of the soil (1733: 217), which, as its name implies, is the belief that there is a continual need for tillage in order to improve plant growth. He explains, "by Tillage, we can enlarge our Field of Subterranean Pasture without Limitation, tho' the external Surface of it be confin'd within narrow Bounds. . . For as the Matter is divisible *ad Infinitum*,. . . the Earth every time of Tilling, should afford a new internal Superficies, and that Till'd Soil has in it an inexhaustible Fund, which by a sufficient Division, (being capable of an Infinite one) may be produc'd" (1733: 21). While scientifically his claims may be questionable, Tull's obsession with labor as

infinitely productive, infinitely expansive, unavoidably echoes the imagery of nation-building which was prevalent in the literary, scientific, and economic culture of eighteenth-century Britain. As will be explored later in the chapter, Tull's agricultural methods are a literal extension of his natural philosophy, envisioning improvement as an inextricably rational and moral project.

In Tull's text, the workings of the consolidation of a modern British self become apparent. Already we have traced the course of a "rationalized" agriculture which was inseparable from the consolidation of land ownership and the rise of intercontinental trade. It has also been shown how the complex socioeconomic shifts of the English landscape were mirrored by the struggles over the representation of a newly-imagined self in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. This section has pointed to the ways in which agriculture was an essential aspect of Britishness as it arose in the years following the Anglo-Scottish union; the process of cultivation functioned in several mutually-reinforcing ways in the national imagination, mobilizing many aspects of British culture. In addition, this section has begun to suggest the ways in which the role of colonial territories in the emergence of British identity was effaced. The remainder of the chapter will discuss the colonial world as an inextricable part of the creation of a Modern Britain.

For it was not only by a rupture with a seemingly primeval past that European modernity was constructed; as Brown contends, modernity's growing consciousness of its difference from the Ancients was paralleled by its confrontation with a non-European other and its dis-identification with the female figure (10). The formulation of modernity

emerged as part of the construction of a privileged gaze, a space of “heightened” vision which allowed the modern European to take in the scope of history and to scan the horizon of a supposedly-known globality. This is Mary Louise Pratt’s “seeing-man” who looks out at the landscape and possesses all in his purview; in the case of “modern” man, that landscape is both history and territory. Having explored at length the construction of modernity’s historiographical framework within which the Ancients are subsumed, in what follows, a greater connection will be drawn between Tull’s writing and the production of a “native” other through both spatial and chronological differentiation.

In spite of the attempts of modernity to occlude its role, the world outside of England features fairly prominently in Tull’s *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*. Tull’s discussion of the importation of foreign plants and the ability of modern agriculture to acclimatize them is indicative of the unspoken significance of colonial trade and domination. Similarly, Tull frequently commands an imperial gaze which looks back through time and across the various cultures of the globe from the center of the British metropole. Tull underscores this privileged position in many instances whether discussing the difference between English and “Eastern” plows (1733: 133-4); elaborating his theory of agricultural origins; or debating the influence of “hot Climes” and “frigid Zones” on plant constitution (1733: 17, 19). Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussion about challenging Europe as the sovereign subject is instructive here: “Europe’s acquisition of the adjective *modern* for itself is a piece of global history of which an integral part is the story of European imperialism” (21). In the same way, Tull’s co-option of the term “modern” signals not only a break with the past, but also the

awareness of an emergent global reality in which Britain positioned itself as a beacon of progress. This point becomes clear upon a close reading of Tull's text, which effaces agriculture's imperial dependencies by disguising itself as domestic. Such a reading follows Chakrabarty's contention that the European narrative of itself was that "the self-fashioning of the West. . .occurred only within its self-assigned geographical boundaries" (Chakrabarty 22).

### **Stadial Theories and Improvement**

*Horse-Houghing Husbandry* witnesses the contradictory ways in which Britain's agrarian ideology functioned. Paul H. Johnstone contends that there was a persistent "incongruity" between the espousal of what he terms the "agrarian creed" and the economic and ideological alignment of its speakers (153-4). Britain's rural gentry and its literary sympathizers cultivated nostalgic imagery of idyllic provincialism suggestive of small-scale landownership coupled with a humble rusticity. This imagery was a rhetorical and political mask which obscured both the interconnections of domestic agriculture to global trade and the direct oppression of the yeomanry and peasantry it claimed to represent (Johnstone 153-5). Agriculture's continuing association with domesticity testifies to the effectiveness of such rhetorical misdirection. In fact, the discourse of agrarianism that Bayly calls "agrarian patriotism" served as an alibi for territorial control and is thus the thread that inextricably connects Britain's domestic process of enclosure together with colonial expansion. Correspondingly, as is apparent in Jethro Tull's writings, the propagation of such agrarianism required a metaphorical distancing from

scholarly intellectualism associated with cosmopolitan urbanity. The somewhat contradictory persona Jethro Tull offers his readers in the *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* can be read in this manner. On the one hand, Tull declares himself a “*Rustick*” who is “*without the usual Qualifications of an Author*” and offers an apology to the “*Learned Writers from whom [he is] forc’d to differ in Opinion as well as in Learning,*” while, on the other, he forcefully argues with respected members of the Royal Society on matters well beyond those of agricultural methodology. Like his contemporaries, Tull’s persona allows him to propagate an agrarian discourse, not simply an agricultural methodology. Despite his omission from the present historiography of eighteenth-century agricultural writing (as opposed to his place in the historiography of technology), Tull’s writing signals his intention to offer his audience an entire system of husbandry which, in his view, encompassed agriculture’s social and historical roles as well as its practical ones. Tull’s “Of Plows” chapter can then be read as a continuation of his argument that insists on a new, prominent place for agriculture in the modern British world. And, “Of Plows” does give Tull an opportunity to offer a context for agriculture’s growing role in the domestic realm. However, a closer reading of the chapter also suggests that Tull’s purview is much broader than simply Britain itself; he conceives of a kind of universal history, a history of origins. This was a type of history which accompanied the rise of natural philosophy and which was equally informed by British and European colonial exploration.

As Joseph M. Levine describes it, “the controversy [of the Ancients and Moderns] was above all about history[,]. . .about how to recapture and represent past customs,

institutions, and events” (267). In fact, the same instincts that drove natural science, a quest to observe and interpret the world around them, a world which continued to expand, were intrinsic to the development of the Moderns’ vision of history. While its objects of observation were distinct from that of science, history was also seen as a phenomenon which could be understood through the interpretation of evidence. It is important to note that the affinities between natural philosophy and history stem from Francis Bacon’s own belief in the importance of making use of the past.<sup>11</sup> Bacon saw history as an essential intellectual pursuit and one which was wedded to science through both their inductive methodology and their quest for natural observation (Levine, *Humanism* 152). Since Bacon believed in the idea of the “regularity of nature,” it followed that both history and natural philosophy provided truth by the observation of recurrent images or tropes (Levine, *Humanism* 152). Bacon emphasized that natural philosophy was dependent upon history: “For knowledges are as pyramids, whereof history is the basis: so of natural Philosophy, the basis is Natural History” (Bacon 117). As far as the Moderns’ method of historical investigation mirrored that of natural philosophy, it differed from the Ancients’ version of history in terms of its “meaning and method of getting at the past” (Levine, *Battle* 267). For the Ancients, history until the eighteenth century had focused on narrative, eloquence, and the transmission of self-evident truths. Some Moderns, early in the Battle, wanted to update, but not outright reject, the Ancients’ methods of writing history by mediating between the use of details (seen as obscure and irrelevant by the

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, Levine argues that there is a clear genealogy directly from Bacon to eighteenth-century historians of the Modern mode. He explains that members of the Royal Society actively appealed to Bacon in combining an understanding of history and natural philosophy (Levine, *Humanism* 153).

Ancients) and the crafting of a pleasing rhetoric (Levine, *Battle* 281, 294-5, 299, 324). Nonetheless, from 1700 on, a marked break can be observed between traditional methods of history and those which arose alongside natural philosophy.

Levine mainly credits the newly-developed field of philology with begetting modern history (282). Philology became increasingly concerned with “retriev[ing] the past by examining objects as well as books, things as well as words” (Levine, *Battle* 282). For philology, antiquaries became the means by which Britain would speak its history. Even with the self-conscious newness of modern history, it commenced with the favored subject of the Ancients: the Romans. Moderns like William Wotton and Edmund Gibson began to produce intensely-researched histories of an entirely new variety (Levine, *Battle* 330-3, 405-7). The continual discovery of Roman antiquities helped to focus scholars’ attention on the lack of an adequate British history (Levine, *Battle* 291, 327). These discoveries reinforced the cultivation of a modern sensibility which allowed a new perspective from which to imagine (in Benedict Anderson’s sense of the term) the community of Great Britain. According to Levine, it was William Wotton’s work that continued to push the boundaries of modern history, receding ever-farther into an ancient, murky past. The boundaries of British history were not enough to contain his inquiring mind, and Wotton ventured beyond its reaches into the only other avenue of sanctioned evidence: the bible. Sometimes with the aid of Orientalist scholar Simon Ockley, Wotton embraced the study of the Talmud (Levine, *Battle* 405-7). He began to be concerned with the origin of language and tried to make use of Greek and Hebrew sources to ascertain the events at Babel and the distribution of languages thereafter (Levine, *Battle*



406, 408). The trajectory of Wotton's historical investigations can be seen as emblematic of larger intellectual trends of the period. First, Wotton's practices and his pursuit of a retreating-horizon of the past provide a context for the methods of later scholars who strove to answer historical questions for which there was no extant evidence. And, second, the expanding topography of Wotton's histories parallels the geographic quest for knowledge and control being simultaneously undertaken by British imperialism. Eighteenth-century historiography, beginning with its consolidation of the idea of England, and later Britain, and continuing through its pursuit of universal, global knowledge, is reflective not just of the available evidence, but also of the pattern of modern self-fashioning more generally. While eighteenth-century history first undertook domestic investigations, crafting a distinct image of modern Britain, it quickly shifted focus to non-European objects of inquiry. Indeed, the concurrent construction of a British and global history suggests the extent to which British identity was shaped by its relationship to its colonial territories. Thus, while the scientist can be seen to gaze across the earth observing and classifying, following the track of imperialism, this figure is mirrored in that of the historian who looks backward through time, delineating a chronology that "leads up to" modern Britain.

Consequently, while Jethro Tull's inclusion of natural history in an agricultural manual strikes a discordant note to the contemporary observer, it seems unlikely that the "of Plows" chapter would have appeared in the same light to the eighteenth-century reader. Rather, Jethro Tull's concern with tracing the history of agriculture is simply an extension of his systematic inquiry. His focus on a point of origin for tillage complements

his claims to “treat. . . [Agriculture] more properly as a Science” since he follows the methods of his contemporaries as well as the suggestions of Bacon himself to look toward history as the source of evidence (1733: 257). In what follows, the “Of Ploughs” chapter will be examined, focusing on its relationship to other aspects of Tull’s husbandry. The chapter entitled “Of Ploughs” aims to trace the history of the plow’s use across time and geography, discussing its history in Italy as well as Egypt, Turkey, and in the “Eastern” part of the world. Tull’s chapter begins this inquiry by attempting to identify an origin for agriculture itself. Acknowledging that the exact circumstances surrounding the genesis of farming are “uncertain,” Tull begins by declaring: “therefore we are at Liberty to Guess” (1731: 104). Tull’s sketch of a genealogy of agricultural history in “Of Plows” argues that agriculture was discovered by accident (which curiously mirrors Tull’s own description of the invention of his seed drill). The discovery of tillage was occasioned, Tull argues, by the observation that, when pigs foraged for food with their snouts, they inadvertently encouraged the growth of plants (1731: 104-107). Paradoxically, this singular moment is marked simultaneously as both outside of human reason and essential to it. It depends on the capacity for empirical observation and is therefore exemplary of the method as well as of the historical practice. The practice of agriculture had to have been the result of observation, in Tull’s view, because, being “rational Creatures,” men would not “take Pains to Till the land, without any sort of Reason why they did it” (1731: 105). Therefore, tillage could only be “fortuitously discovered” and subsequently improved upon by rational observers. In other words, for Tull, theorizing would not have led to tillage, only observation and the consequent

application of reason would have. In this formulation, and in Tull's genealogy of agriculture derived from it, Tull extols the use of reason as that which allows progress. In his scenario, "[t]his Observation [of Hogs using their snouts] must naturally induce rational Creatures to the Contrivance of some Instrument which might imitate, if not excel Brutes in this Operation. . .in order to increase and better [Earth's]. . .product" (1731: 104-5). This statement encapsulates many the central principles of Tull's writings: that rationality alone sets man apart from "Brutes;" that the central use of reason is for the improvement of nature; and that rational or scientific improvement is concerned with multiplying and enhancing earth's "product." The origin of agriculture, precisely because it is marked by chance, is also the entry of humanity into civilization, or, as Tull understands it, a state characterized by the deliberate and consistent application of reason. Tull's genealogy thus seeks to orient human civilization around agriculture as the prime example of humanity's imperative to apply reason to the ongoing transformation, and cultivation, of the natural world.

The primal scene in Tull's agricultural cosmology therefore takes place at the moment when humans make use of their observations and construct rational principles for the improvement of nature through tillage. "Original Agriculture," as Tull understands it, marked the intervention of human reason into natural phenomena. While the swine are guided by "instinct" in their tillage, their human observers are distinct from these "Brutes" through their possession of reason, which drives them to "imitate, if not excel" hogs (1731: 104-5). Tillage, an operation that, for Tull, involves the continual, ideally infinite, breakdown of soil for the purpose of aiding the passage of plant nutrients,

is the primary index of rationality. Indeed, “tillage” functions as a kind of metaphor for reason in Tull’s writings; like reasoning, cultivating is a process that can never be completed; both are tools (of mind and body, respectively) that break down nature’s elements for the sake of human production.

Since humanity’s ability to progressively subject nature to rational principles through tillage is the marker of civilization itself, deviation from this model constitutes inferiority, if not savagery, for Tull. Tull contrasts the primal scene in which humanity learned from, and improved upon, the tillage of hogs with the subsequent breakdown of rationality in Ancient culture. Tull’s criticism of the Ancients regards their failure to improve upon the “original” methodology: “So that all the ancient *Scriptores Re Rustica* have done, was only to keep that Theory in the same Degree of Perfection in which the first Discoverers received it” (1731: 106). Here, as elsewhere in the text, superstition acts as a crucial impediment to reason. For this reason, Tull focuses on the classical account of tillage’s origin given in the myth of Ceres. Tull declares, “They were very unjust, to give the Reputation of Inventrix [sic] of Tillage to Ceres, who could be no better than a Plagiary. . .But Swine had practised the Art of Turning the Soil, and so had Men, long before the fictitious Deity of Ceres was invented” (1731: 107). Tull’s visceral reaction to the narrative of Ceres stems from his objections to the fact that, in his view, it allowed ancient culture to stray from rationality: “they never attempted to improve that Art, lest they should derogate from the Divinity of Ceres, in supposing her Invention imperfect” (107). Additionally, Tull accuses previous writers of being unwilling to acknowledge the accidental and animal origins of agriculture and claims that the myth of Ceres was

substituted “because the Reasons whereon it was founded, were unbecoming of a Man; Being without Principles, it could not (likely) be improved. . .” (1731: 107). Furthermore, Tull associates myth with an irrationality that he codes as feminine, condemning fable in general and the story of Ceres in particular, as lacking fertile ground for improvement. Not only is myth without reasoned maxims, which Tull sees as the basis of scientific advancement, but it also tends to explicitly preclude invention or ingenuity as a deviation from god-ordained precepts.

In offering this narrative to his audience, Tull is participating in an early form of anthropological thinking that took the form of a “progressive developmentalism” during the eighteenth century (Stocking 9-10). Recent scholarly attention to this school of inquiry has pointed to its central role in the foundation of the disciplines of political economy, anthropology, and sociology during the nineteenth century (Stocking, Poovey, Palmeri, Wolloch, Höpfl). As in *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*, the general contours of this line of thought involve speculation about the origins of human society; lacking documentary evidence for earlier periods, this method sought to overcome this difficulty by appealing to both inductive method and natural law. In practice, this meant that the natural philosopher examined the world seeking to understand its functionality by observing how particular exemplars fit into the highly-organized system of repeating patterns and processes that was understood as nature. These patterns were then generalized and applied to humankind’s history. Early human history, it was believed, could be arrived at through the use of what the eighteenth-century historian William Robertson described as ““certain or highly probable evidence”” (Robertson 66; qtd. in

Höpfl 22). Generally, this method employed a “a stadial view of human history” with the number of phases and the emphasis placed on each period differing amongst its practitioners (Palmeri 1-2); as its framer Dugald Stewart described it in 1790, conjectural history explored ““by what gradual steps the transition has been made from the first simple efforts of uncultivated nature, to a state of things so wonderfully artificial and complicated”” (Stewart 34; qtd. in Höpfl 19-20). The term “conjectural history” was a label applied by Stewart to describe earlier texts that evinced the method which he characterized as following the means by which human progress emerged from a “state of nature” which was “simple” and, more importantly, “uncultivated.” While Stewart’s appellation will be used to distinguish this type of historical investigation, Mary Poovey cautions that in using such terminology it is difficult to avoid “superimpose[ing] the map of present disciplines onto the past” (266). This is particularly challenging in this case because of the present unscientific connotations of the word “conjecture” and because of its absence from current disciplines, which also suggests its supersession by more empirical (i.e. modern) knowledge.<sup>12</sup> In fact, conjectural history is a logical extension of the Moderns’ philosophy of history which was discussed earlier in this section. And, while it would be incorrect to suggest that it did not meet with some contemporary resistance, many well-known philosophers engaged conjectural methods in their writings.

Conjectural history is largely associated with philosophers of the Scottish

Enlightenment such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Adam

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<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that Stewart’s label of conjectural history has been supplemented in present scholarly literature with such terms as speculative history. Conjectural or speculative histories are also commonly referred to as stadial theories of which conjectural history is considered a subset. These terms will be used, fairly interchangeably, herein with descriptive rather than evaluative intent.

Smith. However, there were other schools of conjectural history including the French, with philosophers like A.-R. Jacques Turgot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and M.-J. Antoin-Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, and the German school, the most well-known scholar of which is Johann Gottfried Herder (Palmeri 3). The aforementioned scholars have been viewed as engaging most directly with conjectural methods, but there were many other intellectuals of the eighteenth century who made use of them in their work (Palmeri 1-3). As a retrospective label, speculative theories comprise a broad category of thinking that was not distinguished by its practitioners, but that can be seen to share affinities amongst themselves. While Palmeri outlines several distinctions between the Scottish, French, and German schools (3-9), with the exception of the Scottish school, some of these will be glossed over here for the sake of clarity. For the most part, in addition to their progressivist focus, stadial theories were particularly concerned with establishing the *natural* process through which human history developed. Such emphasis was placed on this aspect of conjectural history that a corresponding focus on the idea of accident or coincidence was also present. This is clearly seen in the central moment of Tull's theory, which is conditioned by the chance observation of animal husbandry by early humans. By accommodating or even focusing on the role of accident, conjectural historians believed that they avoided imposing a teleology onto the occurrence of events (Palmeri 5). Speculative history was therefore characterized by a "naturalistic anti-rationalism" which embraced the idea of "the unplanned and noncontractual nature of social development" (Palmeri 6). In eschewing a contractual basis for human history, conjectural historians explicitly differentiated themselves from the social theories of

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Palmeri 5). In part, this was because stadial theorists emphasized process over change; as a break with the past, social contract rested too heavily on the workings of a singular moment. Furthermore, Palmeri argues, in contrast to Poovey, that speculative historians can be distinguished by their refusal of providentialism through their insistence on the existence of the random, undirected course of history (Palmeri 8; Poovey 264, 287). Both agree, however, that the intent of conjectural historians was to avoid attributing intentionality to the unfolding of natural events. In Tull's theory, it is clear that he goes to great lengths to avoid both providentialism and intentionality, which partially accounts for Stephen Switzer's fierce charge of atheism against Tull. Yet, in contrast to Tull, most conjectural historians presented multiple stages of human history, largely for the purpose of explaining the emergence of commercial society, especially in the case of Smith and Ferguson's theories. The absence of multiple stages in Tull's theory should be viewed in terms of his contention that agriculture represents the height of human aspiration. In his view, the progress of humankind can be explained by the initial moment of improvement, a moment which Tull believes can be endlessly replicated. Tull pays so much attention to this singular image since it is also a full account of human progress; in other words, improvement follows precisely the same mechanics regardless of the extent of prior advancement. Despite their differences, speculative theories stressed agriculture as intrinsic feature of their human histories (Poovey 230). All "viewed acquiring mastery over natural resources as essential to human progress" (Wolloch 247). As proposed earlier in the discussion of modern British agriculture, husbandry's importance resided in



its resonance with the religious, political, economic and a natural imagery of the day. This was particularly the case for conjectural historians of the Scottish Enlightenment whose theories were clearly influenced by Scotland's integration into the British socius. For both Smith and Ferguson, Scotland's (agri)cultural changes informed their ideas about the process of human history which seemed to endorse the view that the agricultural stage was necessarily superseded by the commercial. Nonetheless, agriculture was symbolic for most conjectural historians of both a specific set of historical circumstances under which early humans labored and, concurrently, of the distinctive human ability to transform (in a spiritual and physical sense) the raw materials of their environment. As in Tull, agriculture was viewed as an encapsulation of humanity's penchant for progress.

While their features differed in some ways, conjectural history was inherently concerned with the concept of "mapping" both in space and time. This mode required a visualization of time and space which moved from one frame to another with the present place and time as the primary reference point. It is apparent that this vision functioned linearly through time, "backward" as it were from the present moment in order to locate earlier forms of human society. Less obvious is the concurrent mapping of time onto the spatial plane of the Eurocentric world map. Stocking explains these modes of conjectural history as "horizontal" (spatial mapping) and "vertical" (teleological models), models which he sees as characteristic of different historical points in anthropological thinking (14). The spatialized vision of humanity Stocking attributes to earlier thinkers, most particularly Montesquieu, while the teleological models mark a significant paradigm-shift

typical of later eighteenth-century thought like that of Adam Smith and Baron Turgot (Stocking 14-16). Stocking's implicit argument here is that these lines of investigation were not, at least initially, fundamentally concerned with establishing European cultural superiority; Stocking sees spatial localizations as horizontal, and thus democratic; in contrast, the progressivist models are seen as essentially hierarchical and therefore an important precursor to the later work of nineteenth-century comparative anthropologists. Stocking classifies earlier seventeenth- and eighteenth-century spatial models as a mapping of "difference" within human unity rather than as a process of othering. Broadly speaking, Stocking has strong evidence for a shift in the late eighteenth century toward more rigid hierarchical models within anthropological thought. It is important to preserve the distinctions that did exist between earlier theories of human history and later anthropology. For the reduction of these discontinuities only serves to reinforce later anthropological claims that it unearthed innate human qualities which earlier, inferior, modes of investigation failed to observe. Conjectural history could then be incorporated into a developmental narrative of science's continual refinement rather than functioning as an unassimilable, potentially divergent, moment. In other words, acknowledging the particularities of conjectural history can aid the displacement of later racial science from its claims to represent a transparent, incontrovertible reality. For this reason, it should be underscored that speculative theories, especially those of the early eighteenth century, were most often monogenist and thus saw humanity as following a single path, guided by the same *natural* qualities. This universalism, at least in theory, mandates that "the development of civilization [is] natural to mankind" (Wokler 41) even if,

condescendingly, stadial theory also saw cultures with different modes of subsistence as simply “behind” modern (capitalist) Europe (Höpfl 24-5).

Regardless of their unified theory of humanity, the design of all models in conjectural history required the simultaneous and unacknowledged construction of a self, the (European) observer, whose perspective, although hidden, is central. At the heart of speculative history lies the self-construction of the European as a privileged observer. Varied and contrapuntal as they were, stadial theories of history tended to see their present moment in space and time as the culmination of humanity’s efforts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Transplantation and Acclimatization**

If we consider our own Country in its Natural Prospect, without any of the Benefits and Advantages of Commerce, what a barren uncomfortable Spot of Earth falls to our Share! Natural Historians tell us, that no Fruit grows Originally among us. . . ; That our Climate of itself, and without the Assistancess of Art, can make no further Advances towards a Plumb than to a Sloe, and carries an Apple to no greater Perfection than Crab: That our Melons, our Peaches, our Figs, our Apricots, and Cherries, are Strangers among us, imported in different Ages, and naturalized in our *English* Gardens; and that they would all degenerate and fall into the Trash of our own Country, if they were wholly neglected by the Planter, and left to the Mercy of our Sun and Soil. Nor had Traffick more enriched our Vegetable World, than it has improved the whole Face of Nature among us.— Addison, *The Spectator* no. 69, 1711 (emphasis original; 47)

The Englishman who famously surveys the Royal Exchange in *The Spectator* of 1711 celebrates the cornucopia of worldwide goods which greet him in “this grand Scene

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that not all models of conjectural history were “progressivist” since the more traditional Christian views of human change were degenerationist in outlook, stemming from the belief in an original and perfect divine creation from which humanity deviated over time (Höpfl 23-4; Stocking 11-12). And, of course, one of the best examples of non-Christian degenerist thinking was Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. For this reason, I have stopped short of claiming that all conjectural histories were concerned with defining European progress. However, it must be admitted that these histories convey a unique and heightened perspective to the European observer who surveys a multiplicity of cultures over the course of history.

of Business,” the result of “the Traffick among Mankind;” this “Citizen of the World,” as he styles himself in the manner of Diogenes, is usually discussed as investing supreme importance in the role of the merchant in his ability to provide such abundance. Indeed, the Spectator credits merchants as being the most “useful” members of the Commonwealth who “knit Mankind together.” Yet, in the passage above, the speaker also alludes to the transformative properties of “the Planter” and the power of “*English Gardens*” to “improve. . .the whole Face of Nature.” It is true that the Planter is only able to transform “the natural Prospect” of English landscape through the “Benefits and Advantages of Commerce” advanced by the merchant, but the speaker suggests the interests of the Planter and the Merchant are in fact mutual. For, as the merchant “supplies us with everything that is Convenient and Ornamental,” funneling the choicest fruits from “the remotest Corners of the Earth,” it is the Planter who has created this space from which to survey nature’s plenty, a space of home, of “the green fields of Britain” that is “free from those Extremities of Weather” which characterize foreign places.

The vision that the Spectator offers is emphatically English as well as British, and, as in Tull’s text, its vision is made possible by the sensation of modernity. Thus the Spectator imagines a statue of “one of our old Kings” looking down upon the scene and “surprised to hear all the Languages of *Europe* spoken in this little Spot of his former Dominion.” Much like the gardens of the Renaissance and the collections of the virtuosi, modern Britain, in particular the Exchange, is the locus of the world’s diversity, a condensation of its natural and manufactured riches. It is clear that the Exchange

constitutes an imaginative space as well as an actual one. The Spectator, an ancillary for Britain, is the purveyor and possessor of all that is contained in the Emporium. However, unlike the cabinet of curiosities, the Exchange inspires the Spectator to imagine not only the collection of items, but also their naturalization and assimilation. This process is particularly apparent with regard to his description of Britain's ability to incorporate "the Vegetable World" and by proxy the entirety of Nature.

James H. Bunn has suggested that the Spectator's views are best understood as eclecticism or the "extrapolation of the best that has been thought and said in the world," an aestheticizing vision which cut off goods from their original systems of meaning, rendering them exotic curiosities (304, 312-3). However, the Spectator's description of Britain's assimilation of botanical imports is not marked by the same eclecticism as that of the array of foreign goods. Transplantation is therefore figured differently from the eclecticism of mercantile goods or collectibles. Transplantation's differing semiology does not, however, imply that it fails to incorporate some of the same aspects of imperialism's logic. On the contrary, transplantation, at least as Tull understood it, also involves processes of assimilation and naturalization, but the plant's status as a living thing as opposed to a *mere* object shifts its relationship to the host culture. This is implied by the discriminations that the Spectator himself makes between imported products and assimilated plants. This section will discuss two parallel ways in which transplanted botany operates in *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*: as both objects of economic value and natural entities of foreign origin. After sketching the economic and cultural context in

which Tull understood transplantation, especially in terms of its profitability, the implications of Tull's discussion of assimilation will be further unpacked.

First, it is important to establish that the global traverse of plant-life into Britain was not an entirely new phenomenon. By the eighteenth century, the movement of botanical life was becoming increasingly commonplace. As the *Spectator's* examples of the transplanted apples, peaches, and other fruits suggests, the domestication of foreign foodstuffs had a long history in Britain, tracing back to pre-Renaissance Arab trade and beyond (Cook 198 n.9). Yet, the features and figurations of botanical transfer had shifted through time. It is clear, for instance, that botany's role in Renaissance culture was largely understood within a religious framework. Plants and plant collecting were seen in somewhat mystical terms as a kind of (re)production of the garden of Eden; the garden's function was to "contain the world" in microcosm (Drayton 9). Similarly, botanical discoveries were viewed as potential antidotes since each living thing related to another as part of the unity of creation, forming a cosmic chain of being (Drayton 11). With the onset of colonial exploration in the sixteenth century, many of these traditional notions were exploded. As the century progressed, there was an enormous onslaught of new plant species which posed an unavoidable challenge to the Renaissance idea of containment. The array of plant-life which suddenly came into view forced Europeans to accommodate this knowledge in a new paradigm. Richard Drayton and Londa Schienbinger argue that until the middle of the seventeenth century, ancient learning continued to serve as lens through which Europeans grappled with the immense variety of botanical species (Drayton 15, Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire* 87). It was the advent

of new science that significantly altered the perspective of biological knowledge, orienting Europeans towards the collection of plants with the purpose of their observation and classification. Extensive discoveries also prompted the development of increasingly complex classificatory models throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Carl Linnaeus' famous *Systema Naturae* of 1735 was thus less of a novelty than a "culmination of three centuries of European reconnaissance" (Drayton 18). The eighteenth century was an important turning point in the history of botany because it was a time when older ideas about the garden's edenic role were beginning to be surpassed by the perspectives of natural philosophy.

As the Spectator's exclamations about the Exchange reveal, botany had taken on an increasingly important symbolic role in establishing national supremacy especially as it related to empire. Colonial botany was undertaking plant transplantation at an astonishing pace. Plant migration had already been an important feature of the Spanish empire from the sixteenth-century with the introduction of such staple crops as potatoes, corn, and tomatoes. With the ever-increasing expansion of the British empire from the late-seventeenth century, British naturalists became active participants in these biological migrations. Londa Schiebinger has documented the extent of botany's importance to the imperial project as "an essential part of the projection of military might into the resource-rich East and West Indies" (*Plants and Empire* 8). Indeed, these "biopirates" were responsible for the transfer of a vast quantity of plants; in the late seventeenth century, Sir Hans Sloane's travels to Jamaica led to the introduction of 800 new plants to the European continent (Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire* 27). Despite the significant changes

to biogeography wrought by imperial exploitation in the name of natural observation, botanical knowledge was largely confined to classifying, collecting, and observing until after the Restoration (Drayton 19-20). The desire for economically viable discoveries shaped naturalists' methodologies, encouraging functional assessments over complex anatomizing. "Colonial bioprospecting," as Schiebinger describes it, proved fruitful to both metropolitan botany and economics. From its origin, colonial botany was invested in natural inquiry along with monetary benefit (*Plants and Empire* 3-8). The vogue for collecting amongst the metropolitan elite similarly reflected the methods applied to colonial plant-life. Exotic plants became part of the cabinet of curiosities which aestheticized them while occluding their origins. It was only with the new-found emphasis on experimentation that naturalists of the late seventeenth century began to be concerned with the internal mechanics of plants (Drayton 20). For this reason, transplantation even into the eighteenth century could be characterized as:

a haphazard, empirical exercise, unburdened with elaborate theorizing. Animals and plants were transferred for overtly economic reasons: it was understood that if they survived and flourished, this merely demonstrated that the new environment was fortuitously similar enough to the product's original one for the resilient types to take. God may have assigned each animal and plant a special region, but the qualities of another place might turn out to be similar enough not to conflict with his plan. . . its [constitution]. . .in its new setting was taken to be a matter of simple economic productivity, not adaptation. . .When a transfer did not take, it was simply abandoned. (Anderson 137-8)

Transplantation was certainly an indispensable aspect of European imperialism's attempts to capture agricultural wealth. However, until the time that the Royal Society flourished, the development of plant cultivation theories and methods was not the main



focus of botanists. It was only when the economic, cultural and scientific impetuses demanded such an interest that the role of plant transfer began to shift.

While the British penchant for imported foodstuffs and products is by now a well-documented aspect of British imperialism, the establishment of importation as a domestic norm was a relatively recent phenomenon when Tull was writing. Early eighteenth-century writers debated the impact of foreign trade: some claimed that it led to greater economic success while others decried it as immoral and unpatriotic (Martyn 1). Nonetheless, colonial acquisitions from plants to spices and tea continually influenced the domestic sphere, having far-reaching economic and cultural effects. The influence of foreign importation on the body politic, whether viewed as positive or negative, was characterized in economic, cultural, and even biological terms. Mercantilist theory was suspicious of the “exotic” since foreign importations were seen as a destabilizing, degenerative influence on the nation’s health. The influx of imports into England, it was believed, drained the life-blood of the country by siphoning bullion to the colonial periphery, and luxury goods in themselves were a “corrosive social evil” inducing idleness and vice (Berg and Eger 2). The exotic became synonymous with excess and luxury. This conflict over the meaning of foreign importation was evinced in debates about the role of botanical discovery in British trade. In the early eighteenth century, it was not inconceivable that exotic plants could be transplanted and grown in the British Isles, thus re-centering production in the metropole. However, despite the pervasive success of some staple crops imported to Europe largely by the Spanish, it was extremely difficult to reproduce other exotic acquisitions upon their arrival.

The transplantation of the pineapple perhaps serves as the best example of such challenges. A painting, attributed to Henrick Danckerts and painted around 1675, commemorating the presentation of the pineapple to Charles II by the Royal Gardener, John Rose, suggests the importance accorded to the successful propagation in an English hothouse. The painting highlights not only the Royal Gardener's ability to reproduce the pineapple's indigenous conditions, but also, as a symbol of the Americas, the gift of the pineapple signifies the King's possession of its land and its economic power. Unfortunately, it is generally believed that the painting does not accurately reflect the status of the British-grown pineapple: the first documented culture of the pineapple did not occur until 1693 (Musgrave 204). Even tasting the pineapple at this point in Britain was so rare as to have been remarked upon by both John Locke and John Evelyn (Silver 48-53). In fact, while the pineapple was grown successfully in England in 1693, Toby Musgrave emphasizes the excessive exertion required to carry it out. With the aid of stove-houses, Henry Telende, head gardener for Sir Matthew Decker, was only able to cultivate pineapples using "a five foot deep, brick-lined pit filled with a foot-thick layer of fresh horse dung, covered with a thicker layer of tanners bark," and that pit was then "covered with a glass frame; and if it was a very cold winter, to a hotbed within a stove house with glass walls and roof" (204). It was only in 1779 with the publication of William Speechly's *Treatise on the culture of the pine apple and the management of the hot-house* that a definitive procedure was established for "the cultivation of the century's most desired fruits and which provided benchmarks for subsequent cultural improvements" (Musgrave 205). The pineapple's transplantation from Barbados to

Britain demonstrates the variegated history of botanical transfer; while specific instances of exotic transfer were notable, they generally occurred under the extremely specialized conditions of the hothouse with methods that were still in their infancy in the early eighteenth century. When Jethro Tull wrote *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* in 1731, Kew Gardens had yet to be established; its importance to the study and economic exploitation of colonial botany would not come about until at least the time of George III's reign, if not later at the turn of the century (Drayton 89-91). The eighteenth century thus gradually witnessed the consolidation of botanical knowledge, a knowledge which was both the product of and inspiration for colonial exploration.

The history of transplantation in eighteenth-century England is largely one told through the perspective of naturalists, some of whom were explorers and collectors in the periphery, others of whom began to attempt the domestic cultivation of such acquisitions. As the history of the pineapple demonstrates, these projects were undertaken with the financial backing of companies, wealthy individuals, and, later in the century, the British state. British elite interest in botanical knowledge helps to underscore its link to the economic benefits of colonial exploitation. However, what is less clear is how these acquisitions impacted Britain's broader culture (other than as curiosities). The enthusiasm for modern scientific knowledge and its popular implementation in the form of improvement culture have already been established along with their colonial influences. *Horse-Houghing Husbandry's* inclusion in this discussion allows a glimpse of colonial botany's influence beyond the gentleman's gardens and into the fields of British farmers. For this reason, Tull's text does not produce a coherent set of practices or theories with

regard to transplantation. It does, however, offer an understanding of transplantation's role in the profitability of Tull's horse-hoeing methodology. Like the historiography of the pineapple's transplantation, Tull's text elucidates the significance of Britain's burgeoning global trade to domestic agricultural production as well as to British self-identity.

Jethro Tull's views are sympathetic to those that the Spectator expresses as he contemplates Britain's natural state and the role of the Planter within it. Like the Spectator, Tull viewed transplantation as the seamless integration of foreign plant-life into British agriculture. Similarly, Tull follows the Spectator in constructing the role of the Planter as one which involves transformation. Both the Spectator and Tull resist the mercantilist anxieties about the exotic. Rather, the assimilation of exotic species into the domestic landscape only seems to reinforce the authority of British civilization over even the extremes of nature. Agriculture involves the making over of nature, ("improv[ing] the whole Face of Nature" the Spectator calls it) by overcoming the predilections of climate ("the barren uncomfortable Spot of Earth" referenced by the Spectator) and raising nature from its unimproved state by successfully naturalizing imported crops. Above all else, Tull's methods of husbandry including those of transplantation involve the elevation of labor (not necessarily conceived of as manual labor, for "Hands" are somewhat disposable in his text); for labor, specifically tillage, is the application of reason to the natural environment. This is the reason that tillage, pulveration, hoeing and the like are a central focus of Tull's work. Earlier, Tull's concerns with establishing

modern (and British) practices were linked to his interest in labor as improvement. Here, modernity will also be associated with reason's ability to control nature.

Tillage, as the breakdown of the soil, is what aids plant nutrition in Tull's formulation. His *New Husbandry* thus insists on an extremely intensive cultivation. However, intensive cultivation serves as a symbolic extension of human reason since it is only through rationality that humanity can exercise its ability to mold nature to its needs. Tillage is then simply a physical manifestation of reason in agriculture. Tull explains to his audience, "It has been observ'd, that when Part of a Ground has been better Till'd than the rest, and the whole Ground constantly manag'd alike, afterwards for Six, or Seven Years successively, this Part that was but once better Till'd, always produc'd a better Crop than the rest, and the difference remained visible very visible every Harvest" (1733: 23). Tillage alone provides the means for a better yielding agriculture and Tull appeals to observation as proof of its effects. Tull seeks further sanction of this point by invoking the authority of founding-member of the Royal Society, John Evelyn. Tull quotes Evelyn:

Take of the most barren Earth you can find, Pulverize it well, and expose it abroad for a Year incessantly agitated, it will become so fertile as to receive an Exotic Plant, from the furthest Indies; and to cause all Vegetables to prosper in the most exalted degree, and to bear their Fruit as kindly with us, as in their natural Climates. (1733: 23)

Tull's purpose in alluding to John Evelyn is not only to establish that pulverization or tillage has been proven as a rational principle (validated via observable phenomenon and the additional authority of a gentleman-scientist), but it also seeks to prove that tillage can overcome the extremities of climate. Tillage's effectiveness is measured by the fact

that even an “exotick” plant “from the furthest Indies” can thrive in a vastly different climate than nature intended. Throughout *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*, Tull seeks to demonstrate that climate is only a small stumbling block to the successful plantation in Britain of nearly any crop. Nature is subject in Tull’s theories to the dominion of reason. Therefore, the concept of “rationalized” agriculture takes on a dual meaning in Tull’s text.

Furthermore, Tull’s discussion of transplantation, although concerned with the furtherance of domestic agriculture, is inextricably linked to his awareness of a global geography made possible by colonial exploration and subjugation. Tull establishes his agricultural knowledge through the invocation of a vast array of landscapes and plants. His examples bolster the claims of his experiments and methods by suggesting a worldly knowledge acquired through his personal and textual experiences with travel and, similarly, his knowledge of other naturalists who also referenced colonial exploration. For example, in the selection below, as Tull asserts the importance of sunlight to plant growth, he also offers his readers a cosmopolitan view of the range of earth’s climates and creatures. Tull does not deny that indigenous climate plays a role in plant cultivation; he acknowledges that

[n]o Plant can live without Heat, tho’ different degrees of it be necessary to different sorts of Plants. Some are almost able to keep Company with the *Salamander*, and do live in the hottest exposures of the hot Countries. Others have their abodes with Fishes under Water in cold Climates: for the Sun has his Influence, tho’ weaker upon the Earth cover’d with Water, . . . which appears by the Effect the vicissitudes of Winter and Summer have upon Subteraqueous [sic] Vegetables. (1743: 13)

The salamander and subaqueous plants seem to be cited because of their exotic cachet, a means of imbuing Tull's claims with the authority of a naturalist whose knowledge was largely produced through colonial travel. Tull notes the diversity of earth's plant and animal life while also discussing the role of climate ("Heat") in determining the types of life that thrive naturally in particular geographies.

A concern with the climatic influences was typical of more traditional discourses which linked plant and animal life specifically to geography. Climatic theories shaped the understanding of Classical and Renaissance thought and were largely inherited from the writings of Hippocrates (Rusnock 136). Despite its inclusion of climatic rhetoric, Tull's text actually represents a deviation from earlier views of the deterministic role of climate in the growth of animal and plant life. Where Hippocratic discourse established causal links between the environment and the constitution of its inhabitants, Tull rejects these ideas in favor of human control over the environment. Cultivation ultimately triumphs over climate. Tull declares, "I believe Plants are more alter'd as to their Growth, by being Cultivated or not, than by Changes of Climates differing in very many Degrees of Latitude" (1743: 98). His insistence on this point is repeated throughout the text. For example, Tull takes on one his contemporaries for his suggestion that particular soils<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A corollary of the climatic argument, the use of geographically-specific soil was put forth as factor in the success or failure of particular crops. It should be noted that part of Tull's debate with his contemporaries concerns the nature and mode of plant nutrition which was as yet unknown. While later science would agree that soil nutrients could determine the success of a particular species of plant, this fact is not relevant to my discussion. Additionally, in this moment, Tull and his sources are engaged with concerns about environment, which soil was seen as a part of, rather than with nutrition itself. My point here is to highlight that Tull's consistent answer for any difficulties in propagation lies in tillage.

might be the reason why cherries and apples enjoyed greater production in certain parts of England:

For 'tis wondrous how so Great a Man as Dr. *Woodward* should imagine, that difference of Soil should be the Reason, why Apples in *Herefordshire*, and Cherries in *Kent*, succeed better than in other Places, when in truth they are seen to prosper as well almost all over *England*, where planted, cultivated and preserv'd. This I suppose the Doctor took from *Virgil's Quid quæque ferat Regio, & quid quæque recuset*. ["what each country will produce, and what not" (Virgil 16)] . . . Sure the Doctor did not consider, how different the Soil of these mention'd Counties is, to that of those Climates from whence Apples and Cherries were Originally brought: it must have been greater than between that of any Two Counties in *England*. (1743: 97-8)

Here, Tull's awareness that cherries and apples were introduced into England from more tropical climates conditions his response to Woodward. Since the successful naturalization of cherries and apples was only possible through the use of progressive cultivation methods which compensated for their transplantation from vastly different climates, it is apparent to Tull that minor distinctions in climate from one English locale to another cannot be responsible for their lack of success. Greater production is due solely to the type and amount of agricultural labor that is invested in a crop.

Furthermore, transplantation itself is possible only through the practice of a rational agriculture which conquers nature by substituting "man-made" conditions for the natural environment. Soil and temperature may vary between far-flung locales, Tull declares, but it is the methods by which plant-life is cultivated which determine its ability to be transplanted.

By necessity, Tull must point to distant locations in order to illustrate his point that climate is not the determinant of a crop's success. In the "Of Blight" chapter, Tull discusses his means of keeping wheat free from blight by methods which compensate for



the difference between wheat's autochthonous climate and that of England. "A great quantity also of the Sun's Rays is necessary to keep Wheat Strong and in Health;" Tull explains, "and in *Egypt* and other hot Countries, it is not so apt to fall, as it is when sown in Northern Climates. . . Wheat being doubtless originally a Native of a hot Country, requires by its Constitution a considerable degree of Heat to bring it to Perfection" (1743: 70). Wheat blight results in Tull's formulation from an overabundance of moisture that would not be a problem in a warm climate like that of Egypt. Additionally, wheat blight is caused by sowing it too late in the season, a problem that emerges in Tull's view from the reliance on ancient texts whose advice to plant in winter is ill-suited to the English climate. The purpose of Tull's observations is to suggest to the reader that the farmer should compensate for wheat's natural environment by substituting other "man-made" conditions like planting wheat farther apart, an essential ingredient of Tullian agriculture, and growing it during a different time of year than that of warmer climates. In offering his audience these solutions to wheat blight, Tull insists on knowledge brought about by observation, not only strictly first-hand, but also that culled from the writings of travelers and naturalists exploring abroad. These writings, based on observations of peoples and plants outside of Western Europe (in which Italy was not always included), contributed to the production of a sense of modernity. Indeed, Tull's confident references to the climates of Egypt and Sicily are deployed as much to demonstrate a kind of worldly scientific knowledge as to claim identification with the Moderns over the Ancients. In citing his own knowledge of the Mediterranean climate in the context of Virgil's and Columella's texts, Tull seeks to refute the universality of classical knowledge, dethroning

it from its reign over English thought. These two purposes are, however, driven by the same impulse: to mobilize the new knowledge brought about by modern European imperialism over and against the stale (and for Tull superstitious) traditions of the ancient world. Thus, *Horse-Houghing Husbandry* is not simply a rejection of the Ancients, it is also an embrace of a newly-consolidated British identity enabled by its territorial acquisitions. The ancient paradigm is viewed as being completely superseded by that of modern Britain. Classical knowledge has become as irrelevant to the conditions of a global world mapped by British colonialism.

For Tull, transplantation and improvement are synonymous; he not only sees transplantation as an integral component to agricultural improvement in general, but he also claims to be able to overcome most if not all climatic disparities. This point is underscored in his interpretation of apples and cherries as non-indigenous species in English production and consumption. It seems clear that part of the reason Tull chooses to highlight apples and cherries is their seamless integration into English production; their assimilation is so complete that Tull's reference to their non-native origins is intended to remind the audience that something which was once considered "foreign" can, through cultivation, become inextricable from the English landscape, and English self-construction. His vehement support of transplantation as a philosophy is also demonstrated in the notes of the second edition for this same passage. Here, Tull insists that the line of the *Georgics* cited above is so egregiously incorrect and misleading that it cannot be written off, against Stephen Switzer's objections, as Virgil's poetic license. This line and those surrounding it read: "But before we plow an unknown plain, we must

carefully obtain a knowledge of the winds, the various dispositions of the weather, the peculiar culture and nature of the place. And what each country will produce, and what not” (Virgil 16). In fact, the passage does imply (“*recuset*” Virgil 16, line 53) that the earth can “reject” or “refuse” certain crops. So, not surprisingly, Tull interprets this passage as precluding transplantation, an argument which he dismisses as ridiculous. “This Verse seems to forbid Improvement by *Exoticks*,” Tull scoffs, “and if it had always been observed, we should have neither Apples even in *Herefordshire*, nor Cherries in *Kent*” (1733: 220). Tull’s reading thus emphasizes his understanding of the transplantation of “exoticks” as a necessity for further improvement. Furthermore, the force of Tull’s defense of transplantation lies in its transformative possibilities. Through cultivation, introduced species will be completely integrated. Tull believes that such plants will become unrecognizable as foreign entities: they will become native.

Tull’s optimism about the inherent mutability of nature stems from Enlightenment philosophies which accord humankind a central role in nature. As discussed in relation to Tull’s debate with the Ancients, (European) humanity’s elevation to a position of knowledge and control over the natural world was self-consciously crafted through an active break with the past. Modernity was thus understood as humanity’s newfound engagement with natural phenomenon, a phenomenon which could be harnessed through human reason and manipulated for his purposes. Tull’s beliefs about the ability of human rationality to overcome nature’s barriers and to supplement nature’s influence through the production of improved agriculture represent an almost complete rejection of nature’s power. Rationalized agriculture represents, for Tull, the triumph of the human condition.

In his theories of transplantation, Tull implicitly rejects theories of environmental determinism which had dominated views of natural life from the classical period, even experiencing a resurgence of interest in the early modern period. While Tull avoids taking his perspective to an illogical extreme, acknowledging that there were some barriers to nature's pliancy, he largely rejects any kind of determinism except that of human rationality. In accordance with the Spectator, Tull sees the Planter as transcendent, remaking nature to his own ends. Even with the growing influence of natural philosophy and attempts of many practitioners of new science to reconcile Christian views of the universe with emergent scientific notions, the centrality Tull's text accords to mankind represents a bold claim. The idea of humanity's sovereignty over nature was nonetheless a radical challenge to a God-centered universe.

In summary, this examination has revealed transplantation's important role in the furtherance of the economic domination of Britain over its colonies. The impact of transplantation went beyond the development of highly specialized methods of plant propagation sponsored by elite society; interest in exotic botany filtered outward into popular culture. Botanical discovery and transfer therefore also became symbols of colonial domination in their representations in art, metropolitan collections, natural philosophy and in agricultural manuals. Since agriculture was coded by some of its eighteenth-century observers as the product of a provincial backwater, a view that persists into the present, the participation of agricultural writing in the furtherance of colonial plant-transfer has been overlooked. Yet, Jethro Tull's theories and methodology

witness the influence of colonial botany; the practical and ideological impact of colonial domination on Britain's agricultural development can no longer be disregarded.

### **Eighteenth-Century Improvement and the Idea of Mutability**

It is not coincidental that there is a great degree of overlap when reading Tull's theories of transplantation in tandem with his theories of natural history. Together they exhibit not only Tull's preoccupations, but also his theory's imbrication in Enlightenment philosophy more generally. Mutability is the clear hallmark of both of his theories of human and plant-life. For Tull, and for the Enlightenment's human-centric outlook, human history as well as nature are subject to reason, rendering humanity and botany inherently malleable to human intentions. Indeed, the fluidity Tull accords to the pair is an indication of the lack of absolute distinction between botanical, animal, and human life in many writings of the period. In part, this vision of life on earth was inherited from Renaissance models which viewed nature as a complete and interconnected whole, designed by a supreme being. Natural philosophy often took on traditional models such as the chain of being, but inflected them in extremely different ways. In the case of earlier eighteenth-century natural philosophy and of Tull's theories, their understandings of nature as a complex whole emphasized humanity's role in a radically new manner from its earlier conceptions.

As a result, Vanita Seth has proposed an understanding of the Enlightenment as a period poised between earlier Renaissance views of humanity as subject to a divine author and later eighteenth-century perspectives of humanity as subject to the discipline of biology. She argues that, contrary to what one might expect, the Enlightenment's

privileging of nature did not lead to “a deterministic privileging of the natural world. Rather, nature, including the human body, was recognized as malleable and thus receptive to the ingenuity of human intervention. . . [Enlightenment] man embraced nature as a resource that bore witness to the unlimited potential of human reason to fashion the world around him” (205). Against Renaissance norms, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed “man as the source of agency and bearer of knowledge” (Seth 205-6). In direct accordance with Tull’s views, Seth argues that scholarship of this period believed that

the human will could transform not only individuated subjects but also the social and material world. Centuries of experimentation with plant and animal breeding and cross-breeding demonstrated the extent to which ‘it was a plastic world, ready to be shaped and moulded.’ Indeed, as one gardener put it in 1734, man now possessed the power to ‘govern the vegetable world to a much greater improvement, satisfaction and pleasure than ever was known in the former ages of the world.’ (205)

The belief in human reason was so pervasive that it was thought to possess transformative powers. Seth’s example of botanical cross-breeding points to those beliefs which Tull encapsulates in *Horse-Houghing Husbandry*: agriculture is simply the exercise of molding nature to human needs. Tull goes beyond this, however, to argue that it is not only the botanical world which has become part of the human project, it is also humanity itself which awaits shaping. Tull himself would have concurred that “[h]uman knowledge promised infinite possibilities for human improvement” (Seth 203).

What this analysis of Enlightenment natural philosophy underscores is that, contrary to later scientific theories, natural models also functioned as explanatory models for humanity since, until at least the middle of the eighteenth century, there was no

unbridgeable divide between plant, animal, and human. Tull suggests as much in his natural history when he credits hogs with initiating tillage; for Tull, the idea of human borrowings from the animal world are not problematic, particularly when his theory is invested in seeking natural origins. At the same time, the intimacy of the animal and the human is also the reason why Stephen Switzer objects so strenuously to Tull's characterization of animal pedagogy: "the certainty of man's distinctiveness had lost its religious anchor" (Seth 109). As Seth describes in relation to Rousseau's later *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755), humanity had been cut loose from the chain of being, "transforming the concept of man into a category as fluid as it was contingent" (109). Rousseau was not alone in questioning the relationship of humans to animals; Linnaeus' taxonomies also incited controversy for their inclusion of humans in the category of "quadruped" that also contained "apes, sloths, and lizards" (Seth 105). The concept of mutability was thus entrenched at the structural level of natural history in the early eighteenth century which allowed knowledge that was produced in relation to one point along the spectrum of nature to be applied to another. The dynamic relationship between elements of nature explains the unproblematic migration of metaphors and theories from the plant to the human. In *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Science*, Londa Schiebinger has explored the exchange and transmutation of ideas from botany to human gender and sexuality, for example. Schiebinger argues that botanists, particularly Linnaeus, were guilty of "reading the laws of nature through the lens of social relations" (13). This contention, however, risks the implication that the exchange of ideas between botany and biology was an empirical problem rather than, as Derrida describes, an

irreducible epistemological divide. Instead, it is important to realize that the biological bodies of plants and humans cannot simply be empirically “uncovered;” since, as Seth’s work demonstrates, their semiology is continually (re)constructed in the imagination. This is particularly relevant to a discussion of plants and humans in Jethro Tull’s writings since it is apparent that some of his optimism about mutability, most obviously in terms of his understanding of plant biology, stems from his misconceptions about biology; his belief that biology is nearly always subject to human intentionality faced certain logical difficulties. However, Tull’s empirical errors in themselves are beside the point. For the mutability of the body was not the product of the Enlightenment’s scientific shortcomings; it proceeded from a drastically altered modern worldview which thrust “mankind” onto center stage.

Since eighteenth-century natural philosophy saw humanity as deeply imbricated within the natural world rather than as distinct from it, a study of the period’s agricultural and botanical knowledge also necessarily yields the writers’ perspectives on humanity’s functioning within the same system. The correlation of the two became more apparent in the eighteenth century as the study of plant and human biology was increasingly intertwined with many naturalists studying both. For example, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon was both the head of the Jardin du Roi for nearly fifty years as well as the author of *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et Particulière* (1749-88) which in thirty six volumes outlined the history of animal and mineral life. In it, Buffon bound human and plant biology together by suggesting that both were distributed according to climate and geography, creating a theory of biogeography. In the case of Tull’s natural history,



humanity's distinction from animals, as in the cultivating hogs, is not deeply demarcated; similarly, Tull's subscribes to a monogenist view of humankind in which humans are not starkly differentiated from one another.

Even while Tull recognized the fluidity of humanity and the extent of its dominion over nature, there are cautionary notes in Tull's text, impediments to Tull's optimism about human improvement. Tull offers his theory of agriculture's natural origins in the chapter "Of Plows," previously discussed, but he also considers the necessity of agriculture as he elaborates his theory of plant propagation. Observing that plants do not necessarily require tillage for their growth, Tull distinguishes this process as "natural cultivation." "Artificial cultivation," on the other hand, refers to human intervention into the natural process, an intervention that Tull claims has the potential to increase crop yield by ten-fold (1733: 16-7). Using a similar rhetorical style to that which accompanies his agricultural theory, one which positions him as naturalistic observer, Tull suggests that tillage or artificial cultivation is not intrinsic to human life: "The natural Pasture alone will suffice, to furnish a Country with Vegetables, for the Maintenance of a few Inhabitants" (1733: 16). However, there are dangers in relying on nature for sustenance because, without human intervention, countries near the "frigid Zones" in particular would be subject to climatic determinants. Nature is less productive in colder climates, Tull theorizes. As a result, "'tis much to be fear'd, that those of all populous Countries, especially towards the Confines of the frigid Zones, . . . would be oblig'd to turn Anthropophagi, as in many uncultivated Regions they do, very probably for that Reason" (1733: 16-7). Tull goes on to qualify this statement slightly by adding

that “[t]he Artificial Pasture of Plants. . .does, on all Parts of the Globe where used, maintain many more People than the Natural Pasture; and in the colder Climates, I believe, it will not be extravagant to say, Ten times as many: or, that in case Agriculture were a little Improved (as I hope to shew is not difficult to be done) it might maintain Twice as many more yet, or the same Number better” (1733: 17). Tull struggles, in this passage, to characterize subsistence as a contingent existence, but he is unable to fully assert his contention. Perhaps in response to this uncertainty, Tull’s objective rhetorical style slips slightly (“much to be fear’d. . .obliged. . .very probably,” “I believe, it will not be extravagant to say,” “a little improved. . .as I hope to shew. . .,” “it might,”) as he attenuates his initial claim that either extreme climate or larger populations would necessitate anthropophagy. Reluctant to endorse subsistence as a natural state for humanity, Tull is nonetheless unable to directly correlate subsistence with scarcity since it is only “much to be fear’d” that those in populated and frigid environments *might* endure a food shortage which *might* in turn lead to cannibalism. Similar contradictions arise in the notes for this same passage of the second edition as Tull argues that, at least as a defense against Stephen Switzer, societies remain in a state of nature while they draw sustenance from gathering alone. Switzer had charged that “Tillage. . .is of Divine Institution, and nearly coeval with the World” rather than Tull’s “accidental Cause” (1733: 238). Tull’s response endeavors to maintain both natural and divine explanations for agriculture. He asserts that God created a perfect nature: “when God made Man he furnished him with every Thing necessary for his Subsistance; but Tillage, such as we mean, was not necessary for that Purpose before Mankind became numerous; as in some

Countries People have subsisted without it several Thousand Years since the creation of the World” (1733: 239). Here Tull confidently asserts the sustainability of subsistence culture in contrast to his discussion in the main body of the text. Tull does not present the scarcity of food as resulting from certain unpredictable natural occurrences; he has told his audience that in the frigid zones “the Trees *often* fail of producing Fruit” (emphasis added; 1733: 16-17). It follows from this that subsistence is not simply a moment in human history for some societies but a sustained period of “several Thousand Years.” Consequently, Tull’s views on pre-tillage states are unstable: nonagricultural societies are theoretically possible, he first asserts, but in practice, Tull qualifies, they would be constantly threatened by deprivation except for less-populated societies situated in ideal climates.

The reason for such close attendance to Tull’s ideas about subsistence is that it points to an aporia in the text, one which threatens his claims for a strictly naturalistic view of human development. The tensions in Tull’s discussion are symptomatic of the fact that, in the case of both nonagricultural societies and the early humanity of Tull’s stadial theory, Tull cannot produce a natural explanation for humanity’s incentive to reason and to improve. Therefore, subsistence cultures, since Tull defines them as unimproved, cannot be adequately accommodated by his model. Within the parameters of his own text, Tull has rejected climatic determinism as something which can interfere with humanity’s progress; human rationality shapes the natural world rather than the inverse. In addition, Tull maintains a unitary theory of humanity even against the threat of anthropophagy. Despite the tendency of the time to characterize cannibalism as

unnatural or abominable, Tull avoids proposing such a distinction and instead attempts to identify a natural explanation (climate or population) for the practice. But, again, this same attempt to hold humanity together also contradicts his stadial theory's argument for innate reason/tillage since tillage would presumably ward off the threat of anthropophagy. In short, something must give in Tull's model. What seems clear is that Tull cannot maintain tillage as a necessary human condition because the ability of cultures to sustain themselves without agriculture constitutes a *natural* example that defies Tull's logic.

Tull seeks to ground his theories in nature in much the same way as other conjectural historians, particularly those of the Scottish Enlightenment. However, Tull's attempt to pin down a natural explanation for tillage escapes the text. The only potential solutions to these contradictions simultaneously open up the possibility of establishing a deep divide within humanity. Since natural examples cannot be disputed, the continuing existence of subsistence cultures must be acknowledged, thereby invalidating Tull's claim that improvement has a natural basis. On the other hand, Tull refuses to discard reason as an innate human quality, but this contention demands that subsistence cultures be seen as drastically different from other societies in a way which threatens Tull's monogenism. Unwilling to dispense with innate human reason, Tull fails to explain nonagricultural societies. In the last moment, then, there is no naturalistic explanation within Tull's model that can account for his central claim that improvement is part of the human condition.

The aporia which opens in Tull's text upon this reading, while unique to his specific to his views of cultural and natural arrangements, is nonetheless indicative of the problems which conjectural history encountered as it went to great lengths to provide naturalistic explanations for the chronology of human history. In fact, Christian Marouby suggests that many of the same internal tensions can be found in Adam Smith's stadial theories. As is well-known, the *Wealth of Nations* and other texts present Smith's stadial theories which centered on human modes of subsistence and were driven by need in the form of food scarcity. Like Tull and his counterparts, Smith strove to describe human history as a natural mechanism. Smith used travel narratives and other empirical sources of global knowledge to propose the unsustainability of humanity's initial state as hunter-gatherers (Marouby 87-88). However, Marouby asserts that Smith not only overlooked natural exemplars which contradicted this contention, but also that Smith actually alters the population figures for hunter-gatherer societies, particularly in the Americas, from those reported in commonly-known travel narratives (88-9). Marouby asserts that this is a "systematic" ignorance which occludes the success of non-European cultures in the interest of establishing natural history (86, 95). Marouby's point is not simply to underscore the lack of empirical basis for Smith's four-stage theory, but to read Smith's dissemblance as a marker of both Smith's and the period's investment in a naturalistic presentation. Like Tull then, Smith's stadial theory lacks a justification for its foundational drive. The drive for Tull's model is rationality while Smith sees need or lack as the primary mover. In both cases, Tull and Smith must supplement their natural history with a moral imperative for which there was no observable basis. Without the inclusion

of such moral imperatives, human improvement, represented by the chance initiation of agriculture for Tull and the compulsion toward agriculture in Smith, could be seen as a choice rather than a natural necessity. These contradictions are embedded in the construction of all conjectural histories because of their claim to represent humanity in its essential natural state while simultaneously positing a moral drive as originating in instinct rather than from human society. This imposition of morality or subjectivity onto nature might seem obvious, particularly with regard to Tull's somewhat less rigorous description. However, Poovey argues that, in the context of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, it was believed that there was a clear distinction between "human nature" and the "human mind." For "'human nature' could be represented as a product of at least metaphorical observation because one could claim that a combination of introspection and extrapolation could confirm one's belief about this essence, whereas 'the human mind' as an aggregate was a philosophical construct no one could claim to see" (224). However, as her description implies, the slippage between a universal, a generalized description of observed particulars, and an abstraction, the aggregation of a series of similar universals, could easily pass unnoticed (Poovey 224). Furthermore, Poovey observes that "abstractions like 'the human mind' were *produced by the method of conjectural history itself* in order to make something that exceeded any individual incarnation available to intellectual contemplation" (emphasis original, 224). Simply put, conjectural history hinged on the idea that the human mind could be explained by natural mechanisms. At issue here is the distinction or lack thereof between humanity and nature. Speculative history continued to view humanity as a part of nature, but its anxieties about

the precise location of the dividing line between humankind's *natural* drives as opposed to its *culturally-constructed* motivations marked humanity's growing movement away from nature.

Before moving on to discuss the larger implications of conjectural history's naturalization of human nature, they should be considered in terms of Tull's theory more specifically. As the physical manifestation of improvement in Tull's theory, labor, especially tillage, is the moral imperative which Tull reads as innate instinct. In the same moment that he attempts to grasp at universality, an exception presents itself which demands that Tull explain the lack of improvement or agricultural labor in nonagricultural societies. Tull attempts to assimilate this difference by denying human differentiation as well as by attempting to ground difference (the extreme scarcity represented in anthropophagy) in nature. This is one reason for Tull's resistance to labeling anthropophagy in moral terms: he is determined that his theory be unburdened by what he has labeled "suspicion" [(ancient) religion, myth] in the text. Without a natural explanation, Tull prevaricates and ultimately avoids following his own theories through to their conclusions. This avoidance marks an unconscious recognition that human difference is without a natural explanation. It simply exists without "reason."

In a larger sense, difference is ultimately what natural history or anthropology attempts to explain; eighteenth-century philosophy witnessed several approaches to the "problem" of difference. Polygenism and climatic determinism were two such responses. In seeking a unified theory of human development, conjectural historians paradoxically *produced* difference since, by grouping an increasing variety of global cultures and

attempting to describe them, the exceptions, ruptures, and distinctions between them became unavoidably apparent. This process can be seen in Tull's theory when he posits a universal human nature which is in turn undermined as he gazes outward at non-European cultures; the moment when Tull's model falters in the face of difference is also the moment when the aporia is made visible in his text. Difference for conjectural history also attends failure since the teleology of conjectural history insists that humanity *does* something (labor, improve, desire, accumulate, etc.); difference thus produces the idea of failure or lack that postcolonial theory has seen as being projected onto colonial cultures. In Tull, failure is a lack of improvement; this failure threatens the Enlightenment idea of mutability in that humanity's failure to improve itself is a failure to shape its history as well as the natural environment.

Failure becomes a measure of difference here because conjectural theories are actually concerned with the direction of human behavior. Poovey explains that "while claiming simply to describe what moral experimentalists claimed to observe, these laws also functioned implicitly to police behavior by identifying moral and social imperatives and by locating these imperatives in 'nature' itself" (175-6). The conjectural historian, in seeking a natural origin for human behaviors, unwittingly imposes them onto the natural landscape. In doing so, the model of history which he produces reflects back to its observer the sense that nature *compels* particular behaviors. In this sense, the chosen behavior becomes an innate rather than a contingent occurrence. However, since conjectural historians failed to account for their role, their own moment became the only possible end-point, the telos. Their system was rigged not so much by their method



(which was deeply flawed), but also by the fact that the model cannot allow for other potentialities. All other cultural and historical moments were only that: stops on the way to something else. Palmeri and Wokler overlook this point when they emphasize that speculative histories depended upon accident as well as a lack of intentionality in order to avoid anthropomorphizing history. Palmeri sees conjectural history as eschewing the providentialism of earlier philosophies while Wokler argues that conjectural history is without teleology. Yet these explanations, particularly Wokler's, fail to account for the role of the (European) observer in the construction of such models. For only the observer can name the supposedly-natural qualities which he chooses to privilege.

Lest the contradictions that arise from the analysis of conjectural history appear to be merely empirical, this section will conclude by examining the shifts away from the methods and assumptions of early eighteenth-century natural philosophy. The dangers that this method posed to the purity of scientific method were recognized in the late eighteenth century. In response to the abstractions that conjectural history was believed to produce, late eighteenth-century science witnessed the return to "pure" empiricism, which Seth and Wokler detail, through the rise of physical anthropology. Seth claims that the mutability which was embraced during the Enlightenment became a source of suspicion in the nineteenth century. Scientists sought a quantifiable measure of humanity which would not be subject to the historical vagaries which had interested stadial theorists. She explains that the body came to be understood in vastly different ways from its earlier changeability: "In its very fixity, [the body] divulged information that was more reliable than the confused and contested records offered by man's political and

social history” (218). Hence, the logic of biological determinism demanded that the body, as a “reliable . . . index of identity” be read as a sign of difference (Seth 225).

With the increase in information about the diversity of plant and animal species wrought from the intensification of European imperialism, the previously unquestioned dominance of humanity within the natural context seemed to be threatened by the lack of a clear boundary between the animal from the human. The same mutability which had earlier signified confidence in man’s dominance over nature also began to be seen as a potential indicator of man’s precariously unstable location within that system. Furthermore, as biological knowledge accumulated, it became apparent that humanity could not in fact limitlessly mold nature to its demands. Wokler argues that in response to these tensions, theories of physical anthropology arose, rejecting conjectural history altogether particularly because of its tendency to blur the distinction between humanity and animality (44). Armed with apparently unquestionable physical differentiations, modern physical anthropology firmly guarded the frontier between humankind and the remainder of nature by way of empiricism. Humanity became safely ensconced atop the natural kingdom: “With the orangutan now cast out of the human race on account of physical or material divergences only, the attention of anthropologists came to be refocused on the apparent boundaries within the human race, rather than upon the animal limits of humanity” (Wokler 45). The physical anthropology of the late eighteenth century dispensed with the conception of the natural world as a spectrum or chain of being which knit creation or nature together into an interdependent whole. As Wokler asserts, physical anthropology simultaneously erected a barrier between humanity and its

animal counterparts while also becoming invested in the concept of polygenism or multiple human races. In doing so, physical anthropology renounced “the idea of a passage from *le physique* to *le moral*—indeed, came to reject the very distinction between those terms—in favor of one dimension, *le physique*, alone” (Wokler 46). This materialist view of humanity also claimed “deep structural explanations of human nature and behavior: the idea that physicality determines morality” (Wokler 46-7). There are several implications that can be further drawn out from Wokler’s trenchant line of thought. Most importantly in terms of its relationship to Tull, Wokler’s argument makes apparent that the demarcation of human identity in new science as well as in anthropology is inextricable from each philosophy’s impression of the gap between humanity and the world of animals and plants. In other words, human identity is a relational construction. This is true regardless of whether humanity is integrated into nature in the manner of earlier eighteenth-century philosophy or if, on the other hand, humankind is seen as absolutely distinct from other forms of life, as in physical anthropology. For in both cases the degree to which humanity is differentiated from nature is reflective of the extent of human cohesion. Later physical anthropology would impose a strict boundary between animals and people which was equally policed within humanity by way of constructing racial boundaries. It may seem paradoxical for physical anthropology to have been concerned about the internal differentiation of humanity when the construction of an apparently firm boundary was intended to completely marginalize animals. The contradiction can be explained by the obsessive attention to physicality as the singular measure of difference; since it was increasingly believed that significant

distinctions not minor variations existed between human cultures, it followed for the physical anthropologist that these distinctions too must be reducible to physical characteristics.

Tracing this genealogy of difference through its permutations in European history has been seen as a project central to uncovering the intricate workings of European imperialism. In particular, identifying the historiography of racial physiognomy undermines its pretensions as an essentialist logic without origins or ideological context. Vanita Seth's work seeks to further dislodge racial categories from their seeming ahistoricity by locating the chronology of other European modalities of difference, thus exposing physiological differentiation as a contingent practice. In doing so, she and other such scholars challenge racial science's presentation of itself as a cohesive and transparent system. European conceptions of difference are therefore marked by their discontinuities and asymmetries produced as much through rupture as through augmentation. While stadial theories can be read as discontinuous from the form of difference which occurred after it, it is nonetheless the case that physical anthropology borrowed elements of conjectural history in constructing physicality as the sole marker of difference. As Seth and Wokler suggest, modern anthropology was invested in occluding its relationship to natural history because of its projection of itself as pure empiricism in contrast to the supposedly inferior, unscientific methodology of earlier philosophers of human history.

Yet while the nineteenth-century biological body remained seemingly immutable in contrast to the flux of history, the signs which physiology was meant to embody were

simply the same historical variables “written” on the body. In other words, in the construction of a biologically-determined body, nineteenth-century anthropology did not reject the qualities of “human nature” which conjectural historians had privileged. It merely sought to quantify them in biological terms. As Wokler so incisively remarks, the physical became the singular marker of difference. What Wokler implies but never states is that, in addition to “replacing” morality “as the determinant of human nature” (47), biological determinism took up the same moral categories, naturalizing them in the form of physical differentiations. Thus, the meanings that the immutable body seemed to yield were projections of progress and other values onto the body. Behavioral theories, like Tull’s, became solidified into empirically-measurable qualities. Poovey approaches this from a slightly different perspective when she points out that:

one of the effects of transforming philosophical universals (human nature) into abstractions that could be conceptualized as historical agents (the market system) was a model that enabled one to name and quantify the effects of the abstractions themselves. That is, once one declared the market system to be an incarnation of human nature, and once one devised epistemological instruments for making the market system visible, then. . .[they] could be quantified. (247)

Poovey’s argument relates to what she terms “the science of wealth” and the process by which it naturalized economics as a quantifiable measure. With the occlusion of earlier, unscientific methodologies like conjectural history, modern British science continued to sanction progress and its attendant qualities in the form of biological (rather than behavioral) difference. Early eighteenth-century British improvement culture witnesses this transition as well because, since its ideology developed prior to the disciplinization of scholarship into distinct fields, it can be seen as emerging from early agricultural science, economics, and anthropology, which were viewed as aspects of natural philosophy. The

moment when universal human history could no longer account for the human differences privileged by the observer was also the moment when science gave way to a transparent and quantifiable measure of such difference in the form of biology.

## Framing Famine: Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and the Anglo-Irish Critique of Hunger in Ireland

plain murder, it being to starve a great many for a profit to a few

~ Archbishop William King to Edward Southwell, 30 Jan.  
1729<sup>1</sup>

Until recently, the eighteenth century had been perceived as a time of stability and containment in Ireland, bookended by the historical ruptures of the seventeenth-century Rebellion and Restoration and, on the other hand, the Rebellion of 1798 at the close of the century. Increasingly, however, this characterization has been challenged with some scholars arguing that “the social and political stability of the period was a ‘façade,’ masking the reality of a deeply divided society” (McBride 3). Speaking about the process of internal colonization in Ireland, Ian McBride contends that although improvement schemes were sponsored by the Protestant elite as part of their attempts to spread civility and modernization, such projects spoke more about Anglo-Irish identity-formation than about their ability to effect economic change (6-7). In fact, despite the concerted efforts of some improving landlords, the deployment of improvement rhetoric over and against the stark realities of the economic landscape served as a prime example of the many contradictions, paradoxes, and exceptions that characterized Irish colonialism. While there is evidence that Irish agriculture began a slow recovery from the devastation of the prior century and that, by the mid-eighteenth century, exports began to yield greater profits, there is little to suggest that these profits had any sustained impact on the widespread poverty of the tenantry. Recurrent famine, in fact, testifies to the limits of agricultural improvement in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> King, Qtd in Ehrenpreis, *Works* III: 572.

Following the work of a few more recent studies, this chapter seeks to re-frame eighteenth-century Irish historiography by placing greater emphasis on dearth as a central aspect of Irish life during this period. The writings of numerous pamphleteers and public figures throughout the century illustrate the extent to which hunger consistently informed public debate about Ireland's political status, its economic system, and the sufferings of the peasant and even middling classes. In contrast to the perception that famine was understood mainly within a traditional, especially religious, framework during this period, these writings are explicit in addressing scarcity in economic and cultural terms even when this scarcity was clearly impacted by natural events. Furthermore, famine seemed to thrust questions of community and responsibility to the fore. The structural inequality of the Irish economy struck many as the root of the problem, which inevitably led to considerations of both agricultural production and its producers. Despite their potentially conflicted loyalties, Anglo-Irish writers such as Jonathan Swift and Philip Skelton addressed famine as a problem of poverty and therefore one inevitably concerned with the Catholic majority. None suggested a radical reimagining of Catholic rights, but their indignation at the hunger and suffering of the poor nonetheless indicated their willingness to view religious identity through the lens of economic conditions. In other words, all such writers in Ireland implicitly challenged the economic, and sometimes colonial, system which contributed to the poverty of Ireland's underclass, Protestant and Catholic alike.

Studies of the ideology of improvement have typically pointed to Britain's internal developments as evidence of its impact, but Ireland played a no-less-substantial



role in the spread of this forceful economic and cultural rhetoric. Indeed, Nicholas Canny has argued that subduing Irish land and people through agricultural production was an important part of Britain's ideological purpose in establishing plantations during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Plantation writings demonstrate that civilizing Ireland was meant to be accomplished through the establishment of a yeomanry to literally root English power within the landscape. Plantation had thus been intended "to constitute an English world in an English environment, which would serve as an example in civil living to the Irish population, who would be dominated by the settlers both politically and economically to the point where the Irish would have no option but to imitate them" (Canny, *Making Ireland* 132). In a way, then, eighteenth-century hunger in Ireland demonstrated the failure of plantation as well as the failure of economic and cultural assimilation by the English settlers-cum-Anglo-Irish. This is not to argue, however, that Ireland's colonization did not accrue benefits to Britain. Assimilation of the kind the early planters envisioned did not take place, but this did not prevent the increase in Irish exports.<sup>2</sup> The paradox was that Irish production did not contribute to the stability of the Irish economy in the early eighteenth century. This instability was starkly demonstrated by the recurrent famines of the period, eliciting a complex reaction from the Anglo-Irish elite.

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, Canny describes this same situation as it occurred in the prior century: the settlers failed in achieving the English government's goals of improvement which included English-style housing, gardening and tillage, but they succeeded nonetheless in making a profit (*Making Ireland* 130-4, 148). As in the aftermath of 1641, the English government held the settlers responsible for Irish Catholic uprisings attributing it to their "negligence and cupidity" (Canny, "Marginal Kingdom" 59).

## **Famine Historiography**

The study of famines and their etiologies has become increasingly prevalent, not least because of their inordinate impact on inhabitants of the modern global South. Questions of climate change and environmental determinism have also come to the fore despite the scholarship of those like Amartya Sen who have forcefully argued for famine's inextricable links to deeply-embedded economic and social structures. The phenomenology of famine has thus been inflected through multiple prisms of ecology and global economics as well as postcolonialism. Indeed, such discussions have coalesced in emerging views on Ireland's Great Famine. Veering from representations of the Famine as a tragic accident of environmental bad luck to deliberate ignorance, if not active malice, on the part of Great Britain, these investigations have usefully exposed the folly of extrapolating environmental from socioeconomic factors and vice versa. Moreover, studies of the Great Famine continue to resonate in significant ways beyond the nineteenth-century context and into the present moment. At the same time, there has been significantly less attention paid to Ireland's earlier (some argue even more significant) famines of the eighteenth century. The purpose of this chapter is not to so much to rectify their historical occlusion as to consider famine as a discursive event. Without undermining its deadly physical consequences, this chapter frames the ways in which famine is read and understood by its contemporary witnesses; it also exposes the ways in which famines are made to fit retrospectively within particular narratives of "progress" or "underdevelopment" and the like. In order to approach this consideration, the chapter will be engaging with writers of early eighteenth-century Ireland, particularly those who

addressed the famines of the 1720s and the 1740s. Several of the writers whose works will be considered have been seen as prominent Anglo-Irish “patriots” whose position as part of the dominant minority within Ireland was complicated by the kingdom’s subordination by Britain. In addition to offering a localized perspective on the impact of famine in Ireland, the texts share a common interest in assessing extreme scarcity as the outcome of economic and political policies. As a result, they frequently condemned, or at least scrutinized, the role of Ireland’s dependent relationship to Great Britain.

Both Amartya Sen and David Arnold link considerations of famine with discursivity at the same time that they, in different ways, seek to detach famine from a strictly environmental analysis. As in Sen’s description of the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, the impact of natural events on food production is compounded or even created by its local perception and the resultant “panic” and “nervous food market” (166). The relationship in times of famine between economics, especially “manipulative speculation,” and its discursivity is inextricable; in fact, market speculation is derived from the perception of increased demand, making it both a product and a cause of the continuing formation of famine conditions. While Sen’s concern is to establish the fact that famines are not necessarily caused by food shortages or by population growth, his analysis also suggests that the transmission of information, either about shortages occasioned by weather events or about the fluctuations in food prices in the marketplace, structures the threat of a famine as much as the factors themselves. Indeed, the circulation of information about an approaching famine mirrors the circulation of the food commodities about which they speak. Sen also addresses the discursivity of famines in

terms of the rhetoric of their historiography, the way that this rhetoric shapes first-world perceptions of famine and, in turn, shapes the ways that the first-world chooses to intervene in their unfolding (160). Sen characterizes contemporary discourse about famine as burdened by a “tacit pessimism” as well as a “perceived lack of freedom to remedy hunger” (160), both of which ensure lethargy or, to borrow a fatuous phrase from elsewhere, “compassion fatigue” on the part of first world governments and peoples. The rhetorical construction of famine therefore has effects that condition reactions at the local level as well as in terms of more comprehensive interventions. David Arnold more directly considers the role of famine as a representation when he labels famine as both “event and structure” (6). His explanation, not unlike Sen’s, is meant as a shift away from the immediacy of famine and its proximate causes toward a broader understanding of the systemic, ongoing problems which have contributed to its advent. Thus, Arnold emphatically puts forth that famine is “rarely a bolt from the blue, a wholly random and unpredictable occurrence” (7).

Interestingly, for both Sen and Arnold, it is important to distinguish the “event” of famine from what it is not. Sen illustrates this by underlining the “unexpected suddenness” of famine, distinguishing its “sheer intensity” from the “more ‘regular’ phenomenon of general poverty, in the same way that famines differ from endemic hunger” (16). Arnold in turn emphasizes famine as a historical event, a rupture that marks time, in his description of famine as a “disaster” or as a “collective catastrophe of such magnitude as to cause social and economic dislocation” (6). For Arnold, there is a clear tension between famine as event and structure; he measures famine as a cataclysm and

yet also seeks to understand its underlying conditions. Both Arnold and Sen underscore the importance of distinguishing famine from other situations that could be termed “dearth” or “undernourishment,” which allows them to investigate the conditions leading to a clearly defined event. Their concern points to the importance of the term “famine” as an emotive, politicized tool. “Famine” often functions rhetorically as a representation of extreme human suffering that, the argument goes, requires careful wielding and thus vigilant policing.

Alexander De Waal has drawn attention to the impact that contemporary understandings of famine can have on Western public perception, conditioning its economic and political intervention or lack thereof. De Waal’s exploration is useful in pointing to a Western emphasis on starvation or demographic crisis as the singular measure of its event (9-11). As a result of their focus on starvation, De Waal argues that English and American scholars cast famine as an extreme event at the expense of recognizing potentially widespread dearth. In other words, defining famine as a cataclysmic event requires downplaying repeated but consistent amounts of death. Rhetorically, then, contemporary invocations of famine serve to express dire circumstances and to compel immediate response; conversely, moderate but sustained dearth falls outside of its purview. De Waal cites Malthus’ writings as inaugurating this bifurcated view of human suffering. With Malthus’ *Essay on the Principle of Population*, famine became mathematically defined, an event which had to be measured by its numerical impact on population rather than on cultural experience (De Waal 16-18). Despite his contentious position in famine studies, Malthus’ views nonetheless continue

to permeate conventional and even academic notions of famine, De Waal argues. He maintains that famine was understood differently in Europe before the advent of the nineteenth century in a way that is not unlike its ongoing usage in many parts of Africa. De Waal describes hunger as “in part an idiom. In part it is an experience: famines remain landmarks of suffering in the consciousness of peoples. The meaning of the word ‘famine’ in any society is an outcome of the idiom of famine and hunger used, and the history of actual famines experienced by that society” (13).

In the Irish context, this Malthusian inflection of famine, which De Waal labels “apocalyptic Famine, gigantic and inevitable,” has unavoidably and somewhat justifiably been associated with the Great Famine (17). Because of the irrevocable impact that the Famine had on nineteenth-century Ireland and its continuing reverberations into the present, it has attained a status that overshadows prior hunger crises in Irish history. By turning to the writings of eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish pamphleteers, it can become clearer that the Great Famine, while singular perhaps in scope, was not unprecedented. In fact, such pamphleteers register ongoing concern about the recurrence of famine, pointing to faulty agricultural production, lack of governmental oversight, or other such social factors as the source of scarcity in Ireland. Their frequent, impassioned pleas, often directed toward more important members of Irish society, landlords as well as churchmen and other figures, belie the idea that famine prior to 1800 appeared to be an unavoidable, even supernatural, event. Moreover, Irish writers of this period seem rarely if ever to invoke the idea that “rich and poor had felt impotent against nature and Providence” or

that they responded to scarcity as people who “feared God and did not expect very much from distant governments” (Dickson 74).

Ireland experienced repeated famines or subsistence crises throughout the course of the eighteenth century. An important early source of information about these crises was William Wilde’s census of 1851<sup>3</sup> which, among other things, included a remarkably extensive list of famines in Irish history alongside their primary recorders. For the eighteenth century alone, Wilde lists 1728-29, 1730, 1740-41, 1756, 1766, 1782, and 1798-1801 as times of famine. More recently, James Kelly has identified four famines, which he distinguishes from the subsistence crises (“Harvests and Hardship” 65). McBride, in turn, lists 1710, 1728-9, 1740-41, 1744-5, and 1756-7 as famine years with 1762-3, 1770-71, 1782-4 and 1800-01 as years of scarcity (106). Regardless of the careful parsing of “famine” in this context, it is clear that hunger was a consistent factor for the poor throughout the century. One witness of these earlier subsistence crises was William King, Archbishop of Dublin, who wrote in a letter to Jonathan Swift in 1711-12 that, in protest of the increasing amount of land being used for pasturage over tillage, the “poor people are turned to stock-slaying or starve” (*Correspondence* hereafter *Corr. I*, 289). Furthermore, King sees the houghers<sup>4</sup> as attempting to make their act legible to those in power, since to “show that this is no quarrel between Protestants and Papists,

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<sup>3</sup> See “William Wilde’s Table of Irish Famines 900-1850” reprinted and edited by E. Margaret Crawford in *Famine: The Irish Experience: 900-1900* for more information. William Wilde (1815-1876) was the father of Oscar Wilde whose detailed contribution to both the 1841 and 1851 censuses serve as important records for the Great Famine and, apparently, beyond (Wilde/Crawford 1-2).

<sup>4</sup> “Houghing” refers to the maiming of cattle seen as a method of agrarian protest which began in Connacht perhaps around 1710, but which had spread well-beyond the province by 1712. For a more in-depth discussion of the practice and the extent to which it can be seen as the expression of an organized political group please see S.J. Connolly, “The Houghers: Agrarian Protest in Early Eighteenth-Century Connacht.”

they destroy the Papists' flocks and herds generally first" (289). Unfortunately, if this was their design, King was unable to resist suggesting the idea that "there is a deeper design hid under this" because of the strong undercurrent of fear of a Jacobite rebellion. Both the houghers' efforts to make visible their hunger and King's parallel understanding of houghing as a potential political protest demonstrate the extent to which hunger in Ireland was inextricable from the colonial context and was largely understood as such by its contemporaries.

Dating and defining famine during this period in Ireland is contentious not only because of the relative paucity of data, but also because it runs up against the problematic distinction between famine and chronic undernourishment. Modern studies of famine tend to emphasize demographic mortality as its sole measure. Yet, as Paroma Roy has described it, famine is a "figure, like all figures [that] exceeds the conventional logic of numeration, accounting, and modularity" (123). Indeed, "excess" is, counter-intuitively, a common feature of the construction of famine. The elusiveness of diminishment, of lack, of scarcity is counterbalanced by the enormity of mass death. Two economies, those of capitalist and rhetorical excess, meet here in the paradox of scarcity and plenty. Swift's *Modest Proposal* self-consciously enacts this rhetorical contradiction. It also points to the strategies of other writers of the 1720s and 1740s who attempted both to capture the horror of famine and to harness this response for the purpose of effecting change. By relying on the responses of those most proximate to hunger in Ireland, this chapter will re-frame scarcity, not in terms of the spectacular measure of death that is demanded by modern famine studies, but as a chronic experience for the poor occasioned by Ireland's



dependent economic system. In this way, famine can be understood as a constant feature of life for Irish cottiers who “clung[,]. . .with often vehement resistance” to their way of life (Lloyd, *Irish Times* 45). It is important to distinguish this line of argumentation from one which would insist that the persistence of traditional modes of existence can account for the destitution of the Irish peasantry. Rather, as is apparent in these writings, the subordination of the Irish economy subjected its inhabitants to the vicissitudes of the British market, a situation that, because of Ireland’s political dependence, its government was unable and unwilling to relieve. It is important to note that, although they may not have named it as such, Anglo-Irish observers perceived Ireland’s colonial status as a significant if not central contributor to famine and dearth for its inhabitants.

The relative obscurity of famine studies in eighteenth-century Ireland can perhaps be attributed to the perception that, for all of Europe, the eighteenth century constitutes a pre-modern space in which each country struggled to feed its population. Not only does this line of thinking credit modern capitalism with escaping the so-called “nutrition trap,” but it also argues that non-industrialized territories were incapable of supporting their own populations. Such a perspective conveniently supplements the narrative that, by spreading capitalized norms, the West aided colonized spaces, ensuring that the basic needs of its inhabitants could be met. Postcolonial scholars working in later eras have successfully challenged this alibi for colonization by pointing to the hunger crises that plagued colonies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the mythology of capitalist success can be addressed by highlighting the failures of colonial governments at the height of “modern” colonization, it is equally possible to examine

earlier periods in which European hunger was largely being eclipsed by way of its increasing colonial profits. In the eighteenth century, there is considerable evidence both that Western Europe was already beginning to escape widespread hunger and that it was doing so largely by the accumulation of colonial foodstuffs and wealth rather than by any marked technological advancements. While in part due to rationalized agriculture, especially in Great Britain, the West's success in escaping widespread mortality was a function of governmentality. Both John Post and Robert William Fogel have linked the government's willingness to support its citizens through market regulations, poor laws, and the like to Western Europe's declining mortality. Such studies have allowed for greater comparison between Ireland's social conditions and those of other European countries during the same period. Weather events alone cannot explain the repeated and more extensive impact of famine on Ireland, especially in the early eighteenth century. Speaking about the disproportionate impact of the 1740 frost on Ireland and Norway, Post charges that they were "the only regions where mass famines occurred" and that this effect was tied to the "combined consequences of climatic shock, social disarray, prolonged undernutrition, and military operations" (23). Foregrounding the susceptibility of undernourished populations to death, Fogel argues that wealth inequalities and reliance solely upon agricultural production coupled to create severe hunger amongst the laboring populations in eighteenth-century England (256-60). Even with England's greater agricultural production, Fogel argues that the food consumption of the poor was unduly impacted by minor variations in the price of grain (260). Yet, weather events in the eighteenth century failed to induce widespread death in England. Its population was able

to withstand such events because of England's poor laws (Fogel 271). In fact, Fogel argues that but for the poor laws, England's peasants would have died in greater numbers than even the less well-off French peasantry during times of dearth due to the extreme inequality of England's economic structure (271). Taken together, Fogel's and Post's work argues that malnutrition was a substantial problem for the poor of Western Europe, but especially in those places where economic inequality and lack of government intervention persisted. Post in particular argues for the role of extreme undernourishment in Ireland. While famine deaths in Western Europe were not typically induced by starvation itself, but rather by factors like disease, Post argues that emaciation caused a higher proportion of death in the 1740 famine in Ireland and parts of Scandinavia (218). Such research could explain why there were first-hand accounts of starvation in Ireland during various periods which, by other measures, are noted as times of relatively minor shortages. For a population already living on the edge, fluctuations in the price of foodstuffs could easily lead directly from hunger to starvation.

### **Swift on Scarcity: Reading *A Modest Proposal* in Context**

Published in October 1729, *A Modest Proposal* appeared in print just as much of Ireland, particularly Dublin and Belfast, had begun to recover from a grueling famine. Events had been set in motion when the harvest of 1725 faltered, eroding peasant incomes and thus stifling demand and prices (Kelly, "Harvests" 73). The winter saw even greater hardships for Dublin when it was battered by heavy wind and rains, causing flooding and impacting trade (76). Both bread and coal supplies dwindled, temporarily

raising the price of both necessities (76). A weak harvest followed again in 1727, causing £100,000 worth of grain to be imported, “the largest grain imports in a decade” (77). Initial signs of food scarcity began to appear in the North, which was unable to recover from the repetition of low yields (78). Even in more typical years, summers represented the gap between harvests that needed to be bridged by the laying up of stores—stores which were meager during the summer of 1727. In some areas of the North, grain prices rose 140 percent over the prior year (78). Signaling their demand for foodstuffs, the peasantry slaughtered gentleman’s livestock in County Leitrim (78). Failing to provide relief, the wet conditions drove the North from dearth to famine conditions (78). At the same time, the urban poor of Dublin suffered as bread prices skyrocketed. The winter of 1727 was a miserable one as high prices and extreme shortages continued unchecked (78-79). Circumstances became even more dire as poor weather continued through the spring and summer of 1728, ensuring low yields and the necessity of breaking into stores even as the crops were in the process of being harvested (82). At this point, even those areas of the country less impacted by bad weather began to experience rising prices. The beginning of 1729 thus witnessed widespread rioting throughout Munster (88). Just as discontent spread to Dublin, threatening the stability of the capital in late spring, the situation improved with the arrival of imported foodstuffs and the dispersal of regional surpluses to urban areas (89). While the summer of 1729 proved to be a turning point in terms of both the disastrous weather and extreme food shortages, their effects continued to be felt in Ireland’s major cities. Seeking aid, the destitute had flooded Dublin from the countryside. Similarly, famine conditions drove about 4,500 Ulster Protestants to

immigrate to North America, often on the same ships that brought grain from abroad (92). Even Dublin saw a four- to five-fold increase in the number of emigrants in 1729. Acute indicators of famine subsided, but there was little room for relief when an epidemic broke out later that winter. The peasantry, whose monetary and agricultural stores had been devastated, were, in the countryside, unable to escape their debt or, in the cities, reliant upon charities or workhouses for sustenance (94). This general state of devastation continued into 1730 with an inevitable economic depression that enmeshed the peasantry in a vicious cycle of low demand, low profits, and increasing debt (100). 1730 therefore continued to be punctuated by occasional rioting and the steady trickle of emigration (100). While demographic data is lacking for early-eighteenth-century Ireland, studies of related figures suggest that between 20- and 30,000 people perished or emigrated between 1726 and 1732 (101). James Kelly has pointed out that 1729, the worst year of the famine, saw the publication of a “veritable flood of tracts . . . urging specific economic remedies” by a number of Anglo-Irish “patriots” (96).

It was during this same period that Jonathan Swift produced the most significant of his Irish writings, including the *Drapier's Letters*, published throughout 1724, which gave voice to the public outcry against Wood's halfpence, seen as a danger to the economy and an affront highlighting Ireland's dependent status. While some of his earlier works like “The Story of the Injured Lady” (1707) evidenced Swift's awareness of Irish politics, the *Drapier's Letters* sealed his image as a ‘patriot’ for the Irish cause, a title which he told Alexander Pope he did not “deserve; because what I do is owing to perfect rage and resentment” (*Corr.* III 289). However, it was *A Modest Proposal For*

*Preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Publick* that responded most directly to the events of the famine and that became, perhaps, his signature work.

While many commentators have noted that *A Modest Proposal* was published in the context of an ongoing famine, explication of the text itself tends to emphasize Swift's satirization of projectors and of Ireland's economic system in general. Perhaps this relative inattention to Swift's use of famine as the framework for the *Proposal* can be explained by the difficulty of interpreting the text itself. Robert Phiddian has contended that Swift's authorship of *A Modest Proposal* was well known even immediately after its publication because of the audience's familiarity with the stylings of the Drapier. Phiddian believes that both this fore-knowledge and the *Proposal*'s "aggressively alienating" tack prepare the reader to suspend his or her disbelief (605). At the same time, Phiddian notes, the reader's awareness of its authorship does not allow the text to become more transparent or less shocking. "Keeping the concepts of Swift and Proposer apart is a complex task, because the margins are not stable," he argues (608). Furthermore, Phiddian demonstrates the ways in which an awareness of Swift's parodic voice does not necessarily lead the reader to a clear understanding of his position. Referencing Swift's parody of economic rationalism in the text, he describes the way in which Swift "may *manipulate* that language, but the 'voice' we 'hear' is the Proposer's, and the conclusions we draw work on the silent side of irony. Swift is the architect of this irony, but not "directly its enunciator" (609). In other words, *A Modest Proposal* operates through its silences and omissions as well as through its more clearly-diagnosed use of parody. As a

result, Phiddian argues, the reader's attempts to navigate the text are imperiled at many turns. This reading, he insists, is not an attempt to strip away meaning from the text or to "withdraw. . .language into a vacuum where moral and political argument cannot obtain" (610). Rather, Phiddian points out that the effect of such a reading is to see that Swift did not intend to "mov[e]. . .from one false center in the text to a true one" but to increase "the reader's vexed condition" (612). Whether one agrees with Phiddian's specific reading of *A Modest Proposal* is less important than accepting his contention that the possibility for vastly different interpretations is enabled by the ambiguity of the text itself. Of course, Phiddian acknowledges that his reading is centered on the experience of reading *A Modest Proposal* as a discrete text rather than situating it within the context of Swift's biography and writings. At the same time, even those scholars who have made use of a broader swath of Swift's writing have sometimes arrived at distinctly different conclusions about its meaning. For instance, Claude Rawson suggests that current interpretation is too apt to read *A Modest Proposal* as merely satirical when "there is no reason to suppose his own attitude was radically different, or to attribute to him a Dickensian protest about child labor" (*Order* 122). Pointing to other Swiftian tracts, Rawson notes that "Swift gets close to that flat economic utilitarianism which the *Modest Proposal* is alleged to be attacking" (*Order* 123). He accuses modern readers of producing the image of *A Modern Proposal* as a "mellowly pondered product of the liberal imagination" (194). Despite their different perspectives, Rawson's point that "Swift's feelings oscillate starkly between extreme positions" and Phiddian's emphasis on the instability of the reader's entrance into a *Modest Proposal* instruct the reader not

to become complacent about such a widely-read and widely-interpreted text (Rawson, *Order* 128).

One of the earliest commentaries to focus exclusively on *A Modest Proposal*, which he described as marked by “an almost complete absence of sustained scholarship,” was George Wittowsky’s “Swift’s *Modest Proposal*: The Biography of an Early Georgian Pamphlet” (1943). Wittowsky oriented the pamphlet to other economic writings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland and England with which Swift was likely to have been familiar. Its extensive catalog of period tracts set the tone for later scholarship, which continued to suggest the *Proposal*’s parody of and engagement with the emergence of early economic thought from mercantilism to demography and the like. Nonetheless, discussions of the relationship of *A Modest Proposal* to a specifically Irish context seem to have been ambivalent; Wittowsky’s own analysis demonstrates this fact as it attempts to free the *Proposal*’s commentary on Irish economics from its narrow confines by noting that Swift was satirizing “a set of theories and attitudes which rendered such conditions possible” (76). Certainly, there are those who have considered its relationship to Irish politics more fully, but Robert Mahony could still observe less than fifteen years ago that scholars continued to see “Swift [as] embrac[ing]. . .Irish concerns only reluctantly, and hardly for their own sake,” a view which frames Swift as “a satirist of timelessly classical scope” (63). Mahony directly confronts this view of *A Modest Proposal* as “political metaphor” by posing the pamphlet in terms of Swift’s complex inversion and re-deployment of English colonial rhetoric of Irish cannibalism, the history of which stretched back to at least the sixteenth century (64-5). In this way,



Mahony succeeds in drawing attention to the *Proposal*'s relevance to the violence of rhetoric and the rhetoric of violence. This chapter seeks to push Mahony's argument further by reading *A Modest Proposal* as a response to the more immediate events of the famine of the late 1720s—a famine which Swift understands not as a natural disaster, but as the result of colonial violence.

Indeed, famine is the central problem which *A Modest Proposal* purports to address. Throughout the tract, the Proposer reminds his audience that no other viable solution has been offered for the sustenance not only of beggars and their children, but also of a growing portion of Irish society. Food—its necessity, scarcity, obtainment and preparation—is its *raison d'être*. The opening of the pamphlet thus clearly identifies and confronts a dilemma which seemingly compels its observers to act: “It is a melancholy Object to those, who walk through this great Town, or travel in the Country; when they see the *Streets*, the *Roads*, and *Cabbin-doors* crowded with *Beggars* of the Female Sex, followed by three, four, or six Children, *all in Rags*, and importuning every Passenger for Alms” (*Swift's Irish Writings*, hereafter *SIW* 123). Inverting the archetypal image of a mother caring for her children, the speaker conjures female beggars (“These *Mothers*”) as tragic figures who struggle but are unable to provide for their offspring. They are “unable to work for their honest Livelyhood” and are “forced to employ all of their Time in strolling to beg Sustenance for their *helpless Infants*” (*SIW* 123). Yet, despite the affective aspirations of this opening imagery, it is perhaps the most deceptively complex of the piece. Hinting that something sinister may lurk behind this compassionate description, the opening passage ends with the juxtaposition of the “*helpless Infants*”

with the image of the potential harm they offer to Ireland's social order when they "either turn *Thieves* for want of Work; or leave their *dear Native Country, to fight for the Pretender in Spain*" (SIW 123-4). While some readers have argued that this opening does not present a sincere emotional appeal and that Swift's sympathies are unclear (Rawson, *Order* 127-8), there are several considerations in assessing its purpose. The most apparent of these is the relationship between these images and others which appear later in the *Proposal*. For instance, the Proposer explains that his scheme is not "to provide only for the Children of *professed Beggars*," but also for those children "who are born of Parents, in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our Charity in the Streets" (124). Similarly, the Proposer reminds the audience that in "computing the Charge of nursing a Beggar's Child" he is also necessarily including "all *Cottagers, Labourers*, and Four-fifths of the *Farmers*" (SIW 126). Without recourse to extra-textual information, then, it is clear the Proposer as well as the author intends the suffering of the initial "Beggars of the Female Sex" to serve, synechdocically, to represent the equally destitute figures who remain out of sight, but who are no less central to the pamphlet's purpose. When turning to Swift's other texts, Fabricant and Mahony note that the opening of *A Modest Proposal* is noticeably similar to that of *Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland* (SIW 123 n. 1). Caustic as it may be in its meting out blame, this sermon nonetheless commences with a grave glimpse at a "Country as ours which is capable of producing all Things necessary, and most Things convenient for Life, sufficient for the Support of four Times the Number of its Inhabitants" (133). It echoes *A Modest Proposal* in noting that not only beggars but also a number of "Tradesmen, Labourers and

Artificers” have been left without food and clothing (133). From these examples, it is safe to conclude that, while Swift evinces a complex and certainly unsentimental view of beggars in many of his writings, in both the aforementioned instances, Swift paints vagrancy as a problem that is located within a broader political and economic context and that is no longer confined to the margins of Irish society. Indeed, the “prodigious Number of Children” who “crowd” the capital city reflect the growing urgency of Ireland’s inability to sustain its population.

Of course, contrary to what its opening scene may suggest, *A Modest Proposal* as a whole is not approaching the problem of hunger by simply appealing to its readers’ sentimentality. The Proposer may pose as sincerely interested in the plight of the starving poor, but the reader is meant to see that his claims, in which he “hope[s] the proposal] will not be liable to the least Objection” and for which “Cruelty. . .hath always been with me the strongest Objection against any Project, how well soever intended,” only serve to ironically foreground the horror of using the children of the poor as food. At the same time that it parodies economic rationality and armchair projecting, *A Modest Proposal* seduces its readers with an initial emotional appeal in the form of the image of starving beggars only to cunningly advance the idea “of a very knowing *American*” that “a young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food” (*SIW* 125). The author establishes a rhetorical trap<sup>5</sup> by initially offering the reader a comfortable, benevolent gaze through which to safely view the beggars as objects of compassion. It is only after the reader has been led through a

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<sup>5</sup> Elliott calls this rhetorical turn being “booby-trapped” (417).

careful overview of the situation (albeit laden with animalistic language that hints at the Proposer's purpose), that he or she is then confronted with the Proposer's contemptible scheme. This repulsive revelation serves to alienate the reader from the text and thus from the sentimentalized portrait which has introduced it. The reader's trust in the text has been undermined, disorienting him or her. As Phiddian puts it, the text "attacks us" (605). Swift's method of addressing the reader obliquely, through irony and innuendo, follows from his frustration with the lack of response incited by his previous proposed solutions to Ireland's various moral and economic woes. As he wrote in the first of the Drapier's letters, "It is a great Fault" in his audience that "when a Person writes with no other Intention than *to do you Good, you will not be at the Pains to read his Advices*" (38). This great "Folly" in his Irish audience, which he references elsewhere as well, conditions his frustration with their perceived lack of response to his writing and contributes to the way *A Modest Proposal* was constructed rhetorically. The *Proposal* avoids straight-forward exhortations, but nonetheless aims to produce a moral recognition in its audience.

By comparison, there were other pamphleteers who appealed to their countrymen by making use of images of the famine. One, posing as "M.B. Draper" in a tract entitled "A Letter to the People of Ireland" (echoing the fourth Drapier's letter "A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland"), writes that there is an "Evil" which has "crept upon us by degrees, and is now so familiar to us, that we can see without the least Commotion, our Publick Streets crowded with living Spectres, Bodys of our Species with half Life, rambling about for Sustenance, in the most miserable Condition human Nature can be

reduced to” (3). In fact, the pamphlet’s language, whether by coincidence or intention, is similar to that of *A Modest Proposal*’s opening.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Proposer, however, “M.B. Draper” gives more extensive details about the state of the famine victims, not only those who are “visible in our Metropolis,” but also those the author is “credibly inform’d” exist to a “greater degree” in the towns of the countryside (3). “Draper” exhorts his audience to “take a small Journey into the Country where they shall see, those poor People bleeding their Cattle for Sustenance, and fainting in the Road with Hunger, where they may see Poor Desponding Mothers crying over their famish’d Children” (9). This tract, then, published in the same year as *A Modest Proposal*, attempts to speak to the readers’ sense of morality by allowing them to “see” what he believes they have become inured to: the constant death and suffering of the poor around them. The “Draper’s” aim is to engage the readers’ sympathies. In relating ghastly details of extreme hunger, the tract attempts to motivate its audience to address the underlying economic problems that lead to famine conditions. In Dublin, the author relates, vagrant families who, “if they happen to hear of the Death of a Horse, . . . run to it as to a Feast, and . . . quarrel for the just partition of their Booty” (4). Here, “M.B. Draper” attempts to elicit horror through the spectacle of desperate people eating the carcasses of dead horses. At the same time that it summons sympathy, however, this imagery also invokes disgust through the unspoken taboo against eating certain animals, like horses. The Draper’s rhetoric unavoidably witnesses

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<sup>6</sup> The similarities between the pamphlet of “M.B. Draper” and *A Modest Proposal* are indeed striking enough to suggest the possibility that Swift had read it before he published the *Proposal*. While outside the purview of this chapter, further consideration of these points of intersection could provide an interesting study.

these contradictory impulses between sympathy for the famine victims and their simultaneous dehumanization.

David Lloyd has noted a similar phenomenon in writing about the Great Famine, which he describes as the “spectacle of the indigent sublime” (*Irish Times* 50). As in the Burkean notion of the sublime, Lloyd argues that the horror of witnessing the victims of famine is overwhelming for the observer; as a result, their rhetorical figuration is fraught. Their wasting bodies are represented somewhere between human objects of sympathy and animalistic objects of disgust. Lloyd explains that the “excessive spectacle of these starving bodies forces the viewer to the very threshold of humanity, to the sill that divides the human and the non-human, or, rather, . . .the human and the non-human within the human” (*Irish Times* 51). The liminal space within which famine victims are often circumscribed is further evinced as “M.B. Draper” goes on to characterize them as starving as “Spectres.” He emphasizes the strangeness of these unhuman specters, these “Bodys of our Species with half Life,” turning them into a source of terror; they become the “evil” itself which “crept on us by degrees” (3). Later in the tract, “Draper” imagines the famine as proliferating: “it next ascended to the shop-keepers. . .and now we find it gnawing on the Estates of some Gentlemen, so that like a Contagion it spreads everywhere” (12). In this moment, the starving figures themselves are pathologized, becoming, not the victims of famine, but the embodiment of it. Beginning with their uncanny presence, barely subsisting and living somewhere between the human and the animal, famine victims are often perceived as marking the extremes of human existence. Notwithstanding the (sometimes) compassionate gaze of their observers, their terrifying

presence results in their figuration as animals or even as disease. The rhetoric of first-hand accounts thus tends to oscillate between the poles of attraction and repulsion, sympathy and disgust. Excess becomes an aspect of “realistic” representations of famine. As “M.B. Draper” attempts to convey the enormity of famine through recourse to multiple disturbing images, he simultaneously, and unwittingly, dehumanizes them. His ostensible purpose in conveying the horror of famine and in eliciting a response is complicated by this rhetorical strategy. Chris Morash explains that the atrocity of famine resists narrativization, that is, a sequential progression of events related by cause and effect. Without narrative context, images of famine thus become a series of set pieces. Since identification and sympathy rely on mimesis or realism to affect this recognition, the lack of narrative forecloses such possibilities (Morash 116-117; Lloyd, *Irish Times* 49-53).

In contrast, *A Modest Proposal* avoids this tactic altogether. The author of the *Proposal* seems suspicious of sentiment in terms of both its ability to motivate an audience and its representation of victimhood. While starting off with a potentially sentimental image, the proposal wrenches the reader from his comfortable space as spectator by exaggerating the spectacle of the poor’s suffering while simultaneously subjecting them to the ultimate objectification: their portrayal as animals and food. Thus, the children become animals who can be “*Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*” (SIW 124). In doing so, Swift exploits the tension between spectacular representations of the starving and their continuing invisibility outside of the page. *A Modest Proposal* enacts the paradox between the proliferating and destabilizing presence of starving bodies in Dublin

and the callous indifference, even active victimization, of their wealthy onlookers. It does so by capitalizing on the ubiquitous colonial archetype of cannibalistic natives, inverting its logic and highlighting the victimization of Ireland's poor and even middling class (Mahony 64-5; *SIW* 123). Since their physical presence does not seem to affect Ireland's citizens, the author does not attempt to manipulate the audience by invoking their grotesqueness. Rather, the author exaggerates their *indifferent gaze* which appropriately makes food of those who represent the absence of sustenance. "Swift's cannibal readers," Carol Houlihan Flynn explains, "are made to consume the hunger of their victims, the only way they can know the condition they try to deny" (173). Beyond the masterful inversion that is accomplished through cannibalistic imagery, the figuration of children as animals also inevitably questions "the human" as a category. When does a human become meat or "carcase"? *A Modest Proposal* argues that this boundary, at least under Ireland's current circumstances, is porous. As Flynn points out, poor children do not simply become animals; animals begin to take on a distinctly human cast. The Proposer's recommendation for "buying the Children alive, and dressing them hot from the Knife, as we do *roasting Pigs*" is distinctly unnerving for its violence and for the uncanny resemblance between the human and its animal counterpart. Flynn contends that this imagery "awaken[s]. . . sympathy for the suckling pig as well as for the fattened child . . . For it is a fact that suckling pigs do look like suckling children" (171). This unsettling doubling of human and animal assaults the liminality of the non-human, threatening the idea of self/other, human/animal. But this is not only intended as an abstract



contemplation for Swift; it is a political question about the place of starving bodies in relation to a society which attempts to cast them out, like the animal.<sup>7</sup>

For Swift, the proliferation of starvation undermined any claims for a functioning society. As one of the most well-known passages explains, despite its expense, the meat of children's bodies will be "very *proper for Landlords*," "who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents, seem to have the best Title to the children" (*SIW* 126). This description not only baldly states the economic victimization of the tenantry, but it references Swift's claims that the Irish have become slaves, commodities with a title. At issue for Swift is the distortion of the proper moral and political order to which the starving bodies point; figuring children as food similarly distorts the natural order, "turn[ing]. . .the chain of being into an eating chain" (Flynn 175) and indicting the type of state which would allow its members to be reduced to such destitution. The *Proposal* goes further, making the linkage between governmentality and the health of the individual subject explicit. Swift underscores the tyranny of Ireland's extreme inequalities by invoking the (faux-)travel narrative of "the famous *Salmanaazar*," who relates that in the island of "*Formosa*" it is a common practice for the "Executioner [to sell]. . .the Carcase to *Persons of Quality*, as a prime dainty," with one particular "plump Girl of fifteen" being sold to "his Imperial *Majesty's prime Minister of State*, and other

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, this was not the first instance in which Swift inverted human and animal. *Gulliver's Travels* had also played with this relationship in the figures of both the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. In both examples, Swift's investigation of the human is inextricable from his consideration of the status of the "native Irish," a fact which has troubled many critics. Yet, Ann Cline Kelly has cautioned against a too easy identification between the Yahoos and the Irish (846). While this is a vexed question in *Gulliver's Travels*, Kelly argues that Swift ultimately concludes that "brutality" leads to dehumanization even while calling on the oppressed to resist their enslavement (854).

great *Mandarins* of the Court, in *Joints from the Gibbet*” (SIW 127). Cannibalism is here the result of decadent (i.e. “Oriental”) and tyrannical practices that, for Swift, represent the breakdown of the socius. This is the key to *A Modest Proposal*’s condemnation of Irish society. It is not so much an emotive appeal to the Anglo-Irish elite as a denunciation of the systematic dehumanization of Ireland’s subjects. To argue such is not to impose the working of a “liberal imagination” onto Swift (Rawson, *Order* 128); for this is not an attempt to recover the voice of the downtrodden or to extend additional rights to the poor, Catholic or otherwise. Joep Leerssen expresses this point by noting that while “he had little enough personal liking for the rude and plebeian Catholic natives, [Swift] shared Berkeley’s sense of responsibility for their welfare” (310). Without extending political rights, this notion nonetheless implicitly recognizes all people, the “whole People of Ireland,” as subjects whose basic needs are the responsibility of the community. Limited as it was, this understanding of responsibility insisted that all subjects fall within the purview of the state’s obligations. Beyond the analogy of the island of “Formosa,” the text forces its readers into a consideration of the meaning of communal and political responsibility by foregrounding the notion of the human. Posing the problem of starvation in terms of eating its victims, *A Modest Proposal* confronts the idea of humanity itself.

The political import of the *Proposal*’s efforts to thrust the starving members of the populace into view becomes apparent as Swift allows the rhetorical mask of the Proposer to slip momentarily. Alluding to solutions Swift has elsewhere put forward, the Proposer declares “let no Man talk to me of these and the like Expedients. . .[until] there

will ever be some hearty and sincere Attempt to put *them into Practice*” (129-30).

Reiterating the measures he has advocated, Swift pointedly blames his audience for ignoring the resources that Ireland has to remedy its situation. However, Swift also notes that their mobilization depends on the cultivation of a distinct identity, one which is not necessarily in harmony with Britishness. In addition to “[l]earning to love our Country,” Swift also notes, importantly, that the Irish need to dispense with their “*Animosities, and Factions,*” comparing them to “*the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very Moment their City was taken*” (SIW 129-130). This comparison suggests that Swift views the indifference to famine victims as a form of self-destruction. It also casts the Irish as being besieged by Britain. In response to this attack, Swift proposes a communal recognition which eschews such “*Animosities, and Factions*” in favor of a more inclusive view of Irishness. Similarly, Swift’s exhortation to be “*a little cautious not to sell our Country and Consciences for nothing,*” coupled with his sarcastic observation that Ireland’s self-preservation should be in “no Danger in *disobliging ENGLAND,*” openly claim different interests for Ireland and Great Britain. Not to mention Swift’s further accusation that while the landlords may eat their tenants, he “*could name a Country, which would be glad to eat up our whole Nation*” (SIW 130). Just as it began, *A Modest Proposal* closes with the same earnest note that the primary problem it addresses is not foreign consumption or the ills of vagrancy, but “how. . .to find Food and Raiment, for a Hundred Thousand useless Mouths and Backs?. . .adding those, who are Beggars by Profession, to the Bulk of Farmers, Cottagers, and Labourers, with their Wives and Children, who are Beggars in Effect” (SIW 130). The destitution of such large numbers

(“a round Million of Creatures in human Figure”) of Ireland’s inhabitants, and the text’s point that they have become “Beggars in Effect,” underscore the fact that this is not a tract about “professed” beggars, but about poverty and starvation.

*A Modest Proposal* serves as the most public evidence of Swift’s concern with the famine conditions of the 1720s, but there are also several other examples of his preoccupation during this period including his poetry as well as his correspondence.<sup>8</sup> What is significant about these writings is not only that they more clearly orient his purpose in writing *A Modest Proposal*, but also that Swift increasingly viewed famine as the result of the economics of Ireland’s “dependency” or colonization. The short-lived *Intelligencer*, published in 1728 and written by both Swift and Thomas Sheridan, addresses famine in a few of its issues. In Number XVIII, while lauding the patriotism of the Drapier and suggesting that he be honored yearly on his birthday, Sheridan indicts English colonial claims for Ireland’s improvement by referencing Fynes Moryson’s *History of Ireland*. Moryson’s account of Tyrone’s Rebellion, written in the seventeenth century, has typically been seen as partaking in a tradition of virulent and propagandistic anti-Catholicism/anti-Gaelicism. Sheridan, however, uses Moryson for a different end. Paraphrasing Moryson’s own text, Sheridan explains that, during the rebellion, the English had engaged in a form of economic imperialism by devaluing Irish currency, a tactic that resulted in a terrible famine. Sheridan employs Moryson’s text in order to preempt the accusation that he is merely partaking in ‘patriot’ cant when he describes the

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Swift’s references to the ties between Irish poverty and hunger and its British dependency are numerous enough that they cannot all be featured herein. Rather, the chapter will focus on a few of the most relevant moments.

violent, and perhaps unjust, tactics used to subdue Ireland in the past. While Moryson contends that “the Queen had received an account of the *Irish* being up in arms,” Sheridan insists to the contrary that “to speak the Truth, it was the *English* rather; for the . . . Ring-leaders, were all of *English* Extraction” (*Intelligencer* 194; *SIW* 225). Sheridan’s point is to counter the idea that “the Irish” (here referencing the Gaelic Irish) were always disloyal to Britain, something which other pamphleteers of the time like that of “The Present Miserable State of Ireland” likewise claimed, in declaring that “The people of Ireland. . .are certainly the most loyal subjects in the world.”<sup>9</sup> Sheridan goes on to explain that Moryson’s account confirms that the English intentionally devalued the Irish currency in an effort to “quickly subdue their stubborn Spirits, by introducing Poverty, the great Humbler of Families and Nations” (*Intelligencer* 226). The resultant famine is recounted from Moryson’s text but with some important alterations. As Rawson notes, Sheridan changes the tone of the *History of Ireland* (God 86), recasting Moryson’s hostile representations of Irish cannibalism like the following: “some Women. . .used to make a Fire. . .and divers little Children[,]. . .coming thither to warm them, were by them surprized, killed, and eaten” (Moryson 283). Contrary to Rawson’s reading, however, it is clear that Sheridan elides or dilutes passages in which Moryson’s anti-Gaelic biases are apparent. In their place, Sheridan offers a picture of a “good natured and compassionate *Author*, who all along deplores the miserable Condition of the poor Natives, [and] their . . . deplorable Circumstances” (*Intelligencer* 228). Reshaping Moryson’s accounts of

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<sup>9</sup> According to *PW* XII, xv, *The Present Miserable State of Ireland: In a Letter from a Gentleman in Dublin, to his Friend S.R.W. in London* appeared in *The Weekly Journal or Saturday’s Post* September 30, 1721.

starvation, Sheridan intermixes the experiences of each class without labeling their religion (an important omission) or using Moryson's "Rebel" moniker. From the "Middle Rank of People [who] were all ruined" by the influx of devalued currency, to "the Poor, through this whole Kingdom reduced to Famine" (226), Sheridan reinterprets the events of the past through the lens of the present, seeking to create a unified kingdom in the process of describing England's economic imperialism, an imperialism that was matched for Swift and Sheridan by the attempted introduction of Wood's halfpence. Moryson's grotesque scenes are recounted and lamented as "too horrible indeed to mention!", with their prejudiced disgust removed. Sheridan contextualizes each event Moryson depicts not as an instance of the inimical barbarity of "the Irish" (another politically charged label which Sheridan avoids), but as part of the conditions which result from the active perpetration of famine. Sheridan stops short of holding the Queen responsible for intentionally destroying Ireland's currency, as much potentially to avoid prosecution as to remain loyal to the Crown, stating that when the Queen learned of "such deplorable Circumstances," she "quickly recalled her Grant, and put a Stop to the base *Coin*" (228). Yet, he subtly suggests that England, now Britain, had been only too ready to reenact these events by allowing a grant for Wood's halfpence with the knowledge of its repercussions: "I have now finished my melancholy Extract, from whence I shall infer, that as like Causes ever have, and ever must produce like Effects, that villainous Project of *William Wood*, might have entirely ruined this Kingdom, and have converted it into one large poor House, had not the DRAPIER. . . prevented that by his pen" (228-9). While purportedly recounting distant historical events, *The Intelligencer XVIII* is explicit in its

description of famine as a political tool, one that had been used to devastate Ireland in the past. In crediting Swift's pen with the prevention of such circumstances, Sheridan is perhaps overly optimistic since, even at its publication in 1728, some of the impact of the failed corn crops was beginning to be felt in Ireland.

Indeed, the next issue of the *Intelligencer*, Number XIX, written by Swift, indicates that the authors were well aware of not only the scarcity of food, but also of its relationship to the lack of currency in Ireland. Beginning with the epigraph of the letter taken from the *Life of Virgil* it reads, translated from Latin, "Thus do ye, sheep, grow fleece for others, not yourselves" (*SIW* 101), Number XIX decries Ireland's subordination to Britain. Acknowledging that "the Author *personates a Country Gentleman in the North of Ireland*," the fictitious letter describes the complaints of this landlord who, without adequate silver, is unable to trade locally. Moreover, this "Gentleman" argues that "the Suffering of me, and those of my Rank, are Trifles in Comparison of what the meaner Sort undergo" (*SIW* 102). Without romanticizing them (he notes that they frequently spend their pay in getting drunk), this "Gentleman" also correlates scarce specie with higher prices for the staple goods (*SIW* 102). Like *A Modest Proposal*, which followed it, the fictional author aims straight at the dysfunctional economic system and its perpetrators in explaining Ireland's growing difficulties:

those poor Men for want of due Payment, are forced to take up their *Oat-meal*, and other Necessaries of Life, at almost double Value; and, consequently, are not able to discharge half their Score; especially under the Scarceness of *Corn*, for two Years past; and the melancholy Disappointment of the present *Crop*[,]. . . THE Causes of this, and a Thousand other Evils, are clear and manifest to you, and all thinking Men; although hidden from the Vulgar: These indeed complain of

hard Times, the Dearth of Corn, the Want of Money, the Badness of Seasons; that their Goods bear no Price, and that the Poor cannot find work. (SIW 102)

While “hard Times” in the north of Ireland are exacerbated by natural events that have impacted two seasons of harvests, Swift and Sheridan’s country gentleman attributes the extent of its impact to economic causes. The country gentleman’s paternalistic argument that these underlying conditions are “hidden from the Vulgar” argues nonetheless that it is the civic responsibility of Ireland’s (Protestant) elite to protect its inhabitants. Even more pointedly, he castigates the “Hatred and Contempt born us by our Neighbours and Brethren,” which condemns England’s economic subordination of Ireland, blaming England for placing a “dead Weight upon every beneficial Branch of our Trade” and for the loss of “half our Revenues [which] are annually sent to *England*” (SIW 102). *The Intelligencer* therefore seeks to expose the clear linkage between food shortages and the siphoning of resources from the Irish economy. Indeed, it argues that unless these circumstances can be changed, “how far, and how soon this Misery and Desolation may spread, is easy to foresee” (SIW 106).

It cannot be ignored, however, that, in this article, such issues are framed in terms of a distinctly Protestant complaint. The country gentleman thus notes that it is the “*poor loyal Protestant Subjects of Ireland*” (SIW 103) whom the British Government refuses to aid in solving the currency crisis and that this refusal indicates that, as the writer sarcastically observes, “we must submit: For, Lives and Fortunes are always at the Mercy of the CONQUEROR” (SIW 103). At least in terms of the invented persona “A. North” then, the letter is meant to challenge an injustice meted out to Anglo-Irish Protestants



which violates their rights as legitimate subjects, not a conquered people. This was a relatively common argument made by the Protestant community that most famously had been articulated by William Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland*<sup>10</sup> at the turn of the eighteenth century. S.J. Connolly has pointed out that while its articulation was an "increasingly meaningless archaism," it attempted to mobilize the notion that "the connection between Ireland and Great Britain lay in the person of the monarch: Ireland was not a dependency of England, but a separate possession of the English crown" (*Religion, Law, and Power* 106). It is certainly the case that Swift regularly invoked Protestant Ireland as victimized, if not betrayed, by a government that had forsaken it (Fabricant and Mahony xvii-xviii). However, there are a few additional explanations for the explicitly Protestant tenor of the appeal in *The Intelligencer*. For one thing, A. North's persona is one who is specifically tied to the more clearly Protestant geography of the northern counties, a fact which allows him to argue more convincingly that loyal subjects have the right to challenge their government without being seen as seditious. In other words, Number XIX positions its argument in such a way as to be seen as stemming from a community which has a legitimate stake in claiming the attention of the British government. In addition, this *Intelligencer* article self-consciously addresses the fact that challenges to British treatment of Ireland (by Swift in particular) have had dangerous consequences for its authors: "I have very superficially touched the Subject. . .with the utmost Caution: For I know how criminal the least Complaint hath been thought. . .that it may never. . .be interpreted. . .as a false, scandalous, seditious and disaffected Action"

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<sup>10</sup> Molyneux's text, *The Case of Ireland's being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated*, was published in 1698 and largely considered seditious in England.

(*SIW* 107). However much this statement may be tinged with irony, it addresses the reality that loyalty above all else had to be stressed in order to avoid prosecution, never mind to be heard. That the Number XIX is concerned with the “whole People of Ireland,” as Swift addresses them in the fourth Drapier’s letter, is nonetheless suggested by its contention that “[t]his Misfortunate is so urging, and vexatious in every Kind of small Traffick; and so hourly pressing upon *all Persons in the Country whatsoever*” (emphasis added; *SIW* 103). While the famine had not reached its height when *The Intelligencer*, Number XIX was published in 1728, its fears were prescient that these systemic economic problems would reduce Ireland to even greater desolation. It became even more pressingly true that, as it states, “[c]orn among us carries a very high Price; but it is for the same Reason, that *Rats*, and *Cats*, and dead *Horses*, have been often bought for *Gold* in a Town besieged” (*SIW* 105).

The years leading up to the publication of *A Modest Proposal* were thus increasingly strained ones for Ireland’s poor, a fact which is registered in the frequent references to famine and privation in Swift’s writings. As early as 1726, at the very beginning of the poor weather pattern impacting crops in Ireland (Kelly, “Harvests” 77), Swift wrote to Charles Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough that

there is not one farmer in a hundred through the kingdom who can afford shoes or stockings to his children, or to eat flesh, or drink anything better than sour milk or water, twice in a year; so that the whole country, except the *Scotch* plantation in the north, is a scene of misery and desolation, hardly to be matched on this side *Lapland*. (*Corr.* III, 133)

The importance of Swift’s perspective here resides in the fact that even before, strictly speaking, a “famine” can be said to have taken hold of Ireland, Swift already diagnoses

the middling classes, represented here by the farmer, as suffering from scarcity that is not necessarily the result of unfortunate weather events, but a persistent condition and the logical outcome of England's economic subordination of Ireland.

Swift would forcefully make this point in several political tracts written from 1727 through 1729, marked with an increasing urgency which perhaps paralleled the worsening food shortages that plagued Ireland at the same time. Among the many grievances that he aired, Swift frequently returned to the idea that Ireland's widespread poverty was ultimately induced by British policies. In *A Short View of the State of Ireland* (1728), absentee landlords receive their fair share of blame, with the "Rise of our Rents . . . squeezed out of the very Blood, and Vitals, and Cloaths and Dwellings of the Tenants; who live worse than *English Beggars*" (SIW 98). Nonetheless, the tract continues to trace even this state of affairs to Britain, for it is in their interest to encourage absenteeism when "[o]ne third part of the Rents of *Ireland*, is spent in *England*; which, with the Profit of Employments, Pensions. . . Journeys of Pleasure of Health,. . . the Pay of all Superior Officers in the Army, and other Incidents, will amount to a full half of the Income of the whole Kingdom, all clear Profit to *England*" (SIW 96). While specifically intended to address the inflated image that the British populace had received of Ireland's wealth (SIW 93), *A Short View*'s vitriolic tone, addressed much more pointedly toward English oppression than *A Modest Proposal*, seems to stem from Swift's awareness of the insidiousness of an economic system that attacks stealthily, leaving behind a wake of destruction that he attempts to conjure before unseeing British eyes. Swift offers graphic images like that of farmers "who pay great Rents, living in Filth and Nastiness upon

Butter-milk and Potatoes, without a Shoe or Stocking to their Feet; or a House so convenient as an *English Hogsty* to receive them,” intermixed with carefully laid out “Rules generally known, and never contradicted” in an effort to demonstrate Ireland’s exceptional status—the “Paradox of the Kingdom” (*SIW* 98).

One of the main paradoxes that recurs in Swift’s considerations of Ireland’s economic status is that, for him, its natural resources serve as a woefully ironic reminder that there is no rational explanation for the problems that Ireland faces. In *Sermon, Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland*, probably written around 1729 because of its similarity to the language of *A Modest Proposal*, Swift describes the tragedy in which “such a Country as ours which is capable of producing all Things necessary, . . . sufficient for the Support of four Times the Number of its Inhabitants, should lye under the heaviest Load of Misery and Want” (*SIW* 133). Similarly in *A Short View*, Ireland is shown as existing in a state of exception to seemingly incontrovertible principles that “are the true Causes of any Countries flourishing and growing rich” (*SIW* 94). For Swift, the first cause of a kingdom’s financial success is the gifts bestowed upon it by nature. Ireland’s dismal condition serves, then, as an unnatural state, contradicting its possession of many resources. In describing this unnatural, and therefore immoral, state, Swift falters even in attempting to rhetorically imagine it otherwise; he declares that his “Heart is too heavy to continue this Irony longer” (*SIW* 98). Instead, he contends that Ireland’s landscape would be mistaken by a “Stranger” for “*Lapland*, or *Ysland*, rather than in a Country so favoured by Nature as ours, both in Fruitfulness of Soil, and Temperature of Climate. The miserable Dress, and Dyet, and Dwelling of the People. The general Desolation in most

Parts of the Kingdom” (*SIW* 98). This is a particularly strong condemnation of Ireland’s condition for Swift since, as Fabricant elaborates, he did not envision nature in the idealized tones of pastoralism (55-59). As his reference to “Lapland” suggests, nature is not an inherently munificent supplier of human needs, but Ireland’s destitution represents the opposite extreme for Swift: a grossly distorted “desert” within a mockingly fecund landscape (*Maxims Controlled in Ireland; SIW* 118).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Swift represents this paradox as “this prodigious Plenty of *Cattle*, and Dearth of *human Creatures*, and want of *Bread*, as well as *Money to buy it*” (*SIW* 111). For Swift, this state of affairs is inescapably wrought by human hands. His complex understanding of the failings of the Irish economy meant that he leveled blame at many actors both within and outside of the country, including the indigent, whom he sometimes described as “from their Infancy so given up to Idleness and Sloth, that they often chuse to beg or steal, rather than support themselves with their own Labour” (*SIW* 135). At the same time, unlike many of his contemporaries, and even within the same tract, Swift demonstrated an unwillingness to attribute problems to innate characteristics. Thus, he frequently calls attention to the fact that structural inequalities, whether economic or social, continued to foster poverty and other social ills. Of the same “Natives” described above in *Wretched Condition of Ireland*, for instance, Swift describes their children as “trained up in Ignorance and all Manner of Vice,” which leads him to argue for the importance of education (*SIW* 135). The same was also true of Ireland as a whole. Railings against landlords, absentee or otherwise, and foreign consumption were also contextualized in later tracts by noting that

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<sup>11</sup> See Carole Fabricant, *Swift’s Landscape*, 55-63 and 73-77, for a more complete survey of Swift’s anti-pastoral imagery.

Ireland “lie[s] under many Disadvantages, not by our own Faults” or that given “the Hardships we are forced to bear[,]. . .how can we otherwise expect than to be over-run with Objects of Misery and Want?” (*SIW* 141). In *A Short View*, Swift goes further to defend against doubts leveled against the “Industry of the People” of Ireland, charging that “our Misfortune is not altogether owing to our own Fault, but to a Million of Discouragements” (*SIW* 95).

It becomes clear in surveying Swift’s writing that he came to understand Ireland’s economic stagnation not as an aberration as many, especially British observers, did, but as the outcome of its subordination within a colonial system. Swift’s awareness becomes particularly clear when he responds to John Browne’s pamphlet in *AN ANSWER TO A PAPER, called A Memorial of the poor Inhabitants, Tradesmen, and Labourers of the Kingdom of IRELAND*. While incensed by Browne’s ignorance of Ireland’s condition, Swift understands that this lack of awareness stems from the dominance of British improvement ideology, which contended that economies are subject to rational and consistent rules. As he says bitterly to Browne, “I. . .freely excuse your Mistakes, since you appear to write as a Stranger, and as of a Country which is left at Liberty to enjoy the Benefits of Nature” (*SIW* 114). For this reason, the tone of Swift’s tract borders on condescension while also usefully instructing its reader that Ireland’s situation strains credulity with its paradoxical workings. Swift’s main point here is that agricultural production has been ruined by a combination of feckless peasants and boorish landlords; in tandem with the lack of foodstuffs, Irish lands have been engrossed for the production of sheep and cattle. Because of trade restrictions, this situation ensures, firstly, that food

other than meat needs to be imported while, secondly, that much of the profit in grazing is also lost because of Ireland's lack of production. With currency leaving Ireland through the importation of both food and luxury items and the continuing decline of arable husbandry, poverty drives many of Ireland's inhabitants to emigrate while the remainder are barely able to feed themselves. For Swift, the hallmarks of a dysfunctional economy lay in its failure to feed and clothe its inhabitants. However, he also unwittingly acknowledges what scholars would come to understand as the features of a colonial economy. As S.J. Connolly explains, the growing commercialization of the economy did not have the same effects in Ireland as it did in Britain:

[p]roximity. . .to Great Britain enforced a close integration into the stronger British economy that accentuated the consequences of this relative backwardness; . . .Ireland was locked into an inherently unequal pattern of trade. . .High levels of commercialization combined with the absence of customary restraints on the operation of market forces to create unusually effective mechanisms for syphoning off the surplus production of rural workers. The result was the coexistence of an increasingly sophisticated and market-oriented agriculture with miserably low living standards for the great majority. (*Religion, Law and Power* 55-6)

This is precisely what Swift observes and condemns when he writes, "the more *Sheep* we have, the fewer human Creatures are left to wear the *Wool*, or eat the *Flesh*" (*SIW* 110). The specialization of Ireland's marketplace for British export ensures that livestock will be raised without regard to the needs of Ireland's populace. Whereas the high price of corn and other staples is a sign of thriving industry in England, Swift notes that the very different conditions under which Irish tenants labor means that, rather than eating well and exporting excess, inflated prices demand that the tenants sell everything to meet their rents, leaving them to subsist on the meager remains. Low interest rates drive "Savers" to

invest in land, Swift explains, “[h]ence the dearness of Necessaries for Life; because Tenants cannot afford to pay such extravagant Rates for Land, (which they must take, or go a-begging) without raising the Price of Cattle, and of Corn, although themselves should live upon Chaff” (*A Short View*, SIW 98). Despite his recognition that Ireland’s needs have been subsumed within the British economy, Swift sees this as a moral failing on the part of both the Anglo-Irish government and the propertied elite. Denouncing the failure of the government to protect its inhabitants from the destructive ebbs and flows of the economy, Swift charges: “I thought it a Defect in the Laws; that there was not some Regulation in the Price of *Flesh*, as well as *Bread*” (*An Answer to a Paper*, SIW 111). Along with the government, Swift sees landlords as abrogating their duty to their fellow countrymen by placing profit over the health of the body politic: “to bestow the whole Kingdom on *Beef* and *Mutton*, and thereby to drive out half the People who should eat their Share, and force the rest to send sometimes as far as *Egypt*, for Bread to eat with it; is a most peculiar and distinguished Piece of publick Oeconomy; of which I have no Comprehension” (*An Answer to a Paper*, SIW 111).

In surveying Swift’s entire body of work from the time of the initial crop failures of 1725 through 1729, the famine’s most devastating year demographically, it is apparent that Swift’s concern for the poor and their conditions increased. As others have suggested, Swift’s relationship to Ireland and to its populace in particular evolved over the course of his long residence in Dublin. During this time, his numerous references, specifically to food production and consumption, indicate that he was aware of, and troubled by, the impact of the famine both in Dublin and the country as a whole. It is



worth noting that, while Swift's sympathies with the "native poor," as he refers to them, are often ambivalent at best, he was nevertheless a staunch opponent of the indifference which was accorded to the suffering and death that plagued the poor, Protestant and Catholic alike. This follows, in fact, from his relatively conservative outlook which envisioned a proper society as one supported by a series of mutual duties and obligations. Swift therefore saw Ireland's treatment by Great Britain as a moral and political failing that stemmed from the governance of Ireland from both London and Dublin. This is a worthwhile case to make not only to demonstrate Swift's greater identification with his native country, but also to illustrate that contemporary observers of the 1720s famine understood it not as a natural event, but as the culmination of Britain's ongoing economic domination.

### **An Ounce of Prevention: Writings between the 1720s and the Great Frost**

As will become apparent in looking forward to the even more devastating famine of the 1740s, Swift was not alone in consistently advocating specific programs which had the potential to insulate Ireland from such extreme conditions. Yet these recommendations continued to yield little to no results despite ongoing deprivation and recurrent famine. One such writer was Sir John Browne. Despite Jonathan Swift's well-founded rancor towards him for the publication of misguided and naive plans to aid Ireland's poor, Browne seemed to take the criticism in stride. Oliver W. Ferguson explains, "his intentions were good, as he later demonstrated when he asked Swift, both in a pamphlet and in a personal letter, to amend whatever faults were in *Seasonable*

*Remarks* and another of his tracts” (146). Indeed, his commitment to addressing Ireland’s ills and his particular concern about the recent famine became apparent when in 1731 he published another pamphlet, *Reflections upon the Present unhappy Circumstances of Ireland. . . With a Proposal for Publick GRANARIES*. Addressed to the Archbishop of Cashel, the tract seeks to encourage the passage of laws that would direct the construction of granaries in Ireland. Browne confronts Ireland’s colonial status quite directly, opening the pamphlet with a very strongly-worded declaration of England’s reliance upon its various colonies: “[England] must have sunk. . . long ago into Poverty and Want, had not *Ireland*, and the rest of its Dependencies, fed and supported them with their Produce and their Money” (3). Browne’s declaration undermines British claims for its unique industry and progress based solely in its freedoms of liberty and property. In other words, it highlights the myth of improvement which was a central aspect of Britain’s self-image as well as a justification for its right to colonize. In fact, Browne goes on to characterize England as “a mighty Ocean, that swallows up all the Rivers of their [dependencies’] Wealth” (4). However, perhaps realizing that such an aggressive stance was not likely to produce a positive reception, Brown concludes that, because of England’s dependence, it should protect the financial well-being of its colonies. For if “reduced to Beggary,” they will not be “of Use,” but a “Burden and a Blemish” (4). As such passages demonstrate, Browne’s tract is an odd mixture of anti-colonial yet servile rhetoric that reflects the ambivalent position of Anglo-Irishmen in their quest to aid the Irish populace.

Nonetheless, Browne’s pamphlet follows from Swift’s writings in condemning the dysfunction of the Irish economy and the dire circumstances into which it regularly

plunges its inhabitants. The recent famine serves as the backdrop to Browne's sense of urgency about establishing granaries: "There are few, I believe, can forget the dreadful Famine which stared us in the Face, to whatever Part of this poor Island we turn'd ourselves three Years ago" (7). As horrific as the famine was, Browne explains, an even more bizarre paradox has arisen in which "there are as few who can be insensible of a Plenty, almost every way as hurtful, which at this very Instant covers the Land; and crushes us with its Weight" (7). Thus, he points out, "[w]e have. . . within a very little time, even within the compass of three Years, experienced the Miseries of an extream Poverty, and of extraordinary Plenty" (7). Here, Brown observes the phenomenon wherein the extreme fluctuations in the price of grain induce farmers to plow one year, leading to an overabundance, while the next year to starve, having lost everything or refusing to farm. The relationship between scarcity and plenty is also often contrary to the expected result since, during the famine, the high price of corn ensured that rents were paid "though Multitudes of the Poor perished for want" (7). Conversely, even with the enormous surplus that followed, it nonetheless "lies before . . . [the farmer] a useless and unprofitable Heap, and they cannot with all their Hoards even Purchase wherewith to save their Pots or their Blankets from the unmerciful Hearth-money Collectors" (7-8). Comparing Ireland's unstable agricultural economy with that of the Dutch and the English, Browne argues that their success in both dominating trade and sustaining their people arises from a centralized government which carefully monitors food availability and food prices through granaries or tillage laws. Reflecting the dominant image of the yeomanry as the stabilizing force of a socius, Browne depicts husbandmen as "the hardest

Labourer in the Commonwealth” (12). The task of government regulation is therefore to “take Care of the Farmers Interest” (12). There is an inherent contradiction here between the idea of the valiantly laboring farmer and the necessity of regulating prices in order to ensure the yeoman’s “reasonable Encouragement” (11). It anticipates Adam Smith’s economic rationality in its contention that “[p]rofit is the strongest, and perhaps the only inducement to Labor and Industry, and where Care is not taken . . . to secure that to the Husbandman. . .it is a Folly to expect his Application” (12). Unlike Smith, however, Browne sees government as an indispensable part of a successful economy because if the farmers are “left each of them to their own private guidance, [they] must be ever blind to the Future, and destroy each other for want of wholesome Regulations” (9). Furthermore, in outlining a specific blueprint for the erection of a granary system in Ireland, Browne emphasizes transparency, trust, and central authority as indispensable aspects of economic regulation. Browne also hints that these are the very obstacles, in addition to the “extream Poverty of the Country,” that stand in the way of such centralized authority (24, 25-29). Rather than resisting such a tax, Browne puts forth, the “People” will “Chearfully and Gladly” pay it “when they see, that instead of being apply’d as usually, to the Support of their petty Oppressors, it is put into a useful Channel, which in Return, must necessarily bring them Plenty and Riches” (26). Browne’s pamphlet marks his recognition and that of others that famine in Ireland was not an unavoidable event, nor was it prompted by idleness. Nevertheless, the warnings of Browne and others went unheeded.

## The Great Frost and *Blian an Áir* / the Year of the Slaughter

“*Fo liag sheaca [i] ngéibheann*  
[Bound under a frozen headstone]”  
(translation)

Bound under a frozen headstone  
Is the potato Ireland’s nourishment  
It can be said of it that it provides  
Two-thirds of the sustenance of the island of Ireland.

Now that a fierce winter has gripped every land  
And the soil in captivity under frost  
Snow is on every territory  
And all streams are turned to ice.

Though we have only the cold, food and drink  
Belong to the rich and clothes  
While the pauper lives in sorrow  
In cold, famine and hardship.

The starving pauper, alas in sorrow!  
Being most severely pierced by cold  
Who will relieve his want  
If not the prosperous wealthy one in mercy?

For the relief of the poor God gave  
Wealth to each powerful lord  
It is not right therefore that God’s gift  
is concealed under man’s darkness.

A hard heart resembles frost  
and its humanity in coldness of snow  
Charity never left  
The people of noble Ireland.

Tadhg Ó Neachtain (d. ca. 1752)<sup>12</sup>

Despite an array of texts which appeared during and after the height of the famine in 1729, it appears that nothing substantive was done to alter the economic conditions that had contributed to its onset. According to Kelly, Anglo-Irishmen like Swift and Archbishop King were aware of the slim “margins between sufficiency and scarcity, and

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<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in Ó Gráda and Ó Muirthe 59-60.

between scarcity and starvation” (“Swift and the Irish Economy” 9). They continued to address the precariousness of food supplies for the poor, knowing that it left Ireland prone to famine. At the same time, modern scholars have persisted in reading agricultural and political tracts of the time (from Swift to Dobbs) as prone to exaggeration in their representations of Ireland’s poverty. However, with the increasing attention paid to the famine of 1740-41, it has become clearer that these contemporary observers were correct in their assessment of the situation. Barely ten years after the famine Swift had witnessed, the country was struck by what has been variously called “the Great Frost” or *Bliain an Áir* (the Year of the Slaughter). Like the famine which preceded it, the proximate cause of the 1740 famine in Ireland and Europe at large was a weather event: a period of cold that resulted in a deep freeze, seven weeks long, beginning in December of 1739.

Although aged and suffering from both physical and mental ailments, Swift noted its terrible onslaught, recording that “it is now twenty-five days since we have found nothing but frost and misery” (*Corr.* V 176). The immediate effect of the frost was an increase in the price of coal in Dublin (Drake 104). This had enough of an impact on the poor in the capital and the surrounding towns to make it necessary for private charity to assist the poor through various means. In Dublin, Archbishop Boulter was credited with feeding the poor from his own money, while a donation from Swift himself was also recorded (Drake 105-6). Having already experienced a wet growing season the prior year, the frost itself and the continuing cold and dry weather into the summer and fall of 1740 resulted in severe shortages (Drake 107-112). Due perhaps to the ban on grain exports, which went into effect during January’s frost, grain prices held steady through the initial freeze

only to spike in May 1740, which resulted in bread riots in Dublin ( Drake 106, 113). Little abatement for the poor followed, with private charity their only means for relief (the extent of which is unknown due to a lack of records). While grain prices had fallen slightly in September, December saw the highest prices yet (Drake 114). This finally led the Privy Council to institute what Dickson describes as “the nearest thing to an active government response to the crisis” in the form of private grain confiscations (35). However, as both Post and Dickson indicate, these limited measures were short-sighted and wholly inadequate for the crisis at hand. Post explains that the paucity of aid in the countryside led the peasantry to travel toward urban centers in search of food (177). Cork in particular was swamped with beggars who died of both starvation and disease (Post 177). Vagrancy in turn increased the spread of disease. By the spring of 1741, epidemics of dysentery and typhus had intensified (Dickson 50-1). The lack of proper government intervention was then compounded by the policy of jailing itinerant beggars and debtors (Dickson 53, 56). “Dumping the vagrants in that creaking institution [the Workhouse] was grossly irresponsible,” because, as Dickson notes, “in the year beginning June 1741 more children died in the institution (700) than were actually admitted to it” (56). The wheat harvest of the summer of 1741 served to alleviate famine conditions, but contagious diseases continued to rage throughout 1741, keeping death rates high into 1742 (Post 34). All told, conservative estimates of the death toll indicate that somewhere between thirteen and twenty percent excess mortality took place—between 310,000 and 480,000 persons (Dickson 69). Even at its lower bound, in terms relative to population, this places the demographic toll of the 1740 famine as greater than that of the Great

Famine of 1845-49 (Dickson 72). What is striking about the 1740 famine is the much greater impact it had on Ireland (and Norway) than on its neighbor. Post contends that despite their virtually identical weather conditions and the presence of epidemics in both countries, “England experienced no more than moderate dearth, with only a slight increase in the scale of vagrancy” (25). In addition to England’s poor laws, Post sees the diversification of cereal crops as a significant factor in England’s ability to avoid famine. Grain prices followed similar trends in both countries, but only Ireland experienced extreme hunger as a result. Post argues that the ability of the peasantry to “shift . . . demand to lower-priced foods” during times of scarcity insulated them from famine (Post 123-4). In Ireland, the devastation of the potato by the frost combined with its increasing importance to the diet of the poor meant that there was no less-expensive staple on which the cottiers could afford to subsist (Post 124-5). Furthermore, the paucity of potatoes drove up the prices of other grains like oats, exacerbating the plight of the poor (Post 125). “The mortality crisis,” Post underscores, “was rooted more in the inadequate welfare and relief measures than in absolute per capita shortage of food. . . The Irish demographic catastrophe would be repeated in the 1840s, again largely as a result of inadequate welfare resources and programs” (177).

This interpretation of the events of the 1740s is also reflected in Tadhg Ó Neachtain’s poem “Bound under a frozen headstone” in the epigraph above, which claims that “two-thirds” of Ireland subsists on the root. For Ó Neachtain, the corpse of the potato presages the deaths of those who subsist upon it. Yet, while Ó Neachtain identifies a “fierce winter” as a harbinger of this suffering, it is the “pauper [who] lives in



sorrow/ In cold, famine and hardship” while the rich are potentially “hard heart[ed]” if they fail in their duty, since it is for “the relief of the poor [that] God gave/ Wealth to each powerful lord.”

Just as Ó Neachtain’s poem calls for a societal response to the 1740 famine, Philip Skelton’s *The Necessity of Tillage and Granaries* (1741) likewise seeks to address famine as a persistent problem for Ireland. A clergyman of Irish Protestant extraction, Skelton had emerged from humble beginnings. His biographer, Samuel Burdy, would later note Skelton’s constant attention to the poor (whom Burdy notably describes as both Catholic and Protestant) through several other famines which followed in 1757, 1773, 1778 and 1782 (Burdy lxxx-lxxxiv, civ-cxv, cxxv, cxlii). At the time of the Great Frost and the publication of his tract, Skelton was a relatively young man who had yet to be assigned his own parish. While addressed to a member of the Irish parliament as a text concerned with the improvement of agriculture, *The Necessity of Tillage and Granaries* is also self-consciously foregrounded by the current famine. Skelton is careful to appeal, as with other texts of its kind, to “both the encrease of. . .private fortune, and the welfare of [the]. . .country” (3). Its primary aim is to demonstrate the advantages to be gained by arable over animal husbandry, a case which it makes by recourse to a specific accounting of each (4-18). Ultimately however, Skelton admits that the landlords must choose tillage not simply because it can be profitable, but because it would be immoral to do otherwise. He reminds the gentleman that his “country is in a distressed, and almost desperate condition” from “[t]he late famine and pestilence, that have lain so long and heavily on us” (36). He proclaims the famine to be too vivid in their minds “to need a

verbal representation of what exceeds all description” (36). The costs of the Great Frost are such that Skelton declares them to be “every whit as destructive” as wars and plagues, which are normally given more historical weight. As proof, Skelton notes that some have made the claim “perhaps not without reason” that the death toll of the famine had eclipsed that of the Rebellion of 1641 with “[w]hole parishes hav[ing]. . .[been,] in some places[.]. . . almost desolated; and the dead hav[ing] been eaten in the fields by dogs, for want of people to bury them” (36). Even more importantly, Skelton’s text testifies to the recurrent nature of famine during this period in Ireland. “Now Sir, you know this is no new thing with us,” he observes to his reader; “We saw the same in 28 and 29, and since that have once or twice felt it in a lower degree” (37). The problem of famine is such that, for Skelton, “daubing and patching up evils of this kind with late, and ineffectual Alms is a poor, desperate necessitous expedient,” representing a failure to address the underlying issues (37). Thus, the tragedy of the Great Frost is not that Ireland has been visited by an unprecedented natural disaster but that, according to Skelton, its predictable circumstances have never been provided against. He questions,

Are we never to think of preventing them? Are not the lives of so many people worth saving? Are they not our countrymen, our tenants, our flesh and blood? Shall we idly wish a remedy for such general calamities only while they continue to afflict or frighten us, but as soon as ever they abate, never once think of providing against them for the future? (37)

Skelton’s emotional appeal marks his belief in the link between economic well-being and communal responsibility. His designation of this community proceeds from the most general ties of “countrymen” to the more specific ones between a landlord and his tenants, and finally includes the most intimate tie of “flesh and blood.” It is possible to

read this in its narrowest sense as including only Anglo-Irish tenants; yet, Skelton has already specifically addressed his text to a gentleman in the south of Ireland; furthermore, Skelton's repeated concern for the practices of the gentleman's Catholic tenants suggests that Skelton means "our countrymen" in a much more general and inclusive sense. Skelton elsewhere demonstrates his own misgivings about the possibility of fully integrating the Catholic tenancy, but it is nevertheless true that he, like Swift, views the cultivation of communal identity as central to addressing famine.

Skelton also advocates several specific agricultural reforms as key to preventing future scarcities. In addition to increasing arable output, he sees the regulation of the grain market the key to avoiding its dangerous fluctuations (40). However, unlike Browne, whose naivety Swift had declaimed, Skelton has no faith in the ability of the government to establish granaries. Besides the improbability of raising the necessary funds, public granaries are problematic for Skelton because he is convinced that the money would simply be "jobbed away" while the "poor or the public would never be better for it" (41). He argues that granaries should be run by private holders because their inducement to profit and their desire to "preserve their estates from desolation" would ensure their proper workings (41). At the same time, Skelton does not place an unbounded trust in (what would later be known as) free market policies, for he mentions that "proprietors of such Granaries may in time turn the most oppressive forestallers" (41). In times of scarcity, Skelton believes that parliamentary laws can moderate prices. Skelton's preference for private granaries is conditioned both by the context of the tract,

which appeals to the class of gentlemen he praises here, and by the experiences of the past, which demonstrated the Irish government's incompetence in providing for the poor.

Internal problems are the main targets of Skelton's frustration and those which he sees as the source of persistent scarcity in Ireland. For Skelton, Ireland's economy is unbalanced, represented by various extremes from the large profits of graziers to the abject poverty (and idleness) of the poor. Due to the fact that *The Necessity of Tillage and Granaries* was addressed to a gentleman, the issue of landlord abuses as well as the profits of graziers had to be approached more delicately. Still, Skelton contends that grazing is detrimental to the public because he believes that a commercial economy develops alongside tillage rather than animal husbandry. Having made this point, Skelton disparages graziers: "[t]hus it appears how grazers come to make so great fortunes, and at whose expence; and how farming comes to be despised, because no body makes an overgrown fortune by it in a few years" (61-2). But graziers are only part of Ireland's ailments; the poor, especially the "natives," bear the remainder of the responsibility for Skelton. Like Swift, Skelton has contempt for "strolling beggars," whom he associates with "the nursery and academy of thieves" (43). However, Skelton's perspective is also colored by his roots in the northern counties. The gentleman he addresses is a resident of the southern counties, which Skelton views as almost entirely distinct, both culturally and economically, from those of the north. Skelton sees the north as populated with Protestants whose habits of industry encourage them to take up domestic manufactures even after the demands of the harvest and their family's subsistence have been met (52). Munster and Connaught, on the other hand, are seen as completely absent of tillage and

thereby full of (Catholic) natives whose “idle hands. . .do little more than carry the fruits of other people’s labours to their mouths” (43). Of course, this viewpoint also informs his understanding of famine in Ireland since he perceives the natives as a burden on an otherwise self-sufficient Protestant population. “It is amazing that a kingdom can at all subsist,” Skelton exclaims, “in which the few industrious people have such crowds of idlers to maintain, who hang like a dead weight upon all kinds of industry and trade” (43). Nonetheless, Skelton’s vehemence is frequently modulated by his acknowledgement that larger factors condition the poverty of the native Irish. In the same breath, Skelton decries “fifty thousand of them rambling” and their consumption of “a sixth part of the national taxes” only to abruptly change course: “But be that as it will, these wretches are at first set a going by a real want of bread, in bad seasons, during which time, idleness, rambling, and impudence become. . .habitual to them” (44). Emphasizing that this is an issue of economy and not identity, Skelton explains that “Tillage and Granaries would prevent those famines, that always break so many poor families, and turn them out to the road” (44).<sup>13</sup> Skelton’s text demonstrates a much more conflicted view about the source of Ireland’s economic disturbances than those of Swift. While Skelton understands Ireland’s famines as the result of structural problems, his less systematic approach, coupled with his focus on the Irish economy as a discrete entity, ensures that religious and cultural identity play a greater role in his analysis.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, he follows this rather sympathetic assessment with the idea “to seize on all young and lusty beggars,. . .and compel them with the horse-whip and cudgel to work for meat, without wages” (44).

Whereas Swift regularly framed Ireland's economy in terms of its dependence on Britain, Skelton generally credits England with underpinning the Anglo-Irish Establishment. He is inclined to prize Protestant Ireland's cultural ties with Britain, which in turn obscures Ireland's subordination. Yet, despite Skelton's efforts to protect this relationship, when he turns to economic concerns, he is forced to admit that Britain's gains are often Ireland's losses. He states, "the *English* generally prefer Tillage; and use *Ireland* as a stock farm to furnish beef and butter for their shipping" (30). In this moment, Skelton comes closer to Swift's analysis in recognizing that Ireland's economy is subordinated to British demands. Still, Irish dependency does not greatly inform Skelton's discussion of its agricultural economy, and, for this reason, Skelton must look elsewhere for underlying causes of economic instability. Without recourse to the structural inequalities introduced by Ireland's colonization or the acknowledgement of Catholic disenfranchisement, Skelton turns to cultural factors to explain these imbalances. To a much greater extent than Swift then, Skelton embraces the logic of improvement which links culture and economics. The Irish can be improved, Skelton argues, by following the example of their Protestant neighbors: "The natives wou'd, in time, fall into agriculture, and wou'd acquire possessions in houses, lands, goods, and grain, which being permanent things, wou'd be a security for their loyalty and good behaviour" (49). Although participating in an assimilationist narrative, Skelton's belief in native Irish improvement demonstrates that he believes in the possibility of an inclusionary vision of community. Neither religious nor biological, Skelton's notion of identity is formed through habits and shaped in reaction to larger societal, although not

necessarily colonial, forces. Even when he drifts towards more rigid ideas about identity, he unwittingly points to the role of social structure. For example, having contended that British farmers should be invited to plant the southern counties, Skelton admits that this scheme has proved to be a failure in the past. He attributes their lack of success to the fact that such immigrants were in “low circumstances” without much stock and that “by the time they had enclosed their grounds, built, &c. they had nothing left to carry on the intended Tillage” (33). The failure of such plantations, Skelton avers, was due to neglectful landlords who needed to take on the expense of enclosing land and building housing. Skelton credits the patience and assistance of wealthy landowners in the north with the success of Protestant farmers: “No design of this nature can be accomplished without some pains and perseverance. A plantation. . . must be nursed in its infancy by those who have sway and interest in the country” (35). Unfortunately, Skelton does not connect this insight with the status of Catholic tenant farmers, but he does elsewhere assert that “[i]f some pains were taken with the native *Irish*, I believe they might be reclaimed. . . They might by reason and in a good-natured way be won to industry, which would produce wealth, and wealth contentment” (34). In these sentiments, Skelton echoes the rhetoric of improvement that had characterized the mentality of English planters since their settlement over a hundred years prior. What has shifted in the writings of Swift and Skelton, and in that of other Anglo-Irishmen, is a greater identification with Ireland as a distinct cultural and economic space. This gradual adjustment served to highlight both Ireland’s subordinate status as well as the distress of the Irish, especially Catholic, poor. As the Anglo-Irish sense of communal identity

shifted away from England and towards Ireland, the “problem” of poor Irish Catholics came into sharper focus, particularly as the spectacle of famine seemed to lurk continually on the horizon. Skelton emphasizes these points at the close of his tract, calling on the gentleman he addresses and the whole of the Ascendancy to “find a profitable employment for a poor unhappy people, hitherto useless, distressed, and starved. We have a great number of people, but they do nothing; and a most fruitful soil, but it bears only grass. Our people die by thousands for meer want of bread, on one of the richest soils in the world” (88). Skelton’s concern here for the “poor unhappy people” is one undoubtedly directed at the entirety of Ireland’s underclass. Although ambivalent about their role, Skelton nevertheless recognizes Irish Catholics as members of a society that must grapple with notions of responsibility and identity in order to cure Ireland of its economic ailments. Thus Skelton ends with an entreaty to the gentleman to “defend . . . your country from the terrible calamities of famine and pestilence” (64).

This chapter has been concerned with the ways in which contemporaries responded to the events of famine in eighteenth-century Ireland. While recent historical scholarship has succeeded in drawing attention to their importance, it is only by reading the commentary of the witnesses of the 1720s and 1740s that we can begin to understand the distinct ways in which famine was framed during this period. David Arnold has pointed to the shifting meaning of scarcity in Western culture. He argues that prior to the widespread capitalization of agriculture and the dominance over nature that it came to represent, famine and natural events more generally were seen in Christian terms as heavenly signs and omens (16). Arnold explains that “the involvement of the elements . .



. seemed to place causation beyond human reach and to provide sober confirmation of man's subordination to god and nature" (15-16). It is interesting to note, then, that in the views of Swift and Skelton, Ireland's famines had no discernible relationship to their religious outlooks. In fact, Swift often inverts the equation of famine with God's punishment or subordination when he describes the paradox of Ireland's verdant landscape amidst scarcity. Ireland exists in a state of "postlapsarian starvation" or as a "devastated garden" because of human activity or lack thereof (Fabricant 75, 76). Famine for Swift results from human folly, not divine anger. It is precisely this idea of systemic failure, of social ill, which pervades Anglo-Irish writing on famine and agriculture during this period. This is a distinctly different view from that which was propounded one hundred years later by British observers of the Great Famine. The logic of economic rationality had become so central to the colonial outlook at this later date that famine could only be seen as a failing on the part of the victims rather than as an outcome of capitalism itself. David Lloyd contends that the

[Great] Famine is. . .an instance of the profound violence of discursive formations that render the subject invisible . . .It represents a violence that appears as passive, as the consequence, notoriously, of the application of contemporary laissez-faire principles, but which is, in effect, the outcome of a consistent pattern of governmental intervention regulated by political economic theories. . .The Famine has. . .a terrifying rationality, grasped as it must be not as a disastrous accident. . .but as a moment and a conjuncture of discourses and forces that are continuous with a far longer historical logic. (*Irish Times* 47)

It is only by attending to these shifting figurations of famine that its modern iterations can be pried loose from their claims to represent an objective phenomenon. For the crises of the 1720s and 1740s were not seen through the same lens as that of the Great Famine.

Swift and Skelton both make clear that starvation was viewed as a sign of irrationality, an indication of a diseased body politic. Their calls for attention to public welfare, addressed to both the Irish government and the Anglo-Irish gentry, are not surprising given their roles as Anglican clergymen and their emerging consciousness of the Irish “nation,” however fraught a concept. Their complex reactions to Catholic Irish poverty register an ideological clash between the Christian duty of communal responsibility and the narrative of economic rationality that had begun to link prosperity with intrinsic personal qualities. Both Swift and Skelton can oscillate between these conflicting models, denouncing beggars or the idle natives, or contextualizing their economic and political subordination. In the end, though, famine represented systemic failure to many Anglo-Irish commentators. Whether seen as a breakdown in properly improving the native Irish or in rationalizing Irish agriculture, the idea of famine as a systemic failure presumed some degree of social responsibility for even those most marginalized in Ireland. In contrast, as Lloyd argues, the Great Famine would, for many, represent the triumph of political economy, a vindication of its purportedly scientific laws (*Irish Times* 47-9). Famine in this view could not be a breakdown of an infallible economic system; rather it represented the failure of its victims. The transparency of capitalist logic by the nineteenth century succeeded in placing the political and economic subordination of the Catholic Irish under erasure, connecting their ongoing poverty to their identity and thereby absolving both Anglo-Irish society and British colonization from responsibility.

## The Edgeworths, Imperial Pedagogy and the Inculcation of (Economic) Virtue

A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away at the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more; and on the soft fibres of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest Empires  
~ (Servan 35; qtd. in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 102-3)

This chapter seeks to interrogate the Edgeworths' role as self-described reformers of Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century. It takes seriously the contention of Clíona Ó Gallchoir, Marilyn Butler and others that "the Edgeworths were regarded as reformers and radicals of rather old provenance and with an internationalist rather than a nationalist agenda" and seeks to situate their drive for reform in terms of larger trends of the early-nineteenth century ("The United Irishmen" 47). The Edgeworths' concern with reform in Ireland encompassed wide-ranging projects from their support for the education of Irish children regardless of religion to the development of Ireland's commercial and technological infrastructure to the economic acculturation of the Irish peasantry. However, in spite of the localized nature of their efforts, the Edgeworths did not envision themselves as carrying out singular projects affecting only their small outpost in the British Empire. As their writings demonstrate, the Edgeworths, both father and daughter, were well-connected with metropolitan thinkers and participants in reform. While Richard Lovell Edgeworth participated in the Lunar Group, Maria Edgeworth corresponded with some of the most important figures of the day like not only Sir Walter Scott, but also Etienne Dumont, Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk, and even David Ricardo; the Edgeworths were extremely conscious of diverse attempts to mold the British Empire. The Edgeworths' particular engagement with reform demonstrates that it was an idea that

circulated throughout the British Empire, emerging out of both a colonial context as well as metropolitan thought.

In a broader sense, then, the chapter will be engaging simultaneously with questions about the nature of what has been termed liberalism and its connection to imperialism at the turn of the nineteenth century. This is a topic that has excited a great deal of conversation of late, much of which provides an invaluable backdrop to this examination of the Edgeworths.<sup>1</sup> Liberalism will be discussed here more specifically as a discourse in which aid, assistance, or, as Richard Drayton terms it, “amelioration” (92) was increasingly mobilized as a rationale for British intervention. While some genealogies of early liberalism have focused on its cultural, philosophical, or proto-racializing elements, this chapter will look at the language of political economy as one of the primary lenses through which the British assessed such societies. The argument here is that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the language of political economy had ascended to such importance in the British imaginary that it was naturalized as *the* objective measure of progress and civilization. While other types of scientific discourse were continuing to emerge and to present themselves as authoritative models for seeing the world, this chapter argues that political economy functioned for the British as a virtually transparent way of encountering other cultures. Political economy’s entrenchment in this period pre-dating the full-scale emergence of scientific racism is historically conditioned by England’s perception of itself as having mastered agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Uday Singh Mehta’s *Liberalism and Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 1999; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005) and Andrew Sartori, “The British Empire and Its Liberal Mission” in *The Journal of Modern History*. 78:3 (Sept 2006): 623-642 for the central outline of such discussions.

rationality and thus achieving a unique and preeminent modernity. Indeed, it was this aspect of England and later Britain's self-fashioning which allowed economics to be named as such and to be seen as a marker of progress itself. Political arithmetic, as William Petty termed it, and related discourses of progress such as stadial theories thus became the dominant way in which Britain perceived its singularity. Difference during the eighteenth century was largely filtered through this lens.

Furthermore, the chapter points toward agricultural rationality, in particular, as grounding Britain's civilizational models since it was believed that its early mastery launched and uniquely qualified Britain's outward gaze. By the early nineteenth-century, Britain believed that it had perfected agriculture to such a degree that, as a civilization, it was no longer constrained by the immediate necessities of life. In other words, rationalized agriculture had come to symbolize both one of the great achievements of British culture and the minimum standard by which a "cultivated" society should be measured. So foundational was this achievement imagined to be that English modes of agriculture ceased to be recognized as a specific constellation of culturally-conditioned practices; through rationalized agriculture, it was believed, nature's bonds had been transcended, freeing Britain for new frontiers of improvement. Those societies which lacked English agriculture, and therefore English economics, were relegated to a pre-cultural moment in which it was envisioned that only base needs could be satisfied; progress in this scenario was foreclosed. Thus, rationalized agriculture could be seen by liberals of the early nineteenth century as the gift of civilization which it generously offered through the reach of Empire.

The Edgeworths present a particularly interesting case study in the logic of economic progress and its espousal by supporters of Britain's growing empire. As recently as fifteen years ago, it was commonplace to lament that Maria Edgeworth was a "neglected figure" in both English and Anglo-Irish literature and particularly as a woman writer of wide popularity (Hollingsworth 1; Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth* especially 2-17). Even as scholarship about her work has become increasingly more visible, there is some concern that considerations of her *oeuvre* have resulted in rather fragmented perspectives: dividing her writings on England from those on Ireland; assuming the "masculine" influence of her father in some texts while citing others as taking place in a predominantly "feminine" framework; or ignoring her pedagogical work in favor of her fictional. Here, the chapter will attempt to bridge some of these competing images of her work by pointing to her common vision of "improvement" particularly in its guise as a powerful pedagogical instrument which could successfully integrate those of the lower orders (both within Britain and without) into the (economic) socius of Empire.

Here, the Edgeworths' concern with the relation of the Irish peasantry to capitalized economics will be highlighted as fundamentally underlying and uniting these other perceived aspects of Irish identity. Similarly, the chapter will suggest that the Edgeworths' pedagogical philosophies are interconnected with their thinking about (economic) improvement. Indeed, the Edgeworths' pedagogical model, which claims that education is capable of an extensive (re)making of the individual, not only parallels their broader ideas about the reform of the peasantry, but is explicitly discussed as part of such a project. Their concerns with agricultural improvement thus married the Edgeworths'

educational philosophies together with their concern for the economic marginalization of the Irish peasantry.

### **Liberalism and Empire**

While Uday Singh Mehta has convincingly argued that “the world we live in is substantially molded by the triumph of a liberalism with its rationalistic certainties” and that the “sympathy” advocated by Edmund Burke could serve as a welcome antidote to such tendencies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has pointed to a certain “benevolence” as co-existing alongside (Western) rationalism. Mehta similarly gestures elsewhere towards “reform” as an “impulse to better the world” toward “liberal conceptions of freedom, equality, and human dignity” (80, 18). The difficulty of resolving these seemingly contradictory ideas lies in the received idea of “rationalism” as something dry, logical, and technicist. In forming this image of rationalism, there is a risk of reducing the concept to something overly pragmatic and instrumental. Focusing on rationalism and its various scientific and philosophical discourses has the potential to lead to the identification of the “bad actors” of imperialism who might be more readily identified as monstrously technical, or at least monstrously boring, in comparison to other supposedly “good actors.” In fact, this tendency can be seen in some representations of Maria Edgeworth’s writing as overly didactic. Her ideology is seemingly apparent in such a reading because of the “obvious” mobilization of her theories of pedagogy or Anglicization. Not only does this reading of Edgeworth fail to account for her enormous popularity, but it ignores the fact that the “common sense” of one age can easily be

viewed as the “rationalist” or technical of another. Herein lies the necessity of Spivak’s attention to “benevolence.”

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak suggests that “the ethics of reading...takes the study of the self-consolidating other. . .on board and risks noticing that to stop at accusing the equally self-consolidating essentialized Colonizer or Imperialist is to legitimize colonialism/imperialism by reversal” (95 n. 131). In other words, by constructing an image of the Bad Colonizer, the ethical reader focuses on the individual actor who is “not us” for the purpose of the supposed exorcism of such a historically bad actor while allowing the systemic ideology of imperialism’s operation to continue unquestioned. Such a reading of imperialism supposes that ideology acts only in an easily recognizable and easily condemned figure. (It also allows the reader to abdicate responsibility in constructing such a self-consolidating Colonizer.) In critiquing the benevolent figure (of both history and contemporary scholarship), Spivak argues that such a figure can be working in support of colonial reason despite an ethical aura. Furthermore, by acknowledging the role of the benevolent imperialist, it becomes possible to read the logic of colonization as simultaneously violent and mundane. In some ways, this distributive notion of imperial ideology parallels Michel Foucault’s account of power within metropolitan spaces through a recognition of ideology’s productive as well as coercive reach. Spivak emphasizes as much when she notes that *pouvoir* does not have an adequate English translation which captures Foucault’s productive sense of power/knowledge:



But there is also a sense of ‘can-do’-ness in ‘*pouvoir*,’ . . . it is the commonest way of saying ‘can’ in the French language. . . Power as productive rather than merely repressive resolves itself in a certain way if you don’t forget the ordinary sense of *pouvoir/savoir*. Repression is then seen as a species of production. There is no need to valorize repression as negative and production as positive. (*Spivak Reader*, hereafter SR, 150-1; *Outside* 34-5)

Here, Spivak is suggesting that power’s effects cannot be delimited by the binaries negative/positive or repression/production; while such terms can serve as a schematic for its operations, they cannot be allowed to calcify one’s understanding of power’s functioning. She further explains, “there are terminals of resistance inscribed *under* the level of the tactics” and that “terminals of resistance [are]. . . possibilities for reflexes of mind and activity” (SR 151; *Outside* 35). Power, even of the repressive variety, can be productive of effects, however small or even unconscious, that have the possibility of evading its reach. Despite power’s heterogenous effects, Spivak cautions that such a reading cannot act to excuse or negate imperialism. She terms the productive effects of imperialism an “enabling violation” or “a rape that produces a healthy child, whose existence cannot be advanced as a justification for the rape” (*Critique* 371). She stresses “imperialism cannot be justified by the fact that India has railways and I speak English well” (*Critique* 371). In terms of imperial power, then, Spivak’s attention to benevolence results in a complex strategy of reading which insists that because of the heterogeneity of ideology, studies of colonial history must account for the role of the civilizing mission while also acknowledging that such a mission was framed by the Enlightenment’s concern with “man’s” natural rights. As riven as such rights have proven to be, they are nonetheless indispensable. This is an acknowledgement of the seductive quality of Enlightenment endowments of the human; they are “eminently desirable” and, indeed,

the basis of civil society and social justice, but they also encode an insidious and violent rationalist logic (*Outside* 236). It is this strategy of attending to the poisoned gift of liberal imperialism that Spivak terms “deconstruction” or “among other things, a persistent critique of what one cannot not want” (*SR* 28).

### **The Pedagogy of Economic Rationalism**

It is in the field of education that the Edgeworths’ liberal views have been most often noted. *Practical Education*, the joint project of Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, was the product of closely followed empirical methodology applied to the education of the younger Edgeworth children. Mona Narain has described the text as being “very well received” and with providing a “practical intervention” into the educational debates of the period (57). Following Marilyn Butler, Narain notes the educational philosophies of Francis Bacon, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hartley and Joseph Priestley as influences on the text. There has been a fair amount of discussion about which philosopher’s ideas provided the framework of the text, with the main contenders being Locke and Rousseau. Butler had already pointed out that RL Edgeworth’s early subscription to Rousseau’s views on education were not well-represented by Maria’s profligate brother (*Maria Edgeworth* 50-1; 99-100; 106-7). Consequently, RLE and his second wife turned towards a more experimental view of pedagogy which, it has been suggested, was indebted to Locke’s theories of education. Their method was “based essentially on a simple focused dialogue—initially between an individual adult and a child, but in Edgeworth’s subsequent writing importantly between

one child and another” (Butler, “Irish Culture” 161). While RLE was the credited author, Butler and others have argued that Maria Edgeworth wrote or edited a large portion of the text itself with some chapters being authored by her father (*Maria Edgeworth* 169).

When *Practical Education* was published in 1798, it not only marked Maria Edgeworth as a “progressive educator,” but it in large part established her public persona (Narain 58). Regardless of its specific influences, *Practical Education* is distinctly marked by its embrace of Enlightenment ideas arguing for a “child-centered. . . approach” that “saw the young child from four to six or eight as naturally curious: an observer, experimenter, or budding philosopher” (Butler, “Irish Culture” 162). *Practical Education* was considered innovative for both its methods and for its explicit support for the equal education of girls and boys. Some critics denounced *Practical Education* for its failure to include ideas about religious education, an exclusion that had subversive potential in the post-Revolution period. Of course, the Edgeworths’ choice to leave the religious portion of education up to individual spiritual leaders was a direct response to their experiences in Ireland, where religion remained a complex and sensitive subject. Their insistence on avoiding religious education served as a practical solution to one of the largest stumbling blocks to universal education in Ireland. Indeed, even with the eventual implementation of non-sectarian universal education in the 1830s, the issue of religious instruction was one of the main impediments it had to overcome.

For feminist scholars interested in Maria Edgeworth, her pedagogical work seems to provide something of a conundrum since several have disputed the idea that her connection to education points to her domestic containment (Ó Gallchoir, *Maria*

*Edgeworth* 10-17, 32-34; Narain 61, 65-9; Myers, “Erotics” 3-5). They seek to debunk the idea of “separate spheres” in the eighteenth century, which views a woman’s private persona as divided from and limited by that of her public (Narain 57-8; Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth* 11, 34). In its stead, they put forth the view that Maria Edgeworth saw education as an inherently political act since she envisioned the individual as both reflective and constitutive of society. Edgeworth believed that “early subjectivity could not be appropriately constructed without the mirroring of familial and communal approval” (Narain 61). “As an educator,” Narain contends, “Maria Edgeworth was deeply concerned with the moral and ethical implications of the divide between public and private.” (69). This concern resulted from her belief that “pedagogy, literature, and reading. . .served as powerful tools to disrupt and construct subjectivity” and that these tools were “of deep import to national and cultural identity and thus of immense public concern” (69). Taken at face value, such arguments can be seen as productive, disrupting Edgeworth’s inscription in a domestic, apolitical space. These perspectives on Edgeworth’s pedagogy also suggest her awareness of the ideological role of the family as situated within, rather than opposed to, the larger *socius*.

It is important to avoid ignoring or actively reinscribing other forms of marginality while seeking to re-center studies of Edgeworth and pedagogy. For instance, the estate may have represented an ideal space, for Edgeworth: “neither fully private nor fully public, neither exclusively male nor exclusively female. . .where men and women could exercise socially useful roles and communicate freely with one another” (Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth* 11). However, such an idealized space constitutes a

bracketing of class and race in the interest of gender equality. The space of the estate is inextricably cross-hatched by all of these power relationships which means that it is not possible to read it “less in terms of her ethnic and class position as a member of an Anglo-Irish landowning family, and more in terms of her resistance, as an educated and intellectually powerful woman, to the . . . domestic sphere” (Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth* 11). Furthermore, in the constellation of her idealized space of the estate Edgeworth’s role as a powerful, Anglo-Irish landlady may be highlighted, but this particular formulation simultaneously erases any trace of the native woman for whom the estate is not a space of free communication. The problem with this mode of discussing Edgeworth as a woman writer is that it extracts the category “woman” wholesale without any qualifiers; this process not only essentializes women, but it uses the name “woman” as a stand in for an unspoken Anglo-Irish bourgeois femininity without acknowledgement. Feminist readings of Edgeworth and of Irish texts more generally have the ability to highlight discourses of exclusion without extracting one “category” at a time, indicating the ways in which these exclusions function interdependently.

If Maria Edgeworth’s understanding of pedagogy was one which cut across the domains of the private and the public, recognizing the importance of the individual in the constitution of a (capitalized Western) society, it must follow that she herself saw that education served an ideological purpose. In fact, here, it will be argued that her writings often go beyond a discussion of bourgeois education in proposing a specific type of pedagogy for the Irish peasantry as well as other marginalized figures. Agriculture was particularly important to her views on the education of the Irish peasantry since its very

practice was seen to inculcate habits and values conducive to capitalized norms. The Edgeworths, as seen below in Richard Lovell Edgeworth's correspondence, saw agricultural pedagogy as a means of breaking down the marginalization of the peasantry. While it is clear that their belief in universal education for the Irish peasantry was controversial and even perhaps "radical" for the years following both the French Revolution and the Rebellion of 1798, it is nonetheless the case that the Edgeworths viewed the marginalization of a disaffected Irish peasantry as one of the most important dangers to their positions as well as to their persons. The Edgeworths viewed education, both in and out of the classroom, as a means of shaping the proper colonial subject.

Marilyn Butler has contended that the Edgeworths' educational philosophies were derived in part from Adam Smith. Butler is following Emma Rothschild's purpose, here, in recuperating an image of Smith as a liberal by debunking the idea that his views are indicative of "'cold' economic thought—utilitarian, materialist, rationalist, determinist" (Rothschild 208). Similarly, Butler sees the Edgeworths as propounding liberal or even "'left-liberal'" pedagogical theory "which implicitly views the poor child as a citizen, but more obviously and strikingly as an individual" ("Irish Culture" 164). Both Rothschild and Butler overreach here in reading their respective writers as champions of the proletariat and the colonized. Despite his disdain for the intrusion of ecclesiastical authority into education, Smith was nonetheless concerned with the proper integration of the working classes within the state (*The Wealth of Nations* 846). While concerned to a surprising extent about the development of working class intelligence, education for Smith more importantly serves to bond together the citizens of a country since "[the

inferior ranks of people] feel themselves, each individually more respectable, and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors, and they are therefore more disposed to respect their superiors” (*WoN* 846). It is true that Smith acknowledged the violent and distorting impact of some forms of labor on the working class, but Smith’s main focus is on the impact that the individual’s intellectual deformity has on his relationship to the state. He decries the loss not only of conversation and sentiment, but the working man’s loss of judgment as to “great and extensive interests of his country” and his inability “of defending his country in war” since the “irregular” life of a soldier can no longer be tolerated (*WoN* 840).

If, then, it is possible to trace Adam Smith’s impact on the Edgeworths’ theories of pedagogy, it can be seen most clearly in their interest in education as a bonding and civilizing agent. This is not to suggest that their concern with the education of their society’s least fortunate members was not considered subversive. As Smith indicates, the working classes of the metropolis were not necessarily considered its most loyal citizens; education was seen as potentially aggravating the situation by allowing working people access to seditious information. In Ireland, the scenario was even more complicated by the Irish peasantry’s disenfranchisement and their view, of which the Anglo-Irish were aware, that the Anglo-Irish were usurpers. Here again, education could be viewed as wantonly reckless, particularly in the aftermath of 1798. Yet both Smith and the Edgeworths perceived pedagogy as a solution to the problem of disaffection rather than as an emancipatory tool for the marginalized. In fact, by attending to the Edgeworths’ engagement with the Scottish Enlightenment, from Adam Smith to Dugald Stewart, it is

possible to glimpse the implicit relationship between the “cultural” (encompassing not only an emergent sense of national identity, but also things like habit, productivity and the like) and the economic. The remainder of this chapter will form an elaboration of the idea that pedagogy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was increasingly focused on the development of habits which were conducive to economic progress. While it is more common to view these issues from the perspective of mid-nineteenth century colonial ideology, the chapter contends that this earlier period is significant because the link between habits and economic rationality had not been fully worked out. The concern with habit witnesses a struggle to understand what would later become “identity.” For the Edgeworths, pedagogy was a way of re-training one’s habits; they were deeply skeptical about the role of nature in shaping identity. That a person could be shaped primarily by education was a “liberal” idea which challenged the aristocratic mindset of birth. At the same time, pedagogy became, for the Edgeworths, a way of remaking the world in their own image.

Pedagogy plays an increasingly apparent role in the colonial (and indeed metropolitan) imaginary throughout the nineteenth century. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education” (1835) makes explicit what Mehta terms “imperial pedagogy” or that “which relentlessly attempts to align or educate the regnant forms of the unfamiliar with its own expectations” (15, 18). The creation of Catherine Hall’s “civilized subjects” in the periphery is inevitably part of the teleology of development which viewed colonized people as “behind” in both economic and civilizational terms, terms which were not necessarily distinct. For liberalism, the project



of colonization was demanded by the “lag” of other cultures which Mehta calls the “*not yet*” of imperialism and which Spivak terms the “alibi” of empire (Mehta 30). Mehta usefully describes liberal imperialism in terms of a child/parent relationship, one which resonates deeply with the Edgeworths’ views of pedagogy and is also suggestive of their own relationship: “The child/deviant, whose difference threatens the legitimacy of the father by placing a limit on the reach of his authority by straining his understanding, must therefore be assimilated in a power that ‘knows’ or offers a progressive future in which the ambivalence of ‘not-being-one-of-us’ and being ‘one-of-us’ will assuredly get resolved” (33). As Mehta’s description implies, there is a certain, often unacknowledged, power dynamic at work in the parent/child, teacher/student relationship which is further complicated by its application to colonized peoples and spaces. If the ideal pedagogical relationship can be figured, in Spivak’s terms, as “an attempt at uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (*Other Asias* 20), how can we view that which the Edgeworths, as liberal imperialists, aim to establish with various native peoples of the British Empire?

### **Professional Education and the Politics and Economics of the Landed Gentry**

While *Practical Education* (1798) has been taken up by contemporary scholars for its innovative methods and progressive views of both self-improvement and gendered learning, *Essays on Professional Education*, published in 1809, has received significantly less interest. Its overtly “masculine” subject-matter may suggest the reasons that the text’s authorship remains a somewhat murky question; it would have been considered unusual or even improper for Maria Edgeworth to be listed as author. Several scholars

have claimed that she wrote *Professional Education*,<sup>2</sup> but it appeared in print with Richard Lovell Edgeworth as its sole author. The text has a distinctly political orientation, which is indicated by Richard Lovell Edgeworth's signed dedication to Earl Spencer, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer who served as Home Secretary at the time of its publication. Of further interest is the inconsistency of the Edgeworths' audience as well as their own national identifications. They explicitly claim Englishness in several places within the text rather than invoking a more inclusive Britishness, a notable absence considering its publication several years after the Union. While the Edgeworths reference other parts of the United Kingdom, their invocation of Englishness suggests that the values and practices they discuss are not applicable to Britain in general. This distinction becomes more pointed when the Edgeworths look to Ireland and Scotland as examples of territories that have not been fully integrated into a British whole.

*Professional Education* seems to have been intended as a kind of companion to the earlier *Practical Education* in addressing the more advanced training of middle-class men and enabling their pursuit of productive livelihoods. Like its predecessor, *Professional Education* rejects the notion of innate abilities, siding instead with education (broadly understood) as the means of developing personal capacities. The Edgeworths similarly dispense with the idea of "genius," believing its identification to "mistake the

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<sup>2</sup> See also *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* wherein she describes writing *Professional Education* (148, 175). Also in *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, Maria mentions her role in its composition as well as her father's (Vol I, 213, 222, 250). In Richard Lovell Edgeworth's *Memoirs* (edited by Maria), he refers to *Professional Education* as a joint effort (405). Much scholarship has been devoted to the complexity of the relationship between Maria Edgeworth and her father. While this is a significant and interesting issue, a full discussion of it is outside the purview of this chapter. Our discussion will therefore assume that *Professional Education* was derived from their collaboration. "The Edgeworths" will be used to refer to *Professional Education*'s authorship, leaving open the ambiguity of its origins.

effect of accidental circumstances for proofs of natural propensities” (13-4). In fact, the Edgeworths claim that self-taught geniuses have “generally been persons of profligate characters, and wayward tempers, incapable of directing themselves with common sense, frequently without common modesty, and shamelessly insolent and ungrateful to their benefactors” (16). The Edgeworths’ perspective on the “genius” as a spurious and chaotic figure accords with their fundamental insistence on the formation of the individual rather than its natural emergence. Of course, this perspective necessarily corresponds with the advent of bourgeois individualism since it was predicated on a (more) fluid economic system that conferred social status via the transience of capital rather than the circumscriptions of birth. Yet, as a reflection of the Edgeworths’ discomfort with the degree of fluidity that was conferred by the embrace of commercial capital, they note in the second edition that some of Richard’s “best friends have urged him to write on the mercantile profession,” but that, aside from the same general advice common to all professions, he is not aware of “what should be peculiar to a merchant” and “therefore does not presume to teach [it]” (1812: vii). Instead, the Edgeworths delve into the somewhat odd conglomeration of clerical, military, medical, gentry, law, diplomatic, and princely “professions” while acknowledging that although the term is an odd fit, they all “exercise functions of the highest consequence in the state. . .no word seems more proper to designate their occupations” (1809: vii).

For the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be on the role of the country gentleman or “men intended for private life,” as the Edgeworths describe them. For the Edgeworths not only elaborate their necessary training, but also discuss the significance

of their role in British society, especially as it relates to the conditioning of the peasantry for participation in a capitalized economy. Before turning to the country gentleman's impact on the peasantry, it will be useful to explain the way the Edgeworths figure such a gentleman's development, a figuration which points to their necessarily asymmetric roles. "More than one illustrious foreigner has envied the happiness of our English country gentlemen," the Edgeworths assert at the outset of the chapter, "more than one foreign prince has exclaimed, 'The life of an English country gentleman is assuredly the happiest life in the world'" (1809: 247). A very traditional image of the country gentleman as the embodiment of English freedom is invoked here: a freedom enabled by their supposed economic independence. However, the authors also suggest, through the use of the past tense ["They *thanked* God, that they *were* independent of all men" (1809: 247 emphasis added)], that the importance and dignity of their role has eroded by the early-nineteenth century. In fact, the Edgeworths vehemently exhort country gentlemen to focus their energies on the maintenance of their fortunes because their economic status conditions their power and their perceived freedom from obligation: "between this independence of mind and of fortune there is such an intimate connexion, that the one must be destroyed, if the other be sacrificed" (1809: 247). The challenges accorded to country gentlemen follow from their middle station, as it is figured here, between the aristocracy and the merchant class (1809: 247). Since it is from their fortunes alone that their importance is derived, the loss of this fortune through "extravagance" or "fashionable dissipation" jeopardizes their role as "their country's pride and the bulwark of her freedom [; instead,] they will become the wretched slaves of a party, or the despicable tools of a court" (1809:

247-8). Therefore, the discipline of the economic is intimately connected with the discipline of the self: “The great, the brilliant, and the solid virtues of integrity, patriotism, and generosity, cannot long subsist, unless they be supported and protected by the seemingly insignificant and homely habits of prudence and economy” (1809: 248). The Edgeworths describe, in detail, various means of establishing the mores of prudence and economy in the children of such gentlemen largely through the avoidance of competition with their social (and economic) superiors and, concurrently, the recognition of their middle state. In many ways, the portrait offered by the Edgeworths is so traditional as to be conservative in its outlook. Warnings against a worship of appearances and entreaties to cultivate the “plain character of a country gentleman” were staples of eighteenth-century critiques of the gentry (1809: 251). Yet, there are some important distinctions between the Edgeworths’ understanding of the squire’s role and that of earlier portraits.

By the time *Professional Education* was published in 1809, the enormous growth of Britain’s market economy had unavoidably altered the “country” landscape which was once figured as insulating the gentry from the “luxuries” of London. In fact, the country gentleman could no longer afford to ignore his imbrication in national and indeed world economics. The Edgeworths were keenly aware of these economic changes and believed not only in adjusting to them, but also in using “modern” economic relations to their advantage. The preservation of the country gentleman entailed a great deal of attention to the “business” of both his household and his country, and, less explicitly, the lessons learned through British colonization. The position of the country gentleman is unique, the

Edgeworths assert, because it is through the lack of the ties of birth (aristocracy) or the necessity of chasing income (merchant class) that the virtuousness of the country gentleman is made possible. At the same time, the Edgeworths are careful to point out that the issue of money-making is complex for the country gentlemen since his fortune largely derives from rent.<sup>3</sup> His ability to create income is highly circumscribed: “when a country gentleman has lived beyond his income, what is his resource? not trade, not business of any kind; to that he cannot stoop; for this he is not qualified” (1809: 248). This comment calls attention to *Professional Education*’s appearance in a moment wherein the massive changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution are only just beginning to be felt in Britain. The Edgeworths’ characterization of the country gentleman as “stooping” to engage in trade or any business underscores the persistence of gentrified mores in an economic landscape in which they are becoming increasingly unsustainable.

While unable to foresee the extent of these economic changes, the Edgeworths are nonetheless astute in the careful consideration of capitalized economics on both micro- and macrocosmic levels. This awareness is reflected in their understanding of commerce as central to the nation, pumping the life-blood of its functioning, rather than as a peripheral, even degenerate, menace to Britain’s health. Thus the Edgeworths’ discussion of luxury, or more properly, extravagance, represents an important departure from earlier reflections on avoiding consumption. In the first place, the Edgeworths argue that luxury

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, rent could also be derived from colonial estates, as *Belinda* and *Mansfield Park* both reveal, but this is not alluded to in *Professional Education*.

should be judged according to the “certain style in living, in houses, equipage, furniture, which is usual to persons of that class” (1809: 230). “Luxury” is actually a “comparative” term, the Edgeworths put forth, since its definition alters “with the progress of civilization” (1809: 229). Therefore, “[t]hose who consider the wealth of nations as the first object are right in wishing to encourage this species of luxury” (1809: 230). While the Edgeworths are unwilling to completely align the wealth of nations with “the happiness of nations” and “their moral independence,” they nonetheless agree that “it would be bad policy in these days, even if it were possible, to restrict the pleasures of life to that of bare existence, to reduce the love of our country, embellished by commerce and the arts, to mere habitual attachment to the natal soil” (1809: 249). Contrary to the mores of earlier Englishmen, “it is by no means certain, that a taste for luxury diminishes the martial spirit of a people; and to restrict men to the necessaries of life, would be to destroy commerce, and to reduce them to a state of Spartan simplicity, . . . incompatible with modern ideas of happiness” (1809: 249).

The whole of the Edgeworths’ recommendations for the schooling and upbringing of the “young squire” revolves around the development of his knowledge of political economy. The centrality of economics can be explained by their insistence that “one of the best chances for restoring a national spirit of independence and honest patriotism is by educating country gentlemen to understand and pursue their real interests, and the interests of their country” (1809: 260). Furthermore, the Edgeworths contend that an understanding of the connection between individual action and its greater economic impact is absolutely essential to carrying out effective, and not harmful, change: “a man

who attempts any [improvements] . . . , a man who attempts any one operation of political economy, without understanding the principles of that science, runs the hazard of doing evil; he can do only partial good, and that merely by chance” (1809: 256). The power that the landlord possesses to make extensive change must be wielded carefully, the Edgeworths caution, because he can “injure not only his private interest, and that of his tenants, but . . . would tend to retard the progress of civilization in his country” (1809: 257). The danger resides not only in the “intricate” nature of economics, but also in the temptation appearances offer over true knowledge: “For instance, the changes in the rate of interest, the putting down monopolies, the lowering of the price of provision, or the disposition of tenantry to emigrate, have all been the subject of loud lamentation with short-sighted persons”<sup>4</sup> (1809: 257). In such moments, *Practical Education* succeeds in impressing its audience with the weighty complexities arising in the management of one’s estate. It would be logical for the text to delve with greater depth into the technical workings of estate management, agricultural improvement, and the like in the manner of numerous contemporary texts. However, the Edgeworths’ focus lies elsewhere, more in the mechanics and application of political economy than in the creation of a “treatise on political economy” (1809: 249).

It is interesting then that the Edgeworths immediately turn to questions of the landlord’s relationship with his tenants. One might expect this to comprise part of a discussion of the country gentleman’s profession, but the Edgeworths insinuate a close link between such relational concerns and the economics of the estate itself. At a young

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<sup>4</sup> This quote will be discussed at length later in the chapter.



age, the young squire “should ride out with his father among his tenants; should see in summer the delights of hay-making and of harvest-home. . .and all those country festivities, which attach people to their homes. These customs tend to connect and to increase the pleasure of connexion between different classes of society, and they cement the bond of union between landlord and tenant” (1809: 260-1). In the Edgeworths’ view, such an affective bond ensures that country gentlemen will be inspired with “many wishes and schemes for increasing the comforts and permanent happiness of the peasantry, who enjoy so much. . . [these] transient pleasures” (1809: 261). The cultivation of this relationship begins when the young gentleman has occasion to hear “his father’s dependents and neighbors speak of him with gratitude and respect,” which are brought about by his father’s plans “to improve their houses, to add to their comforts, to prevent them from disputing, and to do justice among them” (1809: 252). However, the Edgeworths caution against the overindulgence of this bond by arguing that the country gentlemen should eschew “merely giving money to relieve the temporary wants of the poor, instead of inspiring them with the desire of relieving themselves by their own exertions” (1809: 261). Rather, the Edgeworths advocate specific programs of agricultural improvement which are meant not simply for “lucrative business,” a goal pursued by “mere farmers,” but for “public and private service. . .in ascertaining facts in rural economy, in establishing principles” (1809: 268). Furthermore, the Edgeworths contend that “[w]hether these experiments succeed, or whether they fail as to the immediate object, they are of ultimate service” since they “give the lower classes of people confidence in persons of superior talents, and will teach them to show toleration

for new inventions” (1809: 268, 269). Agricultural pursuits serve a dual purpose, not only advancing science and economic efficiency, but also encouraging the relations between landlord and tenant.

The affective bond envisioned by the Edgeworths thus traces a path from the enlightened sympathy of the young landlord to his future tenants; it is this seed of sympathy which is meant to blossom, through his careful education in political economy, into the “pleasures and occupations. . .of agricultural pursuits” that will model both the landlord’s superiority as well as the labor and ingenuity that he wishes to inculcate in the tenantry, the ultimate goal of which is “to improve a people” (1809: 269-70). The answer to the question, “what ‘people’ are the Edgeworths referring to?” reveals the underlying logic of their claims.

*Lessons from the Periphery: the Discipline of Rationalized Agriculture*

Peoples colonized by the British Empire provide the Edgeworths with the best instances of the trials and tribulations of “improvement,” a project that manifests not only the physical and economic development of colonial territories, but, simultaneously, the imbrication of such people within the circuits of capitalism. The Edgeworths present two cases of colonial improvement, one successful and the other not, in order to explain the methods by which British landlords should proceed with their own tenants. The first case of colonial improvement is a cautionary tale wherein Methodist missionaries meet resistance to their attempts at improving the natives of the South Seas. However, their error, according to the Edgeworths, was that the missionaries began their conversion

project with the theories of theology, agriculture, and European manners before attending to their practical workings: they “began by preaching to the poor savages of things which they could not comprehend, and who blamed them for not having habits, which they had no means and no motive to acquire” (1809: 270). The Edgeworths seem to expect the failure of such an approach, explaining that the “naturally gentle and docile” inhabitants “proved stubborn, profligate, and thievish,” declaring that while the missionaries “gave them a great deal of talkee,” they never gave them useful implements such as knives and scissors (1809: 270).

The fruitful methods employed by the Quaker’s undertaking “in promoting the improvement and gradual civilization of the North American Indians” are offered by the Edgeworths as the most relevant and useful for the improvement of the domestic peasantry. As evidence of their esteem for the project, the Edgeworths cite the entirety of its record so that the reader may consult its methods more closely.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the summary given by the Edgeworths, their hint will be followed and *A Brief Account* will be looked at in greater detail. First, the distillation given by the Edgeworths is instructive as to their concerns. They note, following the Quakers, that the “savages [were] averse from all sorts of labour” (1809: 270). The Quakers’ solution to this perceived difficulty lies in modeling behavior, a method which is directly in line with the Edgeworths’ thinking about education in many forms: “the Quakers began by cultivating a piece of ground for themselves, and, without exhorting the natives to industry, showed them its

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter referred to as simply “*A Brief Account*.” *A Brief Account of the Proceedings of the Committee, Appointed in the Year 1795 by the Yearly Meeting of Friends of Pennsylvania, New-Jersey, &c. For the Promoting the Improvement and Gradual Civilization of the Indian Natives*. Philadelphia printed; London reprinted: Phillips and Fardon, 1806.

advantages” (1809: 270). Here, the Edgeworths (and indeed the Quakers) follow Enlightenment precepts that suggest a common ability to reason and to allow for a certain amount of difference in cultural practices. The successful transmission of European farming methods to colonized peoples similarly inculcates within them other desirable and “rationalized” behaviors, from their occupations to the construction of their housing. The inculcation of certain values and behaviors (the civilizing mission) is thus directly linked to the application of European agriculture and the subsequent capitalist stirring that result from it.

Like the Edgeworths, the Quakers are motivated by their desire to “do good.” In fact, they are concerned that their lack of direct gain from their improvement project be apparent. The Quakers refer to their benevolence repeatedly in the text and, likewise, entreat the Native Americans of the Oneida and Seneca tribes to view their work in the same light. Not only do the Quakers claim that their enterprise occasioned a “considerable charge” for which they expected no payment, but they also contend that “though they are not directly acting the part of missionaries, they are preaching religion by example; and are probably preparing the Indians, by more means than one, for the reception and acknowledgement of the gospel” (5). In fact, they offer this explanation because it is their opinion that “some readers may think every scheme of civilization defective, that does not immediately attempt to plant Christianity” (5). While the Quakers’ purposes may seem at odds with those of the Edgeworths because of the explicitly religious dimension of their organization, in fact, the similarities of their civilizational goals underscore the fact that proper or moral behavior is necessarily linked

to the development of economic sensibilities. Matthew Dennis suggests that the Quakers' stripped-down version of Christianity might explain their relative appeal to the Senecas. He argues that the Quakers were willing to dispense with much of the overtly theological precepts of Christianity in favor of "cultivat[ing] piety, morality, order, and industry . . . subsumed more fully in the work and regulation" (126). Furthermore, the Quakers envisioned "the fundamental transformation of Seneca society, to be remade in the idealized image of the American yeoman and his wife" (126-7). As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, this idealized image of the yeoman derived directly from the ideology and economics of England's agricultural revolution, which was mutually reinforced by the experiences of its missionaries and settlers in the colonial periphery. Their awareness, much like the Edgeworths', of the troubles that can result from the enforcement of conversion on native peoples convinces them that a "scheme of civilization" offers the "satisfaction of having sown, in a promising soil, the seeds of civilization and its attendant comforts" (4-5). Thus the projects of improvement that the Quakers record and the Edgeworths sanction are much the same.

While the Quakers view the Oneidas and Senecas as requiring improvement, there is a highly ambivalent note to their writings. For one thing, the Quakers contend the (white) settlers have been a negative influence on Native Americans: "the contentions of their civilized neighbours have often made alterations in the territories of the Indians, as their vices have planted among them the principle of decay" (3-4). This comment reverses the usual opposition between "civilized" and "decay" or "vice." Of course, this passage also employs highly coded language that obscures the annexation of Native

American land through colonization with the phrase “alterations in the territories of the Indians.” At the same time, however, the Quakers see this as leading to the “decay” of Native American culture. It remains unclear whether the Quakers would have seen the need to “improve” the Native Americans in the absence of these destructive incursions into their way of life. Nonetheless, as becomes apparent in *A Brief Account*, the Quakers envision agricultural education as more than simply “helping” Native Americans. While not seeking religious conversion, the Quakers sought to affect cultural conversion with Western agriculture as its disciplinary mechanism. As other scholars have noted, the relationship between the Quakers and the Oneida and Seneca people was one that placed the Native Americans in a dependent position. The Quakers note the Oneida’s awareness of this obligation: “It may be proper here to remark that some suspicion and mistrust of Friends’ views, became manifest in several of the Indians. They knew that the improvements made, and the various tools and implements of husbandry distributed among them, must have cost a large sum of money; . . . therefore some had fears it was meant to. . . lay claim to part of their land” (10-11). The Quakers want to allay the fears of the Native Americans and assure them that remuneration is not their goal. The Oneidas, however, recognize not only that gifts ensure future return, but also that agricultural tools are expensive and are representative of Western exchange-values.<sup>6</sup> Despite their seeming marginalization, the resistance of the Oneidas suggests their awareness that this process has inevitably shifted the nature of their interactions with the Quakers and other colonists.

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<sup>6</sup> One is reminded here of Derrida’s insistence on the impossibility of the gift as well as his argument that the language of the circulation of gifts unavoidably partakes of an economic logic of credit, debt, etc. (12-14). Further implications of Derrida’s discussion of the gift will be drawn at a later point in the chapter.

Again, the Quakers insist, by retreating from Native American land and leaving behind the tools, that they demonstrate the lack of obligation they have placed on the Oneidas. They were certain that this was “convincing testimony among the various tribes of Indians, that their good was our motive for thus liberally aiding them” (11).

The Quakers’ improvements have far-reaching implications for the cultures of the Oneidas and Senecas, the implications of which the Quakers are largely aware. While initially they have difficulty encouraging Native Americans to participate in Western farming methods, the Quakers misrecognize many of the reasons for their resistance. The Quakers believe that they need to “stimulate and encourage the Indians to cultivate their land” when it is apparent that the Senecas already practice their own methods of husbandry. In fact, the agriculture practiced by Seneca women represents a division of labor that the Quakers find offensive. They therefore seek to rearrange gendered labor amongst the Senecas and insist that “it was not right to suffer their women to work all day in the fields and woods;” the Quakers perceive Seneca men as “at the same time amusing themselves with shooting arrows from their bows, or some such diversions” (17). This seems like deliberate obfuscation on the part of the Quakers, who would have been aware that it was common amongst many Native American peoples for the women to be engaged with agriculture while the men were responsible for hunting and gathering. However, the specific configuration of gendered labor which the Quakers advocate is inextricable from the workings of Western capitalism. Matthew Dennis explains that the Quakers “focused particular attention on realigning Seneca gender roles . . . and hoped to remake Seneca extended, maternal families into more discrete, nuclear units. Such

families, then, would become independent, patriarchal economic and affective bodies, which would provide competency and comfort and promote social and political order” (128). Therefore, the Quakers’ comment that “[t]hey were *recommended* to begin *our* way, and take their boys out to hoe, &c.” represents the first step in shifting the underlying relationships via the strictures of Western agriculture (emphasis added, 17)

By reading the Seneca’s habits in this manner, the Quakers’ assumption that Native Americans are “not only unaccustomed, but averse to labour” is based on their elision of female agricultural pursuits as well as male hunting rituals as labor (8). Furthermore, it seems probably that many of the characteristics of European (even specifically English) farming seemed not only foreign but useless and unnecessarily difficult to the Oneidas and Senecas. The Quakers mention, for example, Native American resistance to practices like regimented chronological structures as well as the clearing and partitioning of land. In the early stages of establishing European-style farms, one of the “Friends” became ill and it was suggested that some of the Oneidas could be hired as wage labor to supplement the Quaker’s work. This plan was not effective, the Quakers note, because “they were so irregular in working that the plan was abandoned. Some days, near thirty would come to work, and other days scarcely one was to be had” (9). The note that thirty men would appear ready for work suggests that, rather than avoiding labor, the Oneidas were very willing to be engaged, but their perspective on time differed greatly from that of the Quakers. The Quakers’ solution is to have the men “boarded, and allowed a reasonable compensation for their labour” (9). It is only through the discipline enacted by their physical enclosure and proscribed labor and compensation



that the Oneidas can become imbricated in the larger economic system. While the highly structured methods of English husbandry had been naturalized by the British settlers and their (American) descendants, the Oneidas are unable to see the need for such regimentation. Similarly, the English norms of enclosure are in direct opposition to the traditional practices of many Native Americans who farmed amongst the trees or in small clearings and generally did not domesticate animals. The Quakers are forced to continually emphasize the future benefits of the enormous amount of labor required for these undertakings. Seven years later, in 1809, the council of Friends is compelled to write to the Oneidas to encourage their modest gains:

It has afforded us satisfaction, in passing through your town, to notice marks of industry taking place; that you are building better and warmer houses to live in; and that so much of your cleared land is planted. . .in good order. . .We hope more of your men will assist in clearing and fencing land, and planting it with corn; . . .you will then have a supply of provision, more certain to depend upon than hunting. . .we are pleased to see a quantity of fence made this summer, and we would not have you discouraged at the labour it takes; for if you clear a little more land every year, and fence it, you will soon get enough to raise what bread you want (18-9).

*A Brief Account* thus chronicles the gradual transition of the Oneida and Seneca tribes away from their customary practices, or their mode of production, which logically constituted a large part of their culture, from gender relations to living arrangements to their natural environment. In some settlements, the Quakers have encouraged the people to “settl[e] . . . separate and detached from each other . . . already manifestly more to their advantage than living together in villages” (25). This, in turn, led to the abandonment of traditionally-crafted dwellings “which . . . were generally either gone to decay or pulled down” (25). In fact, the decay of such physical structures is reflective of the larger

constellation of cultural arrangements that are forced to adjust or atrophy alongside the new economic and behavioral norms. Most importantly for both the Quakers and the Edgeworths, this economic transition from one mode of production to another is simultaneously an increasing discipline of the (native) subject. This becomes evident not only in their labor habits, but also in their personal habits. The consumption of alcohol, a concern that seems to trouble the Native Americans at least as the letters relate it, is one such habit the Quakers seek to annul. Presumably it is one of (if not *the*) “vices” that the Quakers argued was “planted” among the Native Americans by their “civilized neighbours” (3-4).<sup>7</sup> The Oneidas, according to *A Brief Account*, write to the Quakers after one of their civilizing missions that they “are glad the Good Spirit has put into your minds to assist other of our Indian brethren, in learning the same good way of living, for which we also thank you, as well as for the good advice you gave us about the strong drink; and we will try all we can to persuade our young men to do better” (12).

*A Brief Account of . . . the Improvement and Gradual Civilization of the Indian Natives* is thus meant as a testament to the Society of Friends’ willingness to extend the benefits of (capitalized) civility to the Native Americans with no other motive than benevolence. One of the last letters, dated 1805, from the Quakers who settled near the Senecas, declares that

It is pleasing to find a disposition for improvement continues to prevail amongst the younger class of Indians. Divers have now a considerable quantity of corn to sell; they often express the satisfaction they feel in seeing the fruits of their own

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<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the text quoted here, the Quakers do not address the logical inconsistency between the positive “civilization” that they seek to impose on the Native Americans and the negative civilization which they note has been transmitted by other settlers.

industry; and frequently observe that when they followed drinking whiskey they could hardly clothe themselves; but by industry they now find their substance begins to increase. (44)

In other words, through the introduction of English farming practices, the Seneca and Oneida peoples have come to understand the nature of ownership, labor, commerce, and personal wealth. The discipline demanded by the orderliness of Western planting and for clearing and enclosing land conditions their ability to engage with the settlers. Their initiation into the circuits of capitalism has emerged from the sale of their produce, which in turn brings them the funds through which they clothe themselves and increase “their substance.” No less important are the habits of industry and personal discipline which not only allow production and commerce, but drive their desire for “increase.”

The author of this last letter included in *A Brief Account* ends with great optimism about the positive impact of “the introduction and increase of civilized habits” and believes that such habits are contagious, transmitted from one settlement to another (45). Yet the last word is reserved for the letter in the appendix, dated 1797, relatively early in these Quaker undertakings, which questions the purposes of “experiments. . .made to reform the Indian character” (47). Written to an unnamed member of the Society of Friends, the appended letter originated from a General (his name having been redacted) who claims affinity with the Native Americans of the Northwest Territory against whom he has also been fighting (46-48). The General declares his compassion for the Native Americans “even in the most bloody scenes: for alas, they, in all their wars, have been but the deluded instruments of ambitious and interested men” (46). In fact the General disdains “those who stile themselves Christian” believing that they have “corrupted” the

Native Americans. He believes that “the farther [the Native Americans]. . .are advanced from communication with the white people, the more honest, industrious and temperate [he has]. . . found them” (46). Of course, much of this language partakes in the narrative of the “noble savage” whose purity depends upon his or her outsider status and merely serves as a contrast (rather than an actual person) to the corruptions of society. Still, the General demonstrates a striking awareness of the position of Native Americans in relation to the early United States. His concern, he says, is not that they should remain in a state of romanticized obscurity; rather he believes that unless the Native Americans are made “useful to society” they risk “extinction.” “For surely, if this people are not taught to depend for their sustenance on their fields, instead of their forests, and to realize ideas of distinct property, it will be found impossible to correct their present habits; and the seeds of their extinction, already sown, must be matured” (47). It is for this purpose that the General introduces the letter-carrier, Little Turtle, the chief of the Miamis, to the Quakers, hoping that they can assist in the “reform” of his tribe (47). Echoing the traces of the Quakers’ own misgivings and underscoring his awareness of the complexity of “benevolence” and “reform” in this context, the General ends by relating the words of George White-eyes (1770?-1798), the son of the well-known leader of the Lenape or Delaware tribe, Koquethagechton, also known as White-eyes. In a conversation with George White-eyes, he explained to the General that: “It is natural we should follow the footsteps of our forefathers, and when you white people undertake to direct us from this path, you learn us to eat, drink, dress and write like yourselves; and then you turn us loose to beg, starve, or seek our native forests without alternative: and, outlawed your

society, we curse you for the feelings you have taught us, and resort to excess that we may forget them” (48). The General concludes by agreeing with George White-eyes: “How lamentable; and yet, how just!” and by pledging his support for their “permanent prosperity” which he says “would be more acceptable to me than the most distinguished triumph of arms. A great source of my present happiness is, the conviction that I have deserved, and enjoy, the confidence and friendship of the Indians North-West of the Ohio” (48). The choice of this particular letter as the ending, actually the appendix, of the document is one that seems to intentionally underscore the highly ambivalent nature of the project and the intended benevolence of its participants. While the tone of the General’s letter lends a certain exigency to the circumstances of “reforming”<sup>8</sup> the Native Americans, it fails to offer a compelling solution, even suggesting that interference in Native American culture can only lead to its continuing destruction. The problem for Native Americans, as the General understands it, is essentially economic: Native Americans must be inducted into capitalized norms of farming and private property or they will be unable to survive. This is a process which George White-eyes describes as a kind of seduction. Having been educated in European behavioral norms, such Native Americans become disconnected from not only their habits, but from their traditional means of survival (economics). For many Native Americans, according to White-eyes, this is an incomplete process which leaves them “to beg, starve, or [to] seek out native

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<sup>8</sup> The General’s letter uses different language from that of the prior correspondence, favoring terms such as “reform,” “reclaim,” “teach” over “civilize” and the like. Based on details provided in the letter, it seems probable that the General of the last letter is Josiah Harmar who was educated at a Quaker school but was not himself a Quaker. Even Harmar’s military relationship to Native Americans was complex according to Ohio History Central, which relates that he ordered the construction of forts on the frontier in order to suppress squatters from Native American land only to have the security of US military presence itself *encourage* such settlement.

forests” (48). Having been spurned by racist exclusion, their reaction is to “curse you for the *feelings* you have taught us, and resort to excess that we may forget them” (emphasis added, 48). Feeling or affect is thus an important aspect of the cultural and economic seduction carried out by such “civilizing” processes. Similarly, the General points to certain kinds of desire as the origin of relations with Native Americans. He states that “[w]hen we contemplate the fortune of the Aborigines of this our country, the bosom of philanthropy must heave with sorrow, and our sympathy must be strongly excited” (46). While his figurations reinforce the inequality of their relationship, one in which “our country” must “offer” sympathy, it is nonetheless the emotional force of the image of the “bosom. . .heav[ing]. . .with sorrow” that compels a response, a reaction that, at least for the General, is structured via his hope for mutual friendship.

Taken as a whole, *A Brief Account* purports to describe the “improvement” of Native Americans through the Quakers’ transmission of European agriculture, which is in itself a mechanism for economic and cultural discipline. Western agriculture is understood as a civilizing mechanism because it conditions economic relations, demanding a specific engagement with land as property, and food production as commodification, as well as regulating habitual behavior, policing order, cleanliness, and, finally but most importantly, consumption. For these reasons it is envisioned as the entrée into civilized (i.e. capitalized) culture. Through this reading of *A Brief Account of the Proceedings of the Committee. . .for Promoting the Improvement and Gradual Civilization of the Indian Natives*, the reasons for the document’s interest to the Edgeworths becomes increasingly apparent. Returning to the Edgeworths’ other writings,

their similar perspectives on the methods and purposes of civilizing both the English and Irish peasantry come into greater focus.

*Affective Chains: Benevolence, Loyalty and the Seduction of Commerce*

It should not be surprising that the Edgeworths chose to direct their audience towards the “experiments” of civility which have been conducted in the colonial periphery in their attempts to demonstrate the significance of the bond between English landlord and tenant. As Jethro Tull’s writings and numerous other agricultural manuals attest, the relationship between the development of capitalized agriculture and colonial land hunger was consistently referenced in British scientific and economic texts. By the end of the eighteenth century, the circulation of ideas about rationalized agriculture between metropolitan and colonial spaces had continued to intensify capitalized relations and their attendant ideology of improvement. The Edgeworths’ concerns with agricultural and other forms of improvement comprised a direct engagement with the political trends of the metropolis, especially those concerns of liberal Whigs of the time. As Richard Drayton explains, the relationship between agricultural science and politics had been discernible since the mid-eighteenth century, but the events of the French Revolution and, later, the Napoleonic Wars sealed the intimacy of their connection (148-151). The upheaval of the events in France encouraged the (continuing) development of an ideology of “natural law,” discerning order and stability in the makings of the natural world; such an ideology advocated principles of “equilibrium” and calm in a tumultuous context (Drayton 150). The Edgeworths’ views on estate management anticipated later political

and economic programs which aimed to bolster the landed interest: “Whigs preferred to respond to the threat of revolution with education, allotments, public gardens, rather than with mere Tory coercion. Their private enthusiasm for agricultural science, horticulture, and botany was connected organically to their politics” (Drayton 150). When the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford, having “constructed a temple to enlightened Whiggery” on his estate, sought to have the results of his agricultural experiments published, the text was aptly dedicated to Thomas Coke of Holkham whose own earlier work was the inspiration for such projects (Drayton 150-1). The text credited Coke with “enlightened and extensive views, vigorous and persevering industry, generous patronage, and liberal policy” as well as “convert[ing]. . .an immense tract of barren waste into a highly productive and ornamented country, enriched with abundant harvests, colonized with substantial and elegant residences, and above all, peopled with intelligent, scientific, and *grateful* tenantry” (emphasis added; Sinclair v-vi; partially qtd in Drayton 151).

*Professional Education* illustrates that the Edgeworths’ colonial and domestic agricultural experimentation was connected with economic and affective structures that reinforced the power of the ruling elite. The bond between landlord/tenant as well as settler/native enabled the successful transmission of proper (capitalized) behaviors which, in turn, further imbricated the native peasant within the circuits of production and consumption. That the Edgeworths not only understood the importance of civility and improvement but also sought to advance its use is made explicit when, having noted the successes of the Quakers, they ask: “if all this could be accomplished by a few missionaries among ignorant and prejudiced tribes of savages, what may not be done by



similar methods among the civilized inhabitants of our own country? Whenever improvements in husbandry or mechanism are resisted, we must blame the manner in which they are introduced” (1809: 271). The country gentleman is therefore not only engaged in a local project, but one that intersects with the health of the Empire at large. While perhaps easier to accomplish amongst the “civilized inhabitants,” the improvement projects which are advocated by colonial experience and liberal Whiggism alike demonstrate the perceived connections by the metropolitan and colonial elite between the domestic peasantry and the colonized natives.

*Professional Education* is one of many instances in which the Edgeworths evince a keen awareness of the importance of the continuing imbrication of the peasantry within rationalized agriculture. Their perspective is necessarily informed by the experiences of British colonization because of the family’s role as Anglo-Irish landlords. It is this perspective that complicates the Edgeworths’ invocation of “our own country” in addressing a specifically English audience and the happiness of “English country gentlemen” (247). Their continual identification with Englishness is purposeful and implies that it is not “British” country gentlemen and their methods which are being advocated. In other words, *English* freedoms, *English* agriculture, and *English* improvement are being elevated above those other constituencies of early nineteenth-century Britain, particularly Scotland and Ireland. At the time *Professional Education* was written, the Act of Union with Ireland had been in effect for a very short time. In theory, the formation of the United Kingdom, like the creation of Great Britain in 1707, accorded a more centralized role to the newly incorporated entity, in this case Ireland. To

some extent, the Act of Union allowed the Anglo-Irish to strengthen their bonds of identification with Britishness in a similar manner to that of the Scottish elite early in the eighteenth century. In some ways, this identification was more straightforward in that the Anglo-Irish elite already had strong ties of birth, culture, religion, or some combination thereof with Great Britain. However, Ireland's Act of Union created a "United" Kingdom in which the majority of its new subjects were barred from participating in their own rule. Both the Anglo-Irish and the British government supported Union as a method of ensuring the subordination of Irish Catholics whose threatening potential had been fully demonstrated in the uprising of 1798. Such claims for a "united" kingdom which contained the entities of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland allowed the deep economic, political, religious, and ethnic divides to be conveniently elided. Nonetheless, these divisions continued to be reflected in the instability of ethnic identifications within the British polity. Thus, British identification also became a way for Anglo-Irish and Scottish elite to elide the problematic representations of their respective territories.

This point is underscored when the Edgeworths discuss the centrality of knowledge about political economy to the education of the country gentleman and the complexities it entails. As mentioned earlier, the Edgeworths caution that economic events which are apparently negative are often misunderstood by the amateur observer: "For instance, the changes in the rate of interest, the putting down monopolies, the lowering of the price of provision, or the disposition of the tenantry to emigrate, have all been the subject of loud lamentation with short-sighted persons" (1809: 257). This remark is footnoted with the Edgeworths' declaration that "Lord Selkirk's 'Observations

on Emigration' ought to be read by every country gentleman, as well as by every statesman. . . The style of this book is so simply, yet perspicuous, and the reasoning so plain, yet logical, that it will captivate the attention and convince the judgment of sensible and unprejudiced readers" (1809: 257, note e). By configuring these specific economic phenomena as generally misunderstood and, furthermore, by pointing to Lord Selkirk's text, the Edgeworths signal their engagement with capitalization as a tool of civilization that is as useful in both the far-flung territories of the Americas and the South Pacific as it is in the supposedly-domesticated British lands of Ireland and Scotland. Indeed, Selkirk's text is akin to the Edgeworths' outlook not only for its astute commentary on political economy, but also for its strikingly similar perspective on the problems of a "superabundant" and thus potentially dangerous peasantry.

In the main, Selkirk's text unflinchingly delivers an account of the larger economic forces that have shaped the Highland Clearances, or engrossments, and the subsequent lack of subsistence (through land holdings and their cultivation) that has occasioned a rise in the emigration of poor Scots. Not unlike our contemporary language of globalization, Selkirk represents the operations of an increasingly capitalized economy in Scotland as an impersonal, irresistible (and therefore implicitly natural as well as rational) force that should be evaluated in a detached manner for the sake of dealing with its consequences rather than attempting an ill-conceived resistance. Besides providing an overview of Scotland's economic history, Selkirk's other purpose is to push for not only an acceptance of peasant emigration, but also a planned effort to resettle Scottish émigrés in Canada, especially in the province of Nova Scotia. In adopting the logic of the

economy, Selkirk believes that he establishes himself as a mere observer of such processes which entitles him to diagnose the ills, not of the economy itself or its victims, but of uneducated responses to it. Selkirk poses himself as independent thinker who departs from the mores of his class while also claiming to be unswayed by partiality either for or against the Scottish tenantry in espousing rational economic rhetoric. Like the Edgeworths, Selkirk accuses the landed class of wantonly ignoring the realities of their country and miring themselves in ignorance. In fact, a large portion of the text is addressed to the misdeeds of the Scottish gentry. Some of Selkirk's condemnation is reserved for the passage of anti-emigration legislation like the Passenger Vessels Act of 1803. Here, Selkirk accuses the Scottish gentry of hypocrisy in claiming to be concerned about the conditions emigrants were subjected to during their overseas passages while in fact being motivated by the desire for cheap pools of labor. Selkirk suggests that the ostensibly-charitable regulations which attend the bill only serve to increase the price of passage beyond the reach of the Scottish peasantry. More importantly, Selkirk believes that the Scottish gentry are actually undermining their own interests by discouraging or outlawing emigration. He argues forcefully that economic progress of which the clearances are part will inevitably dispossess the peasantry and leave them without land for their traditional subsistence or demand for their labor. In addition to the Scottish gentry, Selkirk further dismisses the objections of Scottish manufacturers who supported such legislation with a prompt dismissal and a backhanded compliment: "Any trifling advantage, that might arise from forcing a superabundant and of course temporary supply of hands, is an interest much too inconsiderable to excite, in that liberal and enlightened

body of men, any of the intolerant zeal which some individuals of a different description displayed upon this question” (84). Part of Selkirk’s reasoning for dismissing the concerns of the manufacturers is that he does not believe that the Highland’s economy is prepared to support manufacturing in the same manner as the Lowlands. In addition to the people’s lack of training and “regular and steady industry” (55), Selkirk sees the remoteness of the Highlands, which results from its lack of market and thus transport penetration, as impeding the ability of manufacturers to profitably run an enterprise of such mechanical complexity (104-6). The Clearances and efficient agriculture are thus the primary step towards a capitalized economy that can allow for the subsequent growth of manufacturing and commerce. Emigration, Selkirk concludes, is a process which signals a quickening of capitalism’s expansion while the “misery of the people” can only continue without its encouragement (111).

In order to clearly situate the economic changes that the Highlands have undergone within a broader context, Selkirk adopts an implicitly modern British vantage point by pointing to England’s “progress” (10). In fact, Selkirk opens the text by conjuring an image of Scotland as an image of England’s “distant” past (9). Note as well, Selkirk’s possessive “we,” placing himself firmly on English, not simply British, ground:

The state of commercial refinement and regular government, to which we are accustomed in England, has been so long established, that it requires some effort of imagination, to form a distinct idea of the situation of things under the feudal system. We must look back to a distant period of time, the manners and customs of which have gradually disappeared, with the causes which gave rise to them, and have left few traces of their existence. . .[B]ut the progress of society in the Highlands has been very different. . .and in every peculiarity of the Highlanders, we may trace the remnants of this former state of the country. (9-10)

The past literally becomes another country here, distant in both memory and apparently in space. In fact, the “feudal” seems nearly impossible to access since Selkirk explicitly asks the reader to “imagine” this period that has disappeared *almost* without a trace. But, in the form of the Highlands, the “remnants,” or traces, of the feudal can be read from their “peculiarities.” Later in the text, Selkirk will claim that these changes were wrought in England “under the Tudors,” three hundred years prior (76). Of course, this is a vast overstatement since while the stirrings of a market economy and capitalized agriculture were just beginning to be felt during at the turn of the sixteenth century, it was nonetheless the case that at the time of Selkirk’s writing, scarcely fifty years had passed since extensive parliamentary enclosures in Britain (Wordie 487). Nonetheless, Selkirk’s belief in the longstanding “commercial refinement” of England serves to construct the reality it purports to reinforce. Having banished nearly all “traces” of the feudal, he imagines England as the pinnacle of civilization, uniquely positioned to look out across (colonized) space and back through time at those not-yet modern potentialities. Scotland thus acts as a window onto England’s feudal past whose future is pre-ordained by England’s present. Despite Selkirk’s claims that Highlanders represent mere “remnants” of a disappearing feudal past, it is simultaneously their overwhelming presence, the mass of peasant bodies, their persistent existence, and its continuing hold on some of the Highland landlords that occasions Selkirk’s piece. Writing about Ireland in a similar context, David Lloyd elaborates the role of the feudal or medieval in the imperial imaginary: “medieval is the name that stands for the unintegrated traces of various social formations that seem prior to those of modernity, that is to say, of capitalism and

colonialism” (Lloyd, *Irish Times* 76). As such, the naming of the medieval or feudal by proponents of capitalist expansion such as Selkirk is also the unwitting identification of “troubling sites of resistance and recalcitrance to modernity’s advent” (*Irish Times* 76). Indeed, Selkirk expends considerable energy detailing the, for him, irrational pull of the “feudal” in the Highlands; the feudal becomes a kind of inexplicable force that persists in animating not only peasant culture, but also, to some extent, that of the Highland landlords themselves. In order to consider the past sixty years of the history of the Highlands from England, one must travel back in time to 1066 for “[i]t must not be forgotten, that little more than a half a century has passed, since that part of the kingdom was in a state similar to that of England before the Norman conquest” (10). Selkirk can only understand Highland culture through the lens of economics since, from his perspective, capital conditions the structural logic of a society. Therefore, he perceives the clan system as functioning somewhat analogously to that of the landlord system, except that in Highland culture, “the principal advantage of landed property consisted in the means it afforded to the proprietor of multiplying his dependents. By allowing his tenants to possess their farms at low rents, he secured their services whenever required” (12). Selkirk attempts to translate the clan system’s workings, despite its differences from the English economy, into the forms and language of capitalized rent. Selkirk’s version of Highland culture simply substitutes labor or military service for specie. The problem with this arrangement arises from two difficulties: the first lies in the role of the chief who acts as a “petty monarch” (21). Citing a traveler’s account from the 1740s,<sup>9</sup> Selkirk quotes:

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<sup>9</sup> The full title of this work by Edward Burt is *Letters from a gentleman in the North of Scotland to his*

“The ordinary Highlanders esteem it the most sublime degree of virtue to love their chief, and pay him a blind obedience, although it be in opposition to the government, the laws of the kingdom, or even to the law of God. He is their idol; as they profess to know no king but him” (Appendix B, v). It is difficult to overstate the dramatic resonance that such a characterization of the Highland chiefs would have had for an English patriot such as Selkirk, and indeed the Edgeworths. For, as detailed in the first chapter, the Restoration and subsequent creation of Great Britain had solidified the image of an English/British government operating by means of a delicate balance between Parliament and the King. It was this freedom from “arbitrary power” that ensured individual liberty and, perhaps more importantly, property. Thus this usurpation of English/British “freedom” by the Highland chiefs represents an abomination for the true-born Englishman. In addition, the feudal as constructed through the lens of Highland culture is problematic for Selkirk in its perpetuation of a lack of accumulation. The clan system, in avoiding specie as a form of payment, places an absolute limit on accumulation since the only “savings” that can occur is through products themselves (food and crafts). The complexity of relations in the clan system through a series of mutual obligations serves as a blockage to capitalized relations. Lacking the desire for accumulation, the chief saw little need to raise rents, which in turn allowed the peasantry to labor for subsistence rather than for the value of their crops. Selkirk explains,

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*friend in London, containing the description of a capital town in that northern country, with an account of some uncommon customs of the inhabitants; likewise an account of the Highlands, with the customs and manners of the Highlanders: To which is added, a letter relating to the military ways among the mountains, begun in the year 1726.* By 1822, Burt’s text was in its fifth edition and also featured Sir Walter Scott’s apparently ethnographic text “The History of Donald the Hammerer, From an Authentic Account of the Family of Invernahyle.”



On two or three occasions in the course of the year, the labours of the field required a momentary exertion, to prepare the soil, or to secure the crop: but no regular and continued industry was requisite for providing the simple necessities of life, to which their forefathers had been accustomed, and beyond which their ambition did not extend. The periods of labour were short; and they could devote the intermediate time to indolence, or to amusement. . . . (16-17)

For Selkirk, it is here in this excess of time and corresponding lack of desire for increase that feudalism is essentially negligent. Without the demand for rent and the equivalent spur for more profitable agriculture, the peasantry cannot be properly disciplined for “regular and continued industry.” Even the *tucksman*, or large sub-tenant, who sits above the cotters, remains unmoved toward profit, for excepting his military role (an important one which Selkirk nonetheless fails to account for as labor), they were not “inclined. . .to engage in the drudgery of agriculture, any further than to supply the necessities of life for their own families” (15). The tucksman’s labor can barely be accounted for since it flows from necessity alone and therefore scarcely warrants the label “agriculture,” which is defined by the desire for efficiency as a means to profit. In fact, it is agriculture in this sense that Selkirk hopes to cultivate in the Highlands, a system of land that is the proper machinery for capitalism, at once conditioning the order and efficiency of its product and its practitioners.

The “feudal” proves difficult to dislodge, however, for reasons that Selkirk struggles to account for. While Selkirk attempts to translate what might be termed the strictly economic structure of the Highlands into terms proper to rationalized rent and agriculture, it is that which escapes this structure that continues to haunt [in David Lloyd’s sense of “a displaced memory that haunts. . .not directly but in images and tropes

that form its traces” (*Irish Times* 6)] his endeavor to pick apart the (il)logic of the feudal. Selkirk’s difficulties thus register the affective structures of pre-capitalist Scotland as both a stubborn, in Lloyd’s term, “recalcitrant” and an incalculable economy that circulates through all of the clan’s elements. Selkirk’s puzzlement is most clearly signaled by his suggestion that the Highland chiefs’ tokens of generosity and “condescension” are counterfeit:

the necessity, which they were under, of conciliating that attachment of their people, led them to follow the same conduct, whatever might be their *natural disposition*. . . Condescending manners were necessary in every individual of whatever rank; the meanest expected to be rated as a gentleman, and almost an equal. . . The intimate connexion of the chief with his people, their daily intercourse, the daily dependence they had on each other for immediate safety . . . were all *naturally calculated* to produce a great degree of mutual sympathy and affection. If there were any of the higher ranks who did not really feel such sentiments, prudence prevented them from allowing this to appear. (emphasis added, 18-19)

This particular aspect of “feudal” Highland culture is inscrutable to Selkirk because it disrupts a capitalized logic in which profit structures individual relations, in which the *natural* superiority of the landowner opposes him absolutely to his underlings. Selkirk can only conceive of such an alternative as another variation of capitalism; it appears to him as the “calculated” product of the chiefs who pantomime affection in order to demand a return.<sup>10</sup> Without reverting to romanticized notions of pre-capitalist social relations, it is clear that the radically different relations, mutual obligations and affections, between clan members of vastly different stature is beyond Selkirk’s understanding and thus can only be registered as illogical or excessive (and even

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<sup>10</sup> Or as the author of *A Tour Through Scotland* explains “The arts of popularity which were used on the other hand, by the chiefs, in order to preserve and strengthen these sentiments among their followers, have continued to affect the manners of the Highlands even till a recent date” (qtd. in Selkirk Appendix B, xix).

dangerous). The flip side of these bonds of affection is witnessed in the cotters' demands of their chiefs that persist in defiance of capitalized relations: "they reproach their landlord with ingratitude, and remind him that, but for their fathers, he would now have no estate. The permanent possession . . . of their paternal farms, they consider only as their just right. . . and can see no difference between the title of the chief and their own" (120). This reproach of the cotter is a refusal of capitalized property, a refusal to recognize the attempts of the chief/landlord to appropriate and naturalize land ownership and peasant dispossession. There is a barely disguised threat of violence here of which Selkirk is aware and which he sees as the problem of allowing the dispossessed peasantry to lurk or haunt the countryside. However, it is not simply their physical number that emboldens the cotters, it is the memory of this alternative set of relations that continues to lie within their grasp. David Lloyd argues that "the very heterogeneities of the medieval [or feudal], its multiple strands and cross-currents, are incapable of being exhaustively sublimated into modernity. That which makes [the feudal] a possible transitional moment, its historical density and specificity, must exceed the capacity of modernity to absorb and fulfill" (*Irish Times* 80). The Highlanders embody this excess in their dispossession as well as in the persistence of earlier practices. The excess of this supposedly superseded mode of existence is what Selkirk struggles to contain in writing *Observations on Emigration*.

Selkirk works to convince his audience that the presence of the dispossessed peasantry is a positive sign of the progress of rationalized agriculture since it means that land has been cleared and the demand for labor has fallen (47). He emphasizes that,

despite appearances, engrossment for agricultural purposes is equally responsible for dispossession as that of pasturage. Sheep walks were regularly held up as evidence of the follies of engrossment and consequent dispossession. This was true both of the Highlands of the turn of the nineteenth century as well as of England in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries when writers were known to declare England more populated by sheep than people. With broad swathes of land emptied of holdings and now sparingly “peopled” with roaming herds of animals, pasturage was an easy target for critics of all political and economic persuasions who compared this image with that of the large numbers of people it formerly supported. Agriculture, since it seemed to fill the landscape, especially if practiced by enthusiastic improvers, and since it only intensified the activity which had always been carried out on the land, was a less obvious contributor to dispossession. However, Selkirk boldly proclaims the merits of both modes of land use in producing efficiency and profit. The “antient state of the Highlands” was one in which “every spot was occupied by nearly as many families as the produce of land could subsist,” but outside of the Highlands, even in the Scottish lowlands, and “indeed in every civilized country where landed estates are on a large scale, we find no more people upon a farm than are reckoned necessary for carrying on the work that must be done upon it” (25). In other words, for Selkirk, a feudal population is maximized by subsistence while capitalized agriculture limits population by its limited demand for labor. This is an unavoidable circumstance, Selkirk claims, since “[t]his is the natural result of the operation of private interest” (25). “Private interest” is a way of invoking the mores of English freedom which are opposed to the clan system in allowing the chief turned

landlord to exercise his (property) rights in the manner he sees fit. Capitalized agriculture thus flows from a “rational” use of land determined not by the demand for immediate consumption, but through the profit that can be extracted at each level of its functioning:

The proprietor lets his land to the tenant who will give him the highest rent for it . . . [the tenant] must raise as much produce, but with as little expense, as possible: to avoid expense, he must employ no unnecessary hands; must feed no superfluous mouths. The less of the produce is consumed upon the farm, the more he can carry to market. (25-6)

By imagining the untenured cottier in terms of the disembodied parts of “unnecessary hands” and “superfluous mouths,” Selkirk dehumanizes them, reducing them to imagery of uselessness and excessive need. There is also an oscillation between dearth and abundance: between the “highest” rent demanding “much produce” and the limit of “expense” and consumption against the demand of abundant hands and mouths. Here, Selkirk mirrors his own description of the desensitization of commerce when he notes later in the text that the peasantry have yet to be conditioned to “the habits of a commercial society, to the coldness which must be expected by those whose intercourse with their superiors is confined to the daily exchange of labours for its stipulated reward” (120). While capitalism aims to substitute the simplicity and rationality of wage labor for the mutual interdependencies of earlier Highland culture, Selkirk cautions that without the removal of such “unnecessary hands,” the new system could be permanently ruptured “in a country still teeming with the superabundant population accumulated by the genius of the feudal times” (37).

Having argued that the expulsion of the cottiers is necessary for the progress exemplified by England’s “state of commercial refinement,” Selkirk must also dispute

some popular solutions to the problem of a “superabundant” population. The newly-minted Highland landlords and manufacturers were inclined to view landless cotters as a cheap labor pool either for certain specialized agricultural products such as kelp production or for factory work. Of the first method of employment Selkirk is somewhat supportive, but, as to the second, he believes that the cotters are not inclined to laboring in factories both because of their supposedly natural attachment to land and because of their lack of properly disciplined habits:

The manners of a town, the practice of sedentary labour under the roof of a manufactory, present to the Highlander a most irksome contrast to his former life. The independence and irregularity to which he is accustomed, approach to that of a savage: his activity is occasionally called forth to the utmost stretch. . . But these efforts are succeeded by intervals of indolence equally extreme. He is accustomed to occasional exertions of agricultural labour, but without any habits of regular and steady industry. (48-49)

Selkirk’s text continually endeavors to account for the paradox of the Highlanders’ work habits which lurch from one extreme to another, from “the utmost stretch” to intense idleness, with neither mode truly according with English agriculture’s “regular and steady industry.” In essence, Selkirk agrees that these “remanants” of the “feudal” Highlands cannot be accommodated within modern Scotland. By their very presence and their stubborn attachment to the memories of their cultural past, they destabilize the kingdom and threaten to send it reeling back in time.

In order to prove his point, Selkirk conjures the most vivid and haunting image available to him: the current state of (pre-Famine) Ireland. The Highlanders’ affection for their history is far from a simple idealization, a set of cultural fairy tales to be relegated to the margins; Selkirk contends that, in fact, such persistent beliefs and

structures can exert real force beyond the past and even the present, into the future: “the irritation that prevails among them may be transmitted from generation to generation, and disturb the peace of the country long after the causes from which it has arisen may be considered as worn out” (121). Those who doubt this can consult the history of Ireland “to prove. . .what distant periods the effect of an antiquated ground of discontent may be prolonged” (121). It is clear that Ireland’s discontents can be seen as “the legitimate offspring” of “the forfeitures under Cromwell and King William” (121). The image of Irish “discontent” is calculated to be so frightful and violent to the Highland landowners that Selkirk must emphasize the real similarities of their situations: the comparison to “a part of the empire so dreadfully convulsed[.]. . .this apprehension is not altogether visionary” (122). As proof, Selkirk recounts several recent instances of agrarian unrest and even local rebellion in the Highlands. Resorting to “any coercive means” (such as legislation) to keep the Highland cotters from emigrating will surely result in an outbreak of violence, Selkirk insists. Therefore, the example of Ireland proves that “had [the dispossessed] found the means. . .to seek a distant asylum, the internal state of that country at this day would be much more satisfactory” (121). This important invocation of Ireland, a topic which Selkirk largely avoids, demonstrates its ability to conjure the uncontrollable, violent, uncivilized presence of a dispossessed peasantry. Selkirk’s allusion to the “forfeitures” or confiscations of seventeenth-century Ireland link its violence to that of the Highland Clearances and suggests that such violent removals have set in motion a violent chain of events that have the potential to be inverted upon their authors. Therefore, Selkirk decries the use of anti-emigration legislation as that which

“would prevent a population infected with deep and permanent seeds of every angry passion from removing” (125). Having successfully established the senselessness and danger of “keeping” a superabundant population, Selkirk offers in its place the planned resettlement of the Highland cotters in British North America.

*Observations on Emigration* is a recasting of the debate about Scottish emigration by situating it within the broader landscape of economic progress represented by England’s “commercial refinement,” thereby reading the dispossession of Highland cotters as a positive sign of the continuing improvement of Scotland’s economic integration. At the same time, Selkirk’s efforts at transforming a recalcitrant problem into a productive colonial end is shot through with an ambivalence about the ability of such emigrants to be successfully integrated into the economic system even through the discipline of English agriculture. For while Selkirk is intent to argue for their removal by pointing out the danger of their continuing presence, he is equally pressed to convince his audience that the resettlement of the Highlanders would aid the ends of empire by means of their loyal and industrious plantation in the Canadian frontier. For Selkirk, the rehabilitation of the Highland cotters can be accomplished through their exportation to British North America where they will serve as a kind of civilizational bulwark against the influence of disloyal and uncouth Americans. Despite his earlier characterizations, Selkirk reclaims the Highlanders as men “whose manners and principles are consonant to our own government” (159). It is upon this characterization that much of Selkirk’s text depends, for the combined elements of culture, ideology and loyalty are what recommend the Highlanders for such a colonial project. Even when describing the potential dangers



that a landless group of cotters present to the Highland landlords, Selkirk is careful to reassure his audience that any “irritation” that was expressed by the people in violent terms was “against their immediate superiors only” and that it was “as if they did not understand that they were committing an offence against the general government of the kingdom” (122, 123). Thus, ultimately the Highlanders can be reclaimed from the unfortunate circumstances that have befallen them since “the Highlanders have never given reason to impeach the character of loyalty towards their sovereign which their ancestors maintained” (123). Furthermore, their presence in Canada can bolster the Loyalist communities there whom Selkirk imagines as perched precariously between the Americans and their potential encroachment on the northern territories. Anxious to preserve this Loyalist character, which is endangered by “the contagion of American sentiments” and of “republican principles,” the Highlanders’ “old established principles of loyalty” and “military character” recommend them as “valuable acquisition[s]” to British North America (160, 161, 162). Selkirk’s belief in the Highlanders’ likely success largely rests on his discussion of the resettlement, which he financed in 1803, of a group of 800 Highlanders in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia. Many of the same “peculiar and characteristic manners” of the Highlanders which were seen as detrimental in the context of Scotland become useful in the Canadian frontier. Their clannish attachment to land has been translated into an important “local attachment and . . . view [of] their property with a sort of paternal fondness” (194-5). And, while their work habits had been the object of suspicion in Scotland, as settlers, Selkirk compliments the “hardy habits of these Highlanders” which give them “a great advantage over people who are accustomed

to better accommodation” and who “immediately applied themselves with vigour to the essential object of clearing their lands” (202). Indeed, “the proud spirit that characterized the antient Highlander, was carefully cherished among them: the near prospect of independence was kept constantly in their view” (205). While the establishment of husbandry for the purposes of survival is an unavoidable necessity, Selkirk emphasizes the role of agriculture in disciplining the habits of the Highlanders. For the purpose of Selkirk’s venture was to fund the Highlanders’ emigration without “encourage[ing]. . .reliance on any resource but their own industry” (205). In light of this, the settlers were allowed to purchase land on credit with the view that by the third or fourth year “an industrious man may have it in his power to discharge his debt out of the produce of the land itself” (204-5). The key to the success of such settlements, Selkirk contends, is that no “charity” should be given to the new settlers; rather supplementary support came in the form of loans so that “their minds were not degraded by the humiliating idea of receiving anything like charity” (205). Canadian soil requires only “slight preparation” to enable its proper tillage, Selkirk contends; the process of clearing the land will employ an “expert workman. . .for six or eight days in cutting down and crosscutting the trees of an acre of land; to pile and burn them requires about as much more labour. . .the stumps may be pulled out with little difficulty after five or six years” (215-6). Furthermore, through the grueling work required in clearing land, growing adequate food and building habitations, Selkirk believes that a spirit of “pride of landed property” is revived in the Highlanders, “a feeling natural to the human breast” (209). This is true of even those settlers “of very moderate property” as demonstrated by his example of one Highlander

who “selected a situation with more taste than might have been expected from a mere peasant” (210). Selkirk reports that under these terms, the Highland settlers were able “in little more than one year” to make “themselves independent of any supply that did not arise from their own labour,” to which he credits “their industrious dispositions and persevering energy” (207). And, more importantly, “[w]hen the stumps are removed, the plough may be used, though for the first or second time with some difficulty. . . After that, however, a farmer may follow the same agricultural process as in England” (217). It is through the successful application of English agricultural techniques to Canadian soil, Selkirk indicates, that both land and people can be properly disciplined into the proper modes of production and consumption. Of course, Selkirk elides those circumstances of the Canadian settlements which contradict the principles of political economy that he had earlier discussed in relation to Scotland. For instance, despite his claims that the Highlanders had been reformed and brought into modern capitalized norms, it appears that a great degree of their success was owing to their persistence in the traditional Highland practices of husbandry and land tenantry. Selkirk excuses these practices by arguing that the extreme circumstances of the frontier allow the relaxation of such rationalized principles: “To obviate the terrors which the woods were calculated to inspire, the settlement were not dispersed . . . but concentrated within a moderate space” (198). The settlers live on “lots laid out . . . [so] that there were generally four or five families, and sometimes more, who built their houses in a little knot together” (198). Reminiscent of those practices which he had earlier attributed to “feudal” culture, the settlers’ grouped lots are described as being “inhabited by persons nearly related, who

sometimes carried on their work in common, or, at least, were always at hand to come to each other's assistance" (198). Again, Selkirk admits no concern for the settlers' reversion to traditional modes of industry, reassuring the audience that "this enabled them to proceed with more vigour, as there are many occasions, in the work of clearing away the woods, where the joint efforts of a number of men are requisite" (199). A great deal of energy is expended in expressing the usefulness of such arrangements in a situation where "a single individual can scarcely make any progress" or where "the work of several men [clearing woods] being collected in one place, made so much greater the show" and that "when any one was inclined to despondency, the example and society of his friends kept up his spirits" (198-9). Selkirk admits that "this plan was the more readily acquiesced in, from its similarity to the former situation of the small tenants to their native country; and. . . a party of relations were willing even to take all their land in one large lot in partnership" (200). Ultimately, this "sociable arrangement" did not work, Selkirk claims, because "in the subsequent stages of the business, as the partners soon began to wish for a subdivision, and this was seldom accomplished without a good deal of wrangling" (200). Yet, as in other moments of the settlement's description, it is the Highlanders themselves who decide their living arrangements even against, for example, Selkirk's attempt at dividing the land via an expensive and time-consuming survey. His description consistently suggests that the "stubborn" Highlanders simply pursued their own course.

Selkirk sounds a note of caution even after his fairly strong praise for the Highlanders' achievements and persevering industry. He notes that "it is observed" by

unnamed interlocutors that “after the first two or three years their exertions have relaxed” (210). This is certainly a perplexing problem for Selkirk since he has contended that the innate pride of property and the grueling demands of the frontier have developed the Highlanders into respectable purveyors of proper English agriculture (implying that a market economy is not far off). Why, then, would this situation arise? Selkirk cannot provide a satisfactory answer, but suggests that such circumstances might be the “effect of an insecure or discouraging tenure, than of any inherent disposition” (211). Here in effect is the crux of Selkirk’s text, which has labored to explain the Highlanders’ dispositions in their native country, where they were viewed as insolent and indolent, and to make a case for their fortuitous resettlement in the Canadian landscape where he had hoped to extract the useful qualities of “pride” and attachment to land and an ability for period of extreme labor and mold them into the figure of the respectable colonial British farmer. However, Selkirk observes that after the initial two or three year period, which he had detailed as a strenuous time of labor and a struggle for survival, the transplanted Highlanders fall back having “found themselves able to maintain their families with ease, and to procure all the comforts they had been accustomed to; and, having no further ambition, have preferred the indulgence of their old habits of indolence, to an accumulation of property” (211). Similarly, the Highlanders tend to settle by the sea shore “in spots abounding with coarse hay” which is a “great convenience to the new settler, by furnishing an immediate maintenance for cattle; but. . .[is] a great impediment to industry” (211). The “pernicious effects of the too great abundance of marsh hay” has consequently been solved by the limitation of the amount of marsh that can be allotted to

each property, “not of a sufficient extent to be a permanent dependance, or to supersede the necessity of going on with improvements” (212-3). These realizations, that the Highlanders’ reform is incomplete, that their backsliding may be unpreventable, leave an aporia which Selkirk happily attempts to patch up at the text’s conclusion with the assertion that the whole of his account

proves that they may be made excellent colonists; and that our North American possessions may be peopled and brought into cultivation, without introducing into them men whose manners and principles are so repugnant to our own constitution and government, as those which are prevalent among the natives of the United States. (222)

The exportation of a superabundant population was a project that Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk was so invested in that he petitioned the king several times for a charter that would allow his own colony. His intentions were finally realized when, having gained control of the Hudson Bay Company, and having allotted himself an area of land (straddling current day Manitoba, North and South Dakota, and Minnesota) which he named Assinobia and which was also referred to as Selkirk’s concession, he resettled a small group of Scottish emigrants there in 1811.

*Diagnosing Ireland’s Ills: RLE’s letter to Lord Selkirk*

Selkirk’s zeal for the cause of the emigration, rehabilitation, and colonization of “excess” population extended beyond Scotland itself as not only witnessed by his remarks about Ireland in *Observations on Emigration*, but also by his 1802 pamphlet entitled “A Proposal Tending to the Permanent Security of Ireland.” It may have been this particular publication that interested the Edgeworths, but it can be more certainly

asserted that by the time of the publication of *Essays on Professional Education* in 1809, their acquaintance was well-established. Richard Lovell Edgeworth's *Memoirs*, edited and partially written by Maria, include his response to Selkirk's request for "information respecting the situation and dispositions of the lower class of people in Ireland" (II 308). Richard's letter is testament to their extremely similar outlooks on the condition of the respective peasantry of their countries. Not only was the letter intended solely for Selkirk and not for a general audience, it is also fair to assume that Richard was already familiar with Selkirk's views as they appeared in *Observations on Emigration*. In fact, Richard's letter is a direct response to *Observations on Emigration*, following its organizational contours and even borrowing Selkirk's phrases. As such, it is apparent that Richard's letter can assume a certain alignment with its reader (Selkirk) which could account for its frank, even brutal, assessment of the state of the Irish peasantry. Unlike Selkirk's text, which must convince an ill-disposed audience both that a "superabundant" population is a positive effect of progress and that such a population can be usefully rehabilitated for the purposes of furthering the British Empire, Richard's letter serves as a first-hand account and elaboration of views that Selkirk has already detailed. Furthermore, Richard's letter focuses on conditions internal to Ireland while doubting the possibility of encouraging emigration, especially for the furtherance of empire (not that RLE was unconcerned with the status of empire more generally). While the respective texts are different in design, their mutual views, from the dynamics of Scottish and Irish peasant economies and their potential blockage to the destabilization of English/British progress, are highlighted in Richard's letter. The question for Richard is not so much what to do with what he terms a

“redundant” population, but how to pry the Irish peasantry away from their current modes of living, either for the purposes of emigration or for overall improvement. While Selkirk is generally enthusiastic about the potential of an organized emigration, it was noted earlier the results of his “experiment” are actually ambiguous at best as to the possibility of reforming the peasantry and instilling a capitalized sensibility. In essence, the issues that each writer confronts are the same: how to inculcate the need or desire for improvement into a self-sustaining and, often, recalcitrant subsistence culture. Richard registers the extent of the anxiety that such an intractable problem presents for the Anglo-Irish landlords when he complains that “[i]t is in vain that we despise his [the cottager’s] *sordid content*” (emphasis added, *Memoirs* II 308). He laments that “as long as the lazy inhabitant of a cabin can provide for his family, ‘meat, fire clothes,’ he will not be tempted from that dear hut, his home” (II 308). The Irish cottager’s ability to cling to his tenancy is enabled by the potato. It is the machinery which allows the engine of the landlord system to turn. For, aside from the turf which “supplies fire and smoke, so that he has warmth enough to compensate for the insufficiency of his cabin,” “potatoes not only supply himself and his family with food, but afford a redundancy—sometimes for a pig, and always for a beggar” (II 308). The real problem for Richard Edgeworth is that such a system of “sordid content” does not allow him leverage: without needs and therefore desires the cottager cannot be induced to change. The Anglo-Irish landlords are not exempt from blame in this situation, according to Edgeworth, since they allow middlemen to convince them that they “could not . . . collect the rents of cottagers;” in other words, absenteeism is a problem because it allows the landlords to be lax in



extracting the maximum amount of rent from the cottagers. Aside from this, however, it is the habits of the cottagers themselves that allow for the perpetuation of this system since they lack concerns that would seem to motivate other (English) peasants: “as to clothes, the difference between rags and a whole coat is not much regarded amongst his neighbors” (II 308). Without physical needs<sup>11</sup> for shelter or sustenance, and without an awareness of appearance or any other form of conspicuous consumption to spur the cottager, the capacity of land itself is the only potential stoppage that Richard can envision. Yet, while he claims that “such an order of things cannot last indefinitely” since “the land is subdivided, till it ceases to provide for another marriage” (II 309), Richard reluctantly admits that this limit is rarely reached. Selkirk had similarly observed the high density of population in Scotland and attributed it to its feudal system since “there is no employment but what arises directly from the land” and therefore the “country is more or less peopled according to the mode of cultivation” (*Observations* 26). Selkirk describes this mode of production as “a highly refined agriculture, that approaches to gardening, [which] will employ a considerable population” (*Observation* 26). While Selkirk’s tone is ambivalent, seeming almost to praise intensive husbandry as “highly refined,” Edgeworth opposes garden culture to agriculture itself. He observes that “[t]he garden culture of Ireland renders each family in some degree independent, as to mere subsistence: but at the same time it prevents the growth of corn, and retards agricultural improvement” (II 310). Inefficient and unprofitable, garden culture allows subsistence on extremely small

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<sup>11</sup> The category of “need” itself will be interrogated at a later point, but it should be noted that even Edgeworth’s usage implies the inherent “give” or pliability of need and that it is on the peasantry’s conception of need that everything rests.

portions of land, a subsistence which for Edgeworth is further degraded by its lack of corn or grain cultivation. Since grain requires large, “efficient” tracts of ploughed land, unlike the spade husbandry of intensive agriculture, both the means of “garden culture” and the product it yields (not to mention the types of food that can be consumed from it) are symbolic of the uncivilized state of the land and its inhabitants. In a similar manner to Selkirk, Edgeworth believes that progress can only occur when “time has obliterated their ancient feelings and habits” because it is clear that, despite the attempts of improving landlords such as himself, very few inroads had been made into traditional practices (II 311). The tenacity of the *clachan* system can only be matched by a force of nature, Edgeworth eerily puts forth, since “famine will probably, in this country, yield precedence to pestilence, as the sustenance of human life, upon the wretched scale on which it is measured in Ireland, cannot fail, till its population is nearly doubled” (II 311). In such a formulation, nature provides an absolute barrier to the growth of population, but it is the habits of the Irish peasantry themselves that run up against nature. It is their ability to sustain themselves on “a wretched scale” that precipitates famine and pestilence. Until such time, however, Edgeworth is not entirely despondent about the state of the Irish peasantry. He suggests to Selkirk that there have been recent hints of change in the habits of the cottagers. Edgeworth notes that “submission to avoidable poverty is becoming less common and less creditable,” and therefore the appearance of “wicker chimneys, a pane of glass, and a cabbage-garden, are becoming every day appendages to the cabin” (II 309). In fact, as a sign that the seeds of consumerism are beginning to germinate, there has been an “astonishing increase of white stockings and

cleanliness among the women [which] necessarily compels the men to labor for the purchase of these new luxuries: but still these luxuries, and these very exertions, fasten the cottager to the soil" (II 309). Here, the white stockings become a sign of the (feminine) purity and domestication of the women whose desire for "luxury" (here positively connoted) in turn disciplines the industry and production of (masculine) agriculture. Edgeworth summarizes the importance of this seemingly minor foray into the marketplace: "New industry arises with new hopes; useful luxury obliges men to look forward" (II 309). As one might expect, Edgeworth sees the coupling of the consumption of "useful luxury" with that of education as a means of introducing such "new hopes" into the minds of the cottagers. He believes that once they are able to perceive that "knowing how to read and write prepares them for situations something above that of day-labourers or wretched cottagers," the peasantry can be more fully subsumed within an economic system in which they will increasingly possess higher stakes (II 309). Arguing for the education of poor Irish youth, Edgeworth contrasts their studiousness with that of the young gentry. For "boys without shoes and stockings" their diligence often pays off with a clerkship or military career. The return to the Anglo-Irish is more than the increasing the stability of their positions, but also the formation of an emotional bond with their tenantry: "for the honor of human nature, and in support of those who maintain the moral advantages of education, the gratitude of these young Irishmen is so common, as scarcely to excite praise" (II 310). This gratitude is a particularly important element for Edgeworth and other Anglo-Irish landlords since it works to assure them that, through the process of inculcating a desire for improvement, they will not be forced to

succumb to the violence of their tenantry's demands. Thus, the improvement of agricultural production and of education provides the entrance into capitalized circulation which simultaneously confers the promise of "new hopes" and the bonds of "gratitude."

Richard Edgeworth's reply to Selkirk's inquiries about the state of the Irish peasantry demonstrate his striking awareness of the local social and economic conditions, nearly equal to Selkirk's own pronounced discernment of the Scottish Highlands. Such writings witness their commitment to recognizably "liberal" ideals; ideals which, while involving the amelioration of the less fortunate, were no less concerned about the potentially violent consequences of excluding a large and disaffected population from the circuits of capitalism. Both Selkirk and Edgeworth conceived of such consequences not in strictly economic terms, but also with a view towards the importance of an affective economy, a set of emotional relations between the producer, his desire for consumption and, therefore, his desire for his own improvement. While both engage in empirical argumentation and suggest "experimental" solutions for economic problems, each of the writers is interested in the elusive goal of transmitting the desire for improvement to himself or herself. This is why Edgeworth's image of the pure white stockings represents such an integral moment, an "astonishing increase," because it is also a moment when the cottager is "compelled" to buy into the need for improvement (through a gendered cycle of consumption and production), not by a coercive device, but by self-initiated desire. So that, while Edgeworth is less convinced of the Irish peasantry's inclination toward emigration, he believes that "whether the posterity of its present inhabitants seek a distant clime, or remain to cultivate their native soil, if they can be taught sobriety, habits of

order and obedience, and the proper use of their understanding, in guiding their conduct to their own happiness, a real, permanent, and increasing benefit, will be conferred on the country” (II 313). This statement in fact encapsulates many of the Edgeworths’ efforts, political, agricultural, educational, and literary, to invest in the improvement of both land and people in Ireland for the sake of “real, permanent, and increasing benefit.”

Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s engagement with metropolitan men of letters has, to some extent, been documented. His involvement with the Lunar Society, which included Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, and Joseph Priestley is fairly well-known. Furthermore, scholars have pointed to his significance, particularly in the context of Ireland, as an engineer and inventor. For instance, Edgeworth funded and prototyped a telegraph system which he believed should be instituted in Ireland due to its threat of invasion from France (and the consequent uprising of the Irish that it all but ensured). Additionally, he was involved in several commissions to survey and assess Ireland’s boglands for reclamation and cultivation. These and other of Edgeworth’s contributions to the science and society of Ireland were further documented by Edgeworth’s own *Memoirs*, edited and at least partially written by Maria Edgeworth. And, while the Edgeworth’s joint work in the field of education with the publication of pedagogical texts like *Practical Education* and *Essays on Professional Education* has been commented on at length, it remains true that Maria Edgeworth’s relationship to non-literary figures like Lord Selkirk, David Ricardo, Etienne Dumont, and others has not informed her image in contemporary scholarship. This seems, at least in part, to be due to the continuing difficulties of extracting her father’s correspondence and relationships from her own.

Such relations are nonetheless an important aspect of her persona and, indeed, her writings. Marilyn Butler suggested this in her biography of Maria when she commented that, with the drafting of *Essays on Professional Education*, Maria consulted at length with figures outside of her immediate family (*Maria Edgeworth* 292-3). Butler implies that such collaboration was restricted to Maria's non-fiction as opposed to her novels, but it becomes clear upon further examination that such interactions influenced her thinking well beyond the page of their correspondences. The best example of this is that of Lord Selkirk himself who not only exchanged letters with Richard, but was also a long-time correspondent of Maria's. Given that both father and daughter were frequent public and private supporters of Selkirk's outlook and undertakings, his influence on their views of colonization and economics should be considered of particular importance. In early 1808, writing to her aunt, Margaret Ruxton, Maria indicates that *Essays on Professional Education* is "the object of [her]. . .waking and sleeping thoughts" and that she has sent pieces of the work on to several commenters including Lord Selkirk, James Keir, and Judge Luke Fox (Butler, *Maria Edgeworth* 292-3). It is clear that Maria considered their views indispensable to *Professional Education*'s publication and notes that the sections sent to Keir and Fox had their respective "approbation[s]." Maria tells Margare Ruxton that both the chapter on country gentlemen, discussed here, and that on statesmen had been sent to Lord Selkirk who "begged to keep it a fortnight" so that he might finish a pamphlet intended for an upcoming session of Parliament (*Memoir of ME* 1:210-11). Knowing the Edgeworth's enthusiasm for his earlier *Observations on Emigration*, it is apparent that Maria sees an affinity between Selkirk's views and her own regarding the

education of country gentlemen. Also apparent is the relative intimacy of their connection especially considering that for her fictional writing, only her family were consulted. Selkirk's influence extends even beyond Maria's published pages as is witnessed by another letter to Margaret Ruxton written later than year in the context of the Edgeworths' lease negotiations with their tenants. She tells Ruxton that her parents have "gone to the Hills to settle a whole clan of tenants whose leases are out, and who *expect that because* they have lived under his Honour, they and theirs these hundred years, that his Honour shall and will contrive to divide the land that supported ten people amongst their sons and sons' sons, to the number of a hundred" (*Letters of ME* 1:165). Maria satirically adopts the voice of the tenants here, attempting to recreate their cadence and representing their manner as diffident yet persistent in "*expect[ing] that*" their leases will be extended and their plots divided as they wish. She further conjures a caricaturized image of the clan: "And there is Cormac with the reverend locks, and Bryan with the flaxen wig, and Brady with the long brogue, and Paddy with the short, and Terry with the butcher-blue coat and Dennis with no coat at all, and Eneas Hosey's widow, and all the Devines, pleading and quarrelling about boundaries and bits of bog" (*Letters of ME* 1:165-6). In addition to highlighting the haphazard appearance of the clan, this long chain of figures is meant to suggest the stereotyped rhetoric of the peasantry as garrulous and disorganized. Yet, just behind this caricature, which reduces the clan to picturesque figures of an equally heterogenous, boggy and hilly landscape, the ability of the peasantry to forcefully argue their case infringes on Edgeworth's text, literally pushing the boundaries that have been drawn around them, as they "plead" and "quarrell about [the]

boundaries and bits of bog.” Maria caps this unruly scene with a more serious although incongruous wish that the stern, authoritative, and patriarchal figure of Lord Selkirk would appear “in the midst of them, with his hands crossed before him;” she adds that she should “like to know if he could make them understand his *Essay on Emigration*” (*Letters of ME* 1:166). Maria’s letter offers insight into the extent of her interest not only in Selkirk’s text, but also with its content and its relevance to an Irish context. Even in the somewhat casual reference she makes to her aunt, playing up its comic appeal, Maria’s mention of the subdivision of land suggests that she is thinking of this moment in economic terms, as a problem of the peasantry’s supposed lack of awareness of the great machinery of progress. She intimates, following Selkirk, that the seemingly impersonal forces of progress threaten to tear the peasantry away from the landscape even without their knowledge. Indeed, as shall be discussed here, Maria Edgeworth’s novels echo her in-depth knowledge of political economy while astutely applying its theories to everyday moments such as the one recorded here. In fact, by viewing her writing in its entirety, from her correspondence to her pedagogical text to her novels and short stories, it is apparent that she is able to seamlessly blend the perhaps dry details of contemporary political economy with the imaginative workings of her fictional works. This ability is generally alluded to, if at all, in relation to her satirical accounts of the Anglo-Irish gentry, particularly with reference to *Castle Rackrent*. However, Edgeworth spends an equally significant amount of time looking closely at Ireland’s peasant economy, at its disturbing resistance to British attempts at its rationalization, and at ways in which this recalcitrance can be overcome.



Illustration 1: "The Knave"

*The Knave and Slave* were also drawing from the life in Ireland. The names are given merely as suiting the expression of the countenance and figures. There are large classes in Ireland, of which these portraits are characteristic.

*The Knave* was not absolutely dishonest; he was only one, who, with slight variation, adopted the Negro's maxim of "God gives black man all that white men forget:" reading it, God gives poor men all that rich men forget. He was a man of much resource, humour, and wit, not restrained by strict regard to truth. Indeed, without any conscience upon this point. This was the person, who described the array and vestments of the fairies. He averred, that he had *visibly seen* the good people, as he called the fairies, dancing on the grass in mid-day. He called us to look at them, declaring, that he saw them plainly, even while we looked to the spot to which he pointed. (Mentioned in the notes to *Castle Rackrent*.) (R.L. Edgeworth and M. Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, 495, 494).



*The Widow.*

## Illustration 2: “The Slave”

*The Slave.* – This appellation does not imply, that the man was enslaved. A slave formerly in England and still in many parts of Ireland simply means a man, who earns his subsistence as a day-labourer. Some years ago, if a labourer or working man was asked what he was, he would answer, “I am a poor slave” – To slave, being synonymous for to work hard.

The individual here represented did not *slave himself* much, for he was, as might be supposed from his portrait, lounging in his gait, slow in all his motions, and lazy in all his habits. But as to the rest, he was an honest, affectionate creature – in his youth a sportsman, and an excellent shot. The happiest hours of his life, and those in which he gloried in his later days, had been spent in going out shooting with his master when a boy – to whom, and to his family, he ever continued faithfully and strongly attached. He survived him but a few months; he was carried off by the fever last year (1818). (R.L. Edgeworth and M. Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, 496, 497).



J. E. M.

G. T. W.

*The Slave!*

### Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui* and the Gift of Agricultural Improvement

But pray, aunt Mary, have we given any thing in return to those countries which have given us so many good things? ~ *Dialogues on Botany* [Maria Edgeworth] London: 1819.

*Essays on Professional Education* and *Ennui, Memoirs of the Earl of Glenthorn*, both published in 1809, demonstrate the Edgeworths' concerns with the reform of a dissipated Anglo-Irish gentry and with the cultivation of ties between the Ascendancy and the peasantry, particularly those of Irish Catholic extraction. As the prior chapter has demonstrated, the Edgeworths understood capitalized agriculture as a potent civilizing force within Empire, citing its significance in a diverse array of British colonial settings. Where *Professional Education* functioned as a strictly pedagogical text, addressing the education of the metropolitan gentleman and alluding to his role as colonial improver, *Ennui* became a fictional working out of its more specific application to Ireland. The ostensible representation of Maria Edgeworth's educational philosophy is the eponymous Lord Glenthorn. His reformation echoes the recommendations the Edgeworths had advanced in *Professional Education* for the proper education of a country gentleman. The development of an economic sensibility amongst the gentry was most strongly counseled by the Edgeworths, who believed that such an awareness would moderate their consumption of luxuries and condition their civic involvement as a principled and independent (both morally and financially) gentleman. Furthermore, in *Ennui* Maria Edgeworth emphasizes the importance not only of the reform of manners, but also of the reshaping and redeployment of Anglo-Irish modes of authority. Such concerns were inextricable from the events of 1798, which laid bare both the violent underpinnings of the Ascendancy's hegemony and the fragility of its authority. In contrast to many of their

co-religionists, however, the Edgeworths' outlooks were stamped by Enlightenment optimism: they were committed to toleration and reform and would have the Anglo-Irish gentry assume the role of benevolent landlords. Novels like *Ennui*, *Ormonde*, and *Castle Rackrent* can be read as an exhortation to Anglo-Irish reform which was forced by the political events of the 1790s, but it is equally true that the Edgeworths' espousal of toleration, especially for Catholics, was not solely predicated on the potency of the insurrection. Instead, the Edgeworths' vision of an "improved" Ireland resulted from a complex mixture of Ascendancy paternalism, political economy, and, to some degree, Enlightenment egalitarianism (Hollingsworth 38-9).

In turning toward *Ennui* for a more careful understanding of Maria Edgeworth's attempts to carefully balance each of these concerns, it becomes clear that many of the Edgeworths' philosophical principles ran up against the realities of colonization and the defense of their role own role within it. By examining the Edgeworths' assumption of the mantle of liberal reform, the chapter will discuss the ways in which *Ennui* offers a superficial undressing of Anglo-Irish hegemony while, in fact, continuing to obscure its underpinnings. *Ennui*'s complicated plot structure has often served to confound critical reaction, engendering arguments over the seriousness of the work and the gender of its author. Here, the rhetorical structure of the text is seen as an indispensable aspect of the illusions which it both actively dispels and secretly deploys. Despite its whimsical or playful aspects, such features of the text are merely superficial: *Ennui* seems to shuffle the deck, to roll the dice, to play or experiment with the idea of an alternative Ireland, an inverted world, only to steadily reconstruct those same hierarchies, more firmly

entrenching and, in fact, naturalizing them. In this way, the entire text can be seen to revolve around questions of class, progress, improvement, and education.

Given the Edgeworths' belief in the interconnectedness of colonial Irish society, a society which demanded the cultivation of a responsible relationship between the gentry and the peasantry, Glenthorn's educational development is matched in the text by his evolving perspective on the peasantry. Christy and Ellinor O'Donoghue perhaps represent Maria Edgeworth's most extensive consideration of the peasantry from their habits to their habitations. As a corollary, the character of M'Leod takes on the role of "practical" educator of the peasantry and resident economist. Indeed, he represents a kind of "eye of the storm," a point of grounded realism which never wavers in the text despite the chaotic events and people which surround him. M'Leod's vision and his projects, which represent one of the possibilities for Ireland's future, are the ones which are shown to be most effective at "improving" the peasantry. Edgeworth emphasizes M'Leod's centrality to the novel both by contrasting his successful ideas with those of the misguided young Glenthorn as well as those of the illiberal Mr. Hardcastle and by situating his character as the conduit of information about the new inhabitants of Glenthorn Castle and their "riotous living."<sup>1</sup> M'Leod's significance is thus secondary only to the figure of Lord Y— as mentor and educator; and, this is only because Lord Y— serves as the primary means of the former Lord Glenthorn's restoration to polite society.

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<sup>1</sup> Ó Gallchoir also argues that M'Leod should be read against Hardcastle; she, however, arrives at different conclusions about their significance, arguing that M'Leod "disappears from view" (*Maria Edgeworth* 94-5).

M'Leod is introduced to the narrative as a somewhat unsympathetic figure. Having contradicted his impulses at aiding his tenantry, M'Leod is viewed by Glenthorn as a "selfish, hardhearted miser" (189). M'Leod's characterization follows from his adherence to rational and economic principles, a perspective the Edgeworths endorsed in both their fictional and pedagogical works (189-91). Identified as a "Scotchman," M'Leod's character has been described as "something of a cross between Adam Smith in his ideas and James Mill in his charm," but many of M'Leod's views also suggest that he is inspired, at least in part, by Lord Selkirk (Deane, *Irish Lit* 95). Edgeworth's retrospective narrator, the former Glenthorn, also describes his aversion to M'Leod as having stemmed from "national prejudice" which assumed that "all Scotchmen were crafty" and that his belief in political economy was simply because "[Adam] Smith's a Scotchman" (181, 191). M'Leod represents the inheritance of Enlightenment, especially Scottish Enlightenment, thinkers; his characterization also suggests the idea that espousing political economy over the dictates of sympathy, on the one hand, or bigotry, on the other, often leads to isolation and unpopularity. In the figures of Glenthorn, Hardcastle, and M'Leod, Maria Edgeworth offers three distinct perspectives on the improvement of the peasantry. Lord Glenthorn's efforts to improve his foster-mother's house as well as to ameliorate the overall conditions of his other tenants are motivated as much by his "agreeable idea of [his]. . . own power and consequence; a power seemingly next to despotic" as by his belief that "the feeling of benevolence is a greater pleasure than the possession of *barouches*, and horses, and castles, and parks—greater even than the possession of power" (182, emphasis original 188). The narrator reflects that "the



method of doing good, which seemed to require the least exertion, and which I, therefore, most willingly practised, was giving away money. . . [W]ithout selecting proper objects, I relieved myself from the uneasy feeling of pity, by indiscriminate donations to objects apparently the most miserable” (189). M’Leod’s stern warnings about such procedures is borne out when Glenthorn observes that the very tenants he has aided, who had “been resolutely struggling with their difficulties, slackened their exertions, and left their labour for the easier trade of imposing upon my credulity” (190). A similar trajectory is detailed for Glenthorn’s project of replacing Ellinor’s “wretched-looking, low, mud-walled cabin” which is fronted by a “dunghill” and which contained, like a modern clown-car:

a pig, a calf, a lamb, a kid, and two geese, all with their legs tied; followed by cocks, hens, chickens, a dog, a cat, a kitten, a beggar-man, a beggar-woman, with a pipe in her mouth; children innumerable, and a stout girl, with a pitchfork in her hand; altogether more than. . . [he] could have possibly supposed the mansion capable of containing. (186)

Glenthorn had envisioned replacing “this hovel” with a “pretty cottage,” “fitted up in the most elegant style of English cottages” (187, 189), but his plans are thwarted by his workmen, whom he blamed for “the delays, and difficulties, and blunders” (65). This experiment is capped by his disappointment at finding the cottage with

divers panes of glass in the windows. . . broken, and their places filled up with shoes, an old hat, or a bundle of rags. Some of the slates were blown off one windy night. . . the rain came in, and Ellinor was forced to make a bed-chamber of the parlour. . . [S]he petitioned me to let her take the slates off and thatch the house; for a slated house. . . was never so warm as a *tatched cabin*; and as there was no smoke, she was *kilt* with the *cowld*. (199-200)

Glenthorn learns that turning Ellinor and the other peasantry into “civilized” English cottagers is not as simple as providing their trappings of life. In fact, it is the

undisciplined habits of the Irish that continually undermine such efforts; Ellinor reshapes the cottage, making use of bric-a-brac, repurposing rooms from their proper function, and denying the rationality of English norms of habitation in an Irish context. Lapsing into a ventriloquization of the peasant dialect, both Glenthorn and Edgeworth express their frustration with the peasantry's refusal to accept proper norms. Ellinor's cottage is slowly, and intentionally, appropriated from the "elegant" English cottage to the state of her former habitation. Glenthorn relates to the reader that "In my life I never felt so angry" which causes him to "reproach. . .Ellinor with being a savage, an Irishwoman, and an ungrateful fool" (200). He instantly regrets this outburst and informs the reader that he had not

consider[ed], that there is often amongst uncultivated people, a mixture of obstinate and lazy content, which makes them, despise the luxuries of their richer neighbours. . .I did not consider, that it must take time to change local and national habits and prejudices; and that it is necessary to raise a taste for comforts, before they can be properly enjoyed. (200)

Here, Glenthorn retrospectively informs his readers that this gift of civilization is one which cannot simply be foisted upon the recipients. He confronts the problems that Lord Selkirk and the Edgeworths had discussed in their other writings—the "admixture of obstinate and lazy content" or the lack of needs or desires. Glenthorn the narrator hints at the solution to this problem by noting that the Irish peasantry are an "uncultivated" people. In other words, like the land itself, the peasantry require the proper preparatory work in order to receive the seeds of civilization. Glenthorn's failure lies in his attempts to impose a gift, demanding immediate restitution. That the more naïve Glenthorn viewed Ellinor's cottage as a gift is fairly explicit in his castigation that she is "ungrateful."

Interestingly, it is this economy of the gift that Glenthorn condemns in his younger self: “So easily is the humanity of the rich and great disgusted and discouraged! as if any people could be civilized in a moment, and at the word of command of ignorant pride or despotic benevolence” (201). The concept of “despotic benevolence” is intentionally reminiscent of Lord Selkirk’s concept of the feudal or clan system, and Edgeworth connects the young Glenthorn’s demeanor in the early stages of the novel with that of the “petty monarch” of Selkirk’s description. Glenthorn Castle itself is depicted as having the “gloomy grandeur of ancient times, with turrets and battlements, and a huge gateway” (177). As Glenthorn enters his new domain, he recounts that the number of servants and the excitement at his arrival increases his sense of his own self-importance and gave him the impression that “[t]hese people seemed ‘born for my use:’ the officious precipitation with which they ran to and fro . . . altogether gave more the idea of vassals than of tenants, and carried my imagination centuries back to feudal times” (178). Edgeworth hints that such impressions are projections of Glenthorn’s when the narrator invokes Anne Radcliffe and the gothic imagery of “mysteries. . .or even portentous omens” to describe the scene: Glenthorn Castle “was so like a room in a haunted castle, that if I had not been too much fatigued to think of any thing, I should certainly have thought of Mrs. Radcliffe” (179). Edgeworth further emphasizes the idea that Glenthorn’s enthrallment with his position is illusory in her description of his dream-like state: “I arose. . .and saw that the whole of the prospect bore an air of savage wildness. . .[M]y imagination was seized with the idea of remoteness from civilized society: the melancholy feeling of solitary grandeur took possession of my soul” (179). Glenthorn’s perception of the

savagery and remoteness of the landscape coupled with his dual impressions of both “melancholy” and “grandeur” suggest a Burkean ambivalence about the power of this land, and by extension, the people in it, to overwhelm him. Thus, while the young Glenthorn seems to revel in his new-found power, the narrator suggests the dangerous undercurrents involved in indulging this fantasy of himself as a feudal lord. The allure of this role holds the potential to re-insert him, and all who are tempted by such power, into an irrational Gaelic past (179). Glenthorn’s “despotic benevolence,” seen in his demeanor and in his erroneous methods of improving the peasantry, is thus tied to the *clachan* system. Like Selkirk’s misreading of feudal Scottish practices, Edgeworth cynically interprets *clachan* patronage as a kind of bribery on the part of the lords who indulge their “vassals” for the sake of inducing a groveling loyalty. Glenthorn’s generosity is tainted, in this view, by his desire for self-reflected glory rather than by the disinterested rationality prized by the Edgeworths.

For Edgeworth, Glenthorn’s attempts at improvement necessarily fail because they are informed by faulty motives and by coercion that masquerades as liberality. The figure of Mr. Hardcastle, on the other hand, offers an alternative view of the improvement, or at least containment, of the peasantry. Initially attractive to Glenthorn, Hardcastle’s boastful and seemingly easy-going manner offers a contrast to the stiff deportment of M’Leod. In language which is rather obviously antithetical to the Edgeworths’ views, Hardcastle declares the value of “common sense” and practicality over “book-learning” and theory (193). Relying only on his personal experiences and impressions, Hardcastle admits no doubt, especially in the manner of “manag[ing]. . .his

people” (193). And, where Glenthorn is beneficent, Hardcastle is parsimonious, believing that the “common people have already too much education” and that “it’s our business to keep them down, unless, . . . you’d wish to have your throat cut” (193). Knowledge can offer nothing to the peasantry, Hardcastle believes, for “Can all the book-learning in the world. . . dig a poor man’s potatoes for him, or plough his land, or cut his turf?” (193). The proof of this, Hardcastle insists, is in the demeanor of his tenants, of which there is not a “quieter, better-managed set of people” (193). The narrative withholds its final judgement of Hardcastle’s outlook while similarly suspending Glenthorn and the reader’s impressions of M’Leod.

As mentioned earlier, Glenthorn regards his land agent, or middleman, M’Leod with suspicion for his national extraction as well as for his personal demeanor. Glenthorn’s dislike of M’Leod is increased when he senses M’Leod’s disapprobation of his improvement projects. Glenthorn perceives M’Leod as “a selfish, hardhearted miser,” noting, significantly, M’Leod’s lack of sympathy and his lack of appreciation for Glenthorn’s self-declared generosity (189-90). In several instances, Glenthorn notes M’Leod’s distinct reserve and unwillingness to forcefully argue his points. However, when Glenthorn consults M’Leod as to his opinions, he discovers that M’Leod has carefully reasoned opinions on nearly every aspect of the state of the peasantry. M’Leod objects to providing “premiums to the idle,” as he terms them, believing, that they can only “creat[e]. . . more in future” (189). M’Leod’s views on charity versus improvement echo those discussed in *Professional Education*, which claim that the landlord should

have a full knowledge of political economy since its appearances are often deceiving. It is also about the importance of the landlord's accurate dispensation of benevolence.

Illustrating this point, M'Leod provides an evocative image from another colonial setting: "Pity for one class of beings sometimes makes us cruel to others. I am told that there are some Indian Brahmins so very compassionate, that they hire beggars to let fleas feed upon them; I doubt whether it might not be better to let the fleas starve" (189-90). Both Edgeworth and M'Leod position this story as a satirical parable about the unintentional consequences of attempting to aid the less fortunate. While Edgeworth intends the cryptic parable to accord with M'Leod's own inscrutable persona, its meaning becomes ambiguous and unstable upon closer examination. Two readings simultaneously present themselves. The first literal reading involves the incongruity of hiring beggars for the ostensible purpose of aiding them while also allowing them to be afflicted by the fleas. Unthinking benevolence leads to cruelty. The second possibility, which is perhaps offered as a humorous subtext, suggests that the flea is representative of the "idle" poor parasitically feeding off of aid to the true objects of compassion, the beggars. Thus M'Leod's comment that he "doubt[s] whether it might not be better to let the fleas starve" suggests that it would be better to avoid increasing the suffering of the intended object of benevolence even if that requires the death of the inadvertent recipient. Yet, the example is perversely allegorical in ways that seem beyond the calculations of both its authors. Which "class of beings" do the "Indian Brahmins" of the example intend to aid: the beggars or the fleas? This ambiguity may be intentional, with the object of critique being not only the examination of the *means* of aiding the less fortunate, but also the

competence of the *purveyors* of compassion. The joke in this case is on the “Indian Brahmins” whose (“Oriental”) despotism blinds them to the proper objects of compassion. The reader, in tandem with M’Leod, thus distances himself from this undesirable blindness by more carefully considering the proper aim of their assistance. The rejection of the “Indian Brahmin” as a model of behavior therefore lies in the reader’s disidentification with figures meant to be evocative of a society whose members are held apart by extreme distinctions of station. In this reading, the Brahmins so-called autocratic rule dehumanizes its lesser members to the point where they can no longer recognize the difference between the needs of the beggar and those of the flea. And yet the text leaves unanswered: who *is* the proper object of compassion? Is the beggar, who is after all “idle,” meant to represent the unworthy poor that M’Leod warns against? Or, is the beggar the rightful recipient of benevolence, whereas it is the donor who is faulted? Furthermore, while the tale provides a negative example of giving, it nonetheless places Glenthorn in the position of the Brahmin: the privileged donor who must choose the rightful object of his compassion. The text cannot avoid drawing an implicit parallel between the perceived despotism of the Indian Brahmin and the potential of the Anglo-Irish gentry to engage in the same dynamic. The text simply leaves this question unresolved. Moreover, the parable is immediately followed by an incident which seems to authorize their equivalency. Responding to M’Leod’s story, the narrator Glenthorn says: “I did not in the least understand what Mr. M’Leod meant; but I was soon made to comprehend it, by the crowds of eloquent beggars, who soon surrounded me: many who . . . left their labour for the easier trade of imposing upon my credulity . . . All this time my

industrious tenants grumbled, because no encouragement was given them. . .[and] look[ed]. . . upon me as a weak good-natured fool” (190). So, here, in contrast to the parable, it is the “eloquent beggars” who become the unworthy objects of compassion (since they do not work) against the “industrious tenants” (the good recipients). But the terms of the parable are further permuted: the “crowds of eloquent beggars” who “surround[. . .]” Glenthorn become the swarm of fleas of the tale. Thus Glenthorn becomes the one who is parasitically drained. Glenthorn becomes “a weak good-natured fool,” the victim of misplaced benevolence. The instability of identification in both the tale and the example that follows it suggests the ambivalence of gift-giving not only in terms of choosing the proper object, but also in the ability of the gift to turn the donor into the “victim.” These ambiguities remain just below the surface of the text; left unaddressed, the story is meant to be read as a simplistic lesson about the unintended consequences of “giving.” In fact, when Glenthorn consults M’Leod about his various improving projects, from the extension of long leases and the reduction of rents to the encouragement of marriage and manufacturing, one of M’Leod’s responses is to suggest to Glenthorn that “it might be doubted whether it would not be better to leave them alone” (191). M’Leod’s manner of speaking in double-negatives demonstrates not only his deference, but also the way in which the true workings of political economy are often contrary to general opinion. For each of Glenthorn’s efforts, M’Leod sees the opposite impact to Glenthorn’s intentions. Cheap leases will not aid the condition of the peasantry, it will only result in middlemen “underset[ing] the land, and liv[ing]. . .in idleness, whilst they ran a parcel of wretched under-tenants” (190). The same will result from



Glenthorn's scheme to raise wages, M'Leod avers. Long leases will not lead to the land's improvement, only to the wearing out of land (190). M'Leod's seemingly contrarian attitude extends to the issue of, as Glenthorn puts it, "the means of improving the poor people in Ireland" (192). Unlike Hardcastle's fear of peasant education, which he sees as leading only to the creation of the "most troublesome seditious rascals" (193), M'Leod heartily endorses it. While Hardcastle declares that an educated peasantry only leads to violence ("teach them to read and write, and it's just adding fuel to the fire—fire to gunpowder"), M'Leod believes that the reverse is the case: "The use of education. . . is to teach men, to see clearly, and to follow steadily, their real interests. All morality . . . is comprised in this definition" (193). This is an important definition, one which the Edgeworths themselves supported; as M'Leod states, education is not simply about "how to read, and write, and cipher," it is about teaching, or perhaps shaping, the peasantry's perception of "their interests," an idea which M'Leod will discuss at length later in the text. The text highlights Hardcastle's bigotry in his response to M'Leod that the men of Ireland are "not like men in Scotland. The Irish know nothing of their own interests; and as to morality. . . :they know nothing about it" (194). Hardcastle thus moves to exclude the Irish not only from education, but from the possibility of improvement itself in relegating them to a different category of humanity from the "men in Scotland" (194). M'Leod instead claims mutability, arguing that the Irish "know nothing; because they have been taught nothing" (73).

Later in the text, the reader is shown in some detail the results of M'Leod's own experiments at improvement. Glenthorn's ennui is temporarily abated by the scene of

M'Leod's "little estate" which consists chiefly of a "school-house and some cottages" (215). It is the cottages that form the main focus of M'Leod's tour more than the school-house itself. This is because Maria Edgeworth wants to present the potential for an alternative society in Ireland, one which is supported by classroom education, but which takes solid root in its links to the development of a (capitalist) economic sensibility. For this reason, M'Leod is keen to "show. . . what can be done with these people, [rather] than to talk of what might be effected" (215). The stress placed on the observation of M'Leod's experimental estate reflects the Edgeworths' insistence on the marriage between the kind of "book-learning" Hardcastle abhors and the "practical" results of such education. Education is thus much more than a classroom experience; as M'Leod put forth, education is "to teach men, to see clearly, and to follow steadily, their real *interests*. All morality . . . is comprised in this definition" (emphasis added, 193). Indeed, the economic overtones of "interest" are intended by the Edgeworths as demonstrated here in *Ennui* and throughout their collective writings, in particular in *Essays on Professional Education*. For the Irish peasant, no less than the Anglo-Irish gentleman, requires an education which demystifies the inexorable workings of the socius, properly orienting him to his specific location in the economic hierarchy, and investing him with the ability to continue following his designated path of productivity. As with the figure of the gentleman, moral virtue stems directly from one's embrace of proper economic behavior.

As Glenthorn views M'Leod's estate, he applauds it, saying that "[i]n an unfavourable situation, with all nature, vegetable and animal against him, he had actually 'created a paradise amid the wilds.'" (215). This imagery partakes of the English tradition

of agriculture which links the cultivation of land to a religious aesthetic, thus naturalizing it as part of nature's plan. M'Leod has gone further in molding nature, "vegetable and animal," in order to create a "paradise" which suggests that it is both the people and the agriculture that have been successfully improved. Glenthorn emphasizes this point as he says in awe, "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). While the specific workings of M'Leod's village are left vague, other details in the novel, like the description of the estate of Lord Y--, the former Glenthorn's patron, argue that the Edgeworths' utopia is filled with "neat cottages" and, more importantly, "well-cultivated farms" which in tandem explain "the air of comfort, industry, and prosperity, diffused through the lower classes of the people" (307). Glenthorn cannot decide in this moment whether the improvement of the Irish and the Irish landscape is expected, given M'Leod's careful plans, or exceptional, given the nearly insurmountable obstacles he faces. This conflict is reflected in the subtle contradiction here between the contention that, on the one hand, M'Leod works with "all nature. . . against him" and, on the other, Glenthorn's claim that there is "nothing wonderful" here. If M'Leod must overcome nature itself in order to accomplish improvement, this inevitably suggests that something wonderful or astonishing has been accomplished. The importance of this contradiction relates to the Edgeworths' philosophies of education and self-improvement. As with other threads of the plot in *Ennui*, Maria Edgeworth claims the nurture side of the debate between the

innate and the adapted, insisting on the power of education and improvement to overcome nearly all supposedly-natural barriers. However, Glenthorn's astonishment at M'Leod's ability to seemingly transmogrify the Irish people and landscape into that of England simultaneously produces the impression that this transformation approaches the miraculous, the super-natural. The qualities that M'Leod has been able to instill in his tenants are characterized by self-discipline and industry, both qualities that are explicitly identified with English subjects and as nearly foreign to Irish. What is unique about the way that Edgeworth depicts M'Leod's experiment is that it is concerned with the methods by which the peasantry are conditioned to their new-found habits. As the episode in which Ellinor slowly co-opts her English cottage back to Irish norms demonstrates, the difficulty of cultivating proper habits arises from the peasantry's lack of receptivity. Without demands for something in excess of food and habitation, the Irish peasantry exist on the margins of the (Anglo-Irish) socius; they are external to the circuits of capital that are integral to the functioning of the British and Irish social and monetary economies. While Hardcastle endorses this peripheralization as a coercive means for restraining the Irish peasantry, M'Leod believes that coercion will not be successful in this aim. This is why he puts forth education as the solution to the "problem" of the peasantry: M'Leod believes that only the economic and social integration of the Irish will contain their violence. Glenthorn's misguided acts of charity only make the peasantry more dependent and external to the economy while also threatening to engulf Glenthorn in a retrograde Gaelic past and continuing the destabilization of the Anglo-Irish hierarchy. Thus, the remedy which M'Leod proposes is one which addresses the economic identity

of the peasantry as much as their ethnic or national characteristics. M'Leod's program involves not simply their Anglicization but their simultaneous capitalization or rationalization. In fact, M'Leod's estate, as well as the Edgeworths' plans for educational reform, sidestep the issue of cultural identity not only because they view it as divisive, but also because they do not believe that culture is the most important arena of the peasantry's integration. Like *Practical Education*, which declared the importance of non-sectarian pedagogy, M'Leod explains that "[r]eligion. . . is the great difficulty in Ireland. We make no difference between protestants and catholics; we always have admitted both into our school" (216). And yet, despite the inattention to religion, M'Leod's estate is clearly meant to represent a resounding achievement in the project of peasant improvement. When Glenthorn questions how it was possible to effect such a transformation, M'Leod explains that it was carried out in a manner similar to what might be expected of any educational program: by "not expecting too much at first" and by "setting them the example of some very slight improvements" (215). M'Leod sees that coercion is not the most effective means of disciplining the behavior of the peasantry and "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*" (emphasis added, 215). This inculcation of the desire for "conveniences and comforts" and thus the desire for (economic) virtue is the fulcrum on which M'Leod's (and the Edgeworths') program for improvement turns. For, such tastes or desires, once implanted, drive the continual integration of the formerly marginalized cottager ever deeper into the economic system. As M'Leod expresses it, "[t]hen the business was done, for the moment the taste and ambition were excited to

work, the people went to gratify them” (215). Tastes therefore “work” just as much as the people themselves since it is only by subjecting themselves to the order and neatness that capitalized labor and rationalized agriculture require that the peasantry can acquire that which will “gratify them” (215). The schoolhouse, which is described as a cottage “with a pretty porch covered in woodbine, and a neat garden, in which many children were busily at work,” is the image of what the M’Leods (for his wife’s involvement is momentarily described as well) seek to cultivate in the children. So it is the condition of the schoolhouse itself, a picture of domestic order and cleanliness surrounded by a “neat” garden, which is meant to educate. This is why M’Leod emphasizes “habits” over any specific kind of “book-learning.” It is the economy of the garden, its produce and its profits that allow the “pretty” condition of the cottage. The habits that are instilled are thus indistinguishable from such an economy: the demands of a proper garden are the demands of the market; the reward of the market is the reward of (English) domesticity. The process of improvement was not an easy one, M’Leod reveals, for “[w]e could not expect to do much with the old, whose habits were fixed. . .it was by beginning with the children; a race of our own training has now grown up, and they go on in the way they were taught, and prosper to our hearts’ content, and what is better still to their hearts’ content” (215-6). Although it has taken nearly an entire generation, the M’Leod’s believe that they have managed to cultivate the prosperous habits of rationalized labor (and consumption) to the extent that their reproduction is self-propagating amongst the peasantry.

There are thus two complementary economies at work in the M'Leods' project, the first of which has already been traced from the inculcation of desire to the integration with and discipline of the market economy; the second economy parallels that of the first and is borne of the relationship that binds the landlord to his tenantry. M'Leod notes the significance of this affective economy when he says that his tenantry have prospered by their own desires as well as the desires of their landlords ("our hearts' content. . .their hearts' content"). While characterized distinctly from that of Glenthorn's and Hardcastle's, M'Leod's relationship to the peasantry is conditioned by both economics and affection. M'Leod's stern personality serves as a contrast to the affability of the dissolute Glenthorn and the garrulous and overbearing Hardcastle, but Maria Edgeworth also emphasizes that his reticence to emotion reflects M'Leod's humility and rationality rather than deficiency. Indeed, M'Leod's personality and personal affect are related to his philosophy of improvement; his desire to aid his tenantry is tempered by an emotional restraint that Edgeworth believes serves as a deterrent to the kind of emotional blackmail that both she and Lord Selkirk centrally locate in feudal or clan culture. Glenthorn assures the reader that M'Leod's good intentions are coupled with an agreeable modesty: "M'Leod. . .seemed quite enlivened and talkative this day; but I verily believe, that not the slightest ostentation or vanity inspired him, for I never before or since heard him talk or allude to his own good deeds; I am convinced his motive was to excite me to persevere in my benevolent projects" (216). Glenthorn's testimony to M'Leod's lack of self-interest is central to Edgeworth's depiction of the role of the improvement and its relationship to a specific type of economic and political program. Improvement is clearly meant as a

process of integration of both the Irish landscape and peasantry into the (capitalized) economic sphere, one that is characterized by the ideal of English freedom, requiring that such integration be chosen by its subjects without the “tyrannical” influence of those in power. For this reason, Edgeworth characterizes M’Leod’s methods of instilling improvement as cautious, aimed at gaining the trust of their tenants. He relates that he and his wife had “patience,” set examples and small trials so that the tenantry would be “lured on by the sight of success;” similarly, the M’Leods “took an interest in their concerns and did not want to have every thing our own way” (215). In this way, the affective bond, the “heart” that M’Leod describes as uniting the desires of the peasantry with those of his own, is an indispensable aspect of this integration.

*Ennui* represents, among other things, Maria Edgeworth’s attempt to present the ideal of liberal colonization: the gift of economic rationality. However, in the carefully constructed figure of M’Leod, Edgeworth’s anxieties about the ethics of gift-giving and its attendant power dynamics are foregrounded. Balanced precariously between the claustrophobic obligations of the *clachan* system and the violent coercion of conquest, M’Leod’s disinterested improvement is Edgeworth’s attempt to construct an ethical pedagogy of the Irish peasantry. While she is explicit about the role of pedagogy in M’Leod’s experiment, she seeks to insulate this relationship from the “tyrannical” overtones of the emotionally manipulative or the coercive. Yet, it is through the affective bond of trust that M’Leod attempts to inculcate rationalized behavior. The colonial pedagogue is forced to create such a bond in order to successfully transmit his or her lesson; for without this bond the native student has no compulsion to receive the gift of



civilization. The refusal of colonial pedagogy would leave violence as the only means of controlling the native student. There is therefore an erotics of pedagogy since it must inculcate desire on the part of the student. However, Edgeworth recognizes the problematics of a pedagogy which ultimately seeks to control behavior; the teacher must manipulate the affective bond by attempting to reproduce his or her behavior in the native student. This is not a gift of reciprocity. Colonial pedagogy is uni-directional in attempting to transmit knowledge with a predetermined end. Unlike *Practical Education* which envisions the teacher engaging in a conversation with the student and inculcating curiosity, the ability for the student to form his or her own thoughts, colonial pedagogy is a gift from the one privileged to give. This is not Spivak's figuration of responsibility or pedagogy that avoids coming "from the consciousness of superiority lodged in the self" (*Other Asias* 26). Instead, Edgeworth's mode of colonial education is closer to a "benevolently coerced assent" (*Other Asias* 28).

### **The Erotics of Pedagogy**

Maria Edgeworth explored the relationship of the teacher and student in another tale published the same year as *Ennui*, "Madame de Fleury" (appearing in *Tales for Fashionable Ladies*). Set just before the outbreak of the French Revolution, the tale follows Madame de Fleury's unlikely encounter with the children of a poor (single?) mother who is forced to lock her children up while she works in order to ensure their safety. Having heard their cries while passing by "one of the most miserable-looking houses in Paris," Madame de Fleury exits her carriage against the pleas of her footman and discovers a chaotic and dangerous scene which is viewed as the inevitable result of

such a neglectful lack of supervision (179). What follows is Madame de Fleury's establishment of a school for girls "selected" from "some of the families of poor people, who in earning their bread are obliged to spend most of the day from home" (195). In the course of the tale, the reader comes to understand the value of such an education when the oldest and star pupil, Victoire, the little girl whom Madame de Fleury encounters in the first scene, demonstrates her loyalty and gratitude to Madame de Fleury by not only informing her of the dangers she faces from the guillotine, but also by placing her own family in danger by hiding Madame de Fleury in their home. Having spirited Madame de Fleury and her husband away to safety in England, Victoire and the other pupils support their now-destitute benefactress by means of their respective trades. Eventually, by a series of fortuitous events, and through the use of educational skills acquired through Madame de Fleury, one of the children manages to secure their return passage to France and the restoration of their property. The tale thus ends with Madame de Fleury's dramatic soliloquy: "No gratitude in human nature! No gratitude in the lower classes of people! . . . How much those are mistaken who think so! I wish they could know my history and the history of these *my children*, and they would acknowledge their error" (emphasis original; 328).

While "Madame de Fleury" is worthy of its own discussion, its usefulness here resides in its explicit characterization of education as "a gift," a gift that both constructs an affectionate bond and demands recompense. It should be noted, however, that this example is distinct from the others discussed heretofore in its focus on the education of *female* peasant children. Thus, it is less concerned with the role of agricultural work than

with the development of certain domestic skills; however, both are related to the inculcation of habits which seek to imbricate the peasantry within a socius from which they are alienated. The tale's so-called didacticism lies in its self-conscious exploration of these issues in the contemplation of the proper pedagogy for cutting across the stark bounds of class (as well as, perhaps, colonial power).

Mitzi Myers has already suggested that the story is concerned with "the erotics of pedagogy." She too is interested in addressing Edgeworth's explicit invocation of "the gift of education" ("Madame de Fleury" 194). For Myers, the tale represents "pedagogic transactions as affective gifts" ("Erotics" 5). However, she problematically characterizes the economy of the gift in the story as involving "the reciprocity of gifts and affection which bond the good characters together" ("Erotics" 11). Indeed, Myers does not see that the power dynamics involved in Madame de Fleury's gift of education prevent the possibility of such reciprocity. The type of pedagogy which Edgeworth proposes is one which Myers sees as "working toward the healing of division" ("Erotics" 16), a claim that she complicates by also astutely pointing out that "Madame de Fleury" is a kind of doubled text, "dense with covert allusions to Ireland's perilous situation," which can be read as working out Edgeworth's ideas about overcoming divisions in Ireland as well as in France ("Erotics" 4).

Myers' reading of the gift of education in "Madame de Fleury" is based on a conception of the gift as outside of a capitalist economy, if not actively working against it. As Spivak's critique of benevolence argues, "[power and knowledge] have a history

longer and broader than our individual benevolence and avowals” (*Outside* 61). In other words, the “love” which Myers argues is able to supersede political and economic differences in the tale cannot naively be read as constitutive of justice even if we account for it as “wishful narrativizing” (“Erotics” 20). As in *Ennui*, Edgeworth acknowledges the complexity of benevolence in “Madame de Fleury” and narrates that “it is not so easy to do good[;]. . .and they, who without consideration follow the mere instinct of pity, often by the imprudent generosity create evils more pernicious to society than any which they partially remedy” (192). Moreover, the narrator imparts, “whilst she delights herself with the anticipation of gratitude for her bounties, she is often exciting only unreasonable expectations, inducing habits of dependence, and submission to slavery” (192-3). These are exceptionally strong cautionary notes that Edgeworth sounds here. That gifts in general can serve as a form of coercion, as a kind of “slavery” even, highlights Edgeworth’s continuing anxieties about the proper modes of gift-giving. Nonetheless, Edgeworth depicts Madame de Fleury as overcoming this problem by her careful “attend[ance] to experience” and the “constant exercise of her judgment” (193). Madame de Fleury’s “benevolence was neither wild in theory, nor precipitate, nor ostentatious in practice” (193). Because of Madame de Fleury’s attendance to the ethics of gift-giving, she decides “the gift of education” will serve its proper purpose, especially as it is “more advantageous than the gift of money to the poor; as it ensures the means of both future subsistence and happiness” (194). At this point in the tale, then, Edgeworth has established Madame de Fleury’s proper benevolence, having satisfied her own conditions for the ethical gift.

In the main, “Madame de Fleury” envisions an education in practical domestic skills as the one proper to the station of the female peasant children. The narrator explains,

it was difficult to provide suitable employments for their early age; but even the youngest of those admitted could be taught to wind balls of cotton, thread, and silk, for haberdashers; or they could shell peas and beans, &c. for a neighbouring *traiteur*; or they could weed in the garden. The next in age could learn knitting and plain-work, reading, writing, and arithmetic. As the girls should grow up, they were to be made useful in the care of the house. (199)

While it could reasonably be argued that many modes of female education in the early nineteenth century were focused solely on the acquisition of domestic skills, this was not the case with the Edgeworthian methods of *Practical Education*, a text which was implicitly written for bourgeois children. Furthermore, when domestic skills were acquired in traditional female bourgeois education, their products were certainly not commodities as they are here. Where female bourgeois productivity is channeled into decorative elements and those which are explicitly removed from the circulation of commodities, Madame de Fleury sees commodity production as an essential aspect of peasant education. This is significant for the same reasons that Adam Smith apparently rejected education in trade for the working class: for the most liberal and even radical thinkers of the time, education was meant to serve the same purpose for both bourgeois and peasant children (Rothschild 211).

Under the pretense of presenting a “practical” and “useful” education, “Madame de Fleury” disdains the teaching of skills which have the potential to unsettle class divisions. This is particularly apparent in the description of a skill which was extremely

personal for Edgeworth: writing. Although she can see that Victoire has a talent for composing verse, the narrator describes Madame de Fleury's reasons for withholding praise: "Excellence in the poetic art cannot be obtained without a degree of application for which a girl in her situation could not have leisure. To encourage her to become a mere rhyming scribbler, without any chance of obtaining celebrity or securing subsistence, would be folly and cruelty" (231-2). Their success can only be "temporary and delusive" since "their productions rarely have that superiority, which secures a fair preference in the great literary market" (232). Such a "rhyming scribbler," even if superior in talent, can only possess the "partially cultivated" mind which is common in "these self-taught geniuses" (233). Avoiding the cultivation of such a talent will ensure that the student is not subject to the foibles of the marketplace which can only leave the poet destitute and with "an aversion to plodding labour, [because] they feel raised above their situation; *possessed* by the notion that genius exempts them, not only from labour, but from vulgar rules of prudence, they soon disgrace themselves by their conduct, are deserted by their patrons and sink into despair or plunge into profligacy" (233-4). Therefore, in the interest of saving the budding poet from such an end, Madame de Fleury decides not to encourage her writing and instead cultivate Victoire as a "good, useful, and happy member of society" (234). In fact, Madame de Fleury "refrained from giving any of her pupils accomplishments unsuited to their situation. . . which were more likely to be dangerous than serviceable." (234). Instead, they were trained to be

shop-girls, mantua-makers, work-women, and servants of different sorts . . .  
[educated] in things. . . most necessary and useful to young women in their rank of  
life. Before they were ten years old, they could do all kinds of plain needle-work .

. . . After this age, they were practiced . . . in drawing out bills neatly, keeping accounts, and applying to every-day use their knowledge of arithmetic. Some were taught by a laundress to wash, and *get up* fine linen and lace. (235)

This mode of education, therefore, stipulates that the acquisition of skills which has the potential to raise the students' station in life is to be avoided.

Similarly, by teaching the peasant girls to carry out useful work, Madame de Fleury's school is simultaneously creating properly civilized subjects whose habits accord with the demands of a capitalized society in need of a large pool of labor: "temper, truth, honesty, order, and industry" (216). However, this is not an entirely rationalist enterprise. The tale is, in fact, characterized by a concern with affection both in the giving and the receiving. Madame de Fleury and the teacher, Sister Frances, are both described as keeping their affections or sentiments restrained; an important part of ethical gift-giving for Edgeworth, affections need to be regulated since the appearance of compassion can be an attempt to gain approbation (a kind of compensation for giving) while the indulgence of compassion can be coercive (nullifying the gift at the outset). For the students, on the other hand, the cultivation of certain emotions as well as skills is an important aim of Madame de Fleury's education. For example, the reader is told that "deep was the impression made on Victoire's heart by the kindness, that Madame de Fleury showed her at the time her arm was broken; and her gratitude was expressed with all the enthusiastic *fondness* of childhood" (emphasis original 207). This is another example of the role gift-giving (kindness being the gift here) plays in integrating the children into an economy of affection as well as capital. Victoire's seemingly natural sentiment of gratitude is repeatedly mentioned as the ideal response expected from the

pupils. Like industry or honesty, gratitude is a cultivated goal of Madame de Fleury's pedagogy. Before the advent of the Revolution affords her the opportunity, Victoire tells Madame de Fleury that she regrets not being able to fully demonstrate her gratitude. Victoire's declaration is occasioned by a visit she makes to Madame de Fleury's residence to deliver flowers to her; having dropped the flowers on the way, she nervously explains that they were jostled into the river. Madame de Fleury immediately forgives her, noting that since she told the truth, Victoire should return to Sister Frances "assur[ing] her, that I am more obliged to her for making you such an honest girl, than I could be for a whole bed of jonquils" (228). Victoire, having been struck speechless by the extent of Madame de Fleury's generosity, seemed to "be lost in contemplation of her bracelet" (228). Noticing her gaze, Madame de Fleury responds: "Are you thinking, Victoire, that you should be much happier, if you had such bracelets as these?—Believe me, you are mistaken if you think so; many people are unhappy, who wear fine bracelets; so, my child, content yourself" (229). Given not only their enormous class divide, but also the immediate context of the tale, Madame de Fleury's remarks work to occlude the political and ideological means of her wealth by replacing status with happiness as the great equalizer. Compounding this, Victoire innocently responds by denying her interest in the bracelets and declaring that it is "a pity you are so very rich [and]. . .you have every thing in this world that you want;" the implication of Victoire's remark is that Madame de Fleury does not lack anything while Victoire and the other children are incomplete without her benevolent gift. Victoire believes that Madame de Fleury's wholeness means that there is no way for her to offer recompense: "what signifies the



gratitude of such a poor little creature as I am?" (229). Foreshadowing events to come, Madame de Fleury tells Victoire the fable of the lion and the mouse,<sup>2</sup> which the narrator declares was the perfect moment to make "an impression upon this child's heart" (23). The moral of the tale of the lion and the mouse is, of course, one of gratitude. Benevolence is its own reward since it confirms the dominance of the giver while ensuring that the recipient is indebted and thus loyal to the donor. Edgeworth makes this moral within a moral the centerpiece of the tale. The narrator declares the importance of Madame de Fleury's seizure of this moment of Victoire's grateful awe since it is such a moment that "sometimes decides the character and fate of a child" (230). The narrator explains that this ability to form such a deep impression on a child is conditioned by the privilege of the speaker:

In this respect what advantages have the rich and great in educating the children of the poor! They have the power which their rank, and all its decorations, obtain over the imagination. Their smiles are favours, their words are listened to as oracular, they are looked up to as beings of a superior order. Their powers of working good are almost as great, though not quite so wonderful, as those formerly attributed to beneficent fairies. (230)

The narrator acknowledges that extent of Madame de Fleury's sway over the children she has chosen to benefit. The curtailment of power imposed, by the narrator, on wealthy donors earlier in the tale seems to have been entirely unloosed. In this moment, there is little attempt at disguising the tyrannical potential of pedagogical gifts. Furthermore, there is certainly an erotics, an affective economy, of education here in "Madame de Fleury," but the question is whether this mode of pedagogy, at least as it is presented here, can be seen as anything but coercive. It is not simply that benevolence serves as the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for Robert Dodsley's 1765 translation of Aesop's "The Lion and the Mouse."

alibi for the conditioning of the peasant children, it is also that benevolence becomes the tool through which the children become imbricated (even seduced) in an unequal system. Their gratitude ensures the safety of Madame de Fleury at the outbreak of violence. In repaying the debt which they owe her for the gift of education, Victoire and the other girls risk their own lives and even the lives of their families to save Madame de Fleury.

The erotics of this pedagogy bind the young women to Madame de Fleury as well as to the marketplace. Their education has given them the opportunity to become productive members of the lower orders in exchange for an unwavering loyalty to those who enabled it. At the same time, by creating such a bond, rationalized pedagogy nullifies the possibility of a horizontal alliance, a reciprocity, with the radicalized citizens of Revolutionary France. The tale ends with a celebration of the reinstatement of Madame de Fleury, which has largely been brought about through the loyalty of her students: “She heard from all her friends . . . repeated accounts of the good conduct of these young people during her absence. She learned with delight how her restoration to her country and her fortune, had been effected” (327). “Madame de Fleury” thus ends in much the same fashion as *Ennui*: with the successful suppression of revolutionary forces which have, through the course of the narrative, threatened to invert the existent power structures. The structural similarities and themes in both works suggest that they be read alongside one another with special attention to the role of education. Myers has gone as far as to argue that, in “Madame de Fleury,” “the rioting mobs and the grateful few who pay back their teachers’ gifts are as Irish as they are French” (“Erotics” 13). The tale thus offers “home truths as much as French solutions to the problem of ‘revolutionary

education,' a heading in the unpublished notebook Edgeworth kept while abroad" (Myers, "Erotics" 4). While Myers' reading seems productive, drawing this parallel between Edgeworth's representations of French and Irish peasant children forces a consideration of its wider implications. Is the marginality of Irish peasant children of the same type and degree as that of the French children in "Madame de Fleury?" For instance, the tale concludes with the successful employment of several of Madame de Fleury's pupils as tradeswomen of various kinds. Of more import, the tale implies, are the students' efforts at restitution for the gift of their education; it is intimated that, through the power of their loyalty, the class structure of France can return to "normal."<sup>3</sup> In other words, education enables social cohesion, which takes place through the economic integration of potentially destabilizing groups. Edgeworth's "Madame de Fleury" represents, as Myers suggests, the utopian possibilities of education. "Madame de Fleury" represents the circulation of the gift as an indispensable aspect of Edgeworth's pedagogical utopia. It is the generous gift which sets the story in motion, and the return of the student's gratitude which ensures its continuation.

"Madame de Fleury" certainly shares broad affinities with other Edgeworthian texts, like *Ennui*, which understand pedagogy as a solution to the "problem" of a disaffected peasantry. Similarly, as Myers' contends, there are aspects of the political

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<sup>3</sup> In recompense for his great skill as an engineer and draughtsman, Basile, Madame de Fleury's pupil and Victoire's future husband, is offered a favor by his general which, of course, is the safe return of Madame de Fleury. Basile's request leads to a "warm contest" between the general and Tracassier, the fictional leader of the Revolution. The end result of their quarrel is that Tracassier and "his adherents were driven from that station, in which they had so long tyrannized. From being rulers of France, they in a few hours became banished men, or in the phrase of the time, *des déportés*" (324-5). This incident is perhaps representative of the Thermidorian Reaction during which Robespierre was executed.

contexts of the tale which suggest that Maria Edgeworth believed that Ireland and France shared commonalities that were useful in considering the phenomenon of rebellion (“*Erotics*” 4, 13). At the same time, there are significant distinctions between the tales which speak to Edgeworth’s understanding of Ireland’s subordination and how this history impacted its socioeconomic structure in contrast to France’s status as a sovereign nation. The main contrast between the peasantry of France in “*Madame de Fleury*” and the peasantry of Ireland in *Ennui* is that the Irish peasantry are imagined to be almost entirely outside of capitalist circulation. This is the problem which emerges out of the colonial context and which is confronted by the Quakers in relation to the Native Americans; Lord Selkirk in relation to the Scottish Highlanders; and the Edgeworths in relation to their tenantry. In Maria Edgeworth’s writing, such a distinction seems to be represented by the appearance of an extensive network of tradespeople in France that are noticeably absent (with a few exceptions) in her “Irish writings.” Therefore, the pedagogical problems which *Madame de Fleury* encounters are, by Edgeworth’s own intimations, different from those that M’Leod and Glenthorn/Delamere confront in Ireland. Yet, although these distinctions are registered in the texts, it is unclear how Edgeworth understood or named them. In other words, are the differences political in nature, conditioned only by Ireland’s subordination? Or, are the differences between each country’s peasantry more starkly drawn, perhaps implying an essential difference? The possibility of pedagogical change in each of the tales is one way to grapple with the question of how Edgeworth envisioned difference. Like “*Madame de Fleury*,” *Ennui* does in fact offer one such utopian moment in the form of M’Leod’s improvement

experiments on his small estate. However, as a whole, the *Ennui* gives a different, and much more complex, picture about the ability of education to affect change in Ireland.

### **Identity and Education in *Ennui***

From the smaller moments in the text, like M'Leod's interlude, to the larger framework of the narrative, *Ennui* is a working out of the Edgeworths' pedagogy at every level of Irish society. It represents the Edgeworth's "missionary opportunity" (Deane, *Strange Country* 32). On its surface, then, *Ennui* purports to represent the power of education against an intrinsic view of the self. Through Glenthorn's disestablishment, *Ennui* argues for enlightened education as the solution to Ireland's political problems. In such a reading, Edgeworth "locat[es]. . . Irish otherness not in defective genes but in a difficult environment, the story's symbolic action marks the self-making of the former earl as a narrative of national redefinition too" (Myers, "'Completing the Union'" 50-1). Or, similarly, *Ennui*, can be seen as partaking in "narratives of transformation" which witness "sudden change[s] of fortune" and the creation of "new social configurations" (Ó Gallchoir, "ME's Revolutionary Morality" 87-9).

Edgeworth introduces the possibility of exploring new conceptions of identity with the revelation that Lord Glenthorn and Christy O'Donaghue have been switched in childhood by Glenthorn's birth mother Ellinor O'Donaghue. It is clear, on the one hand, that such an event represents an enormous upheaval to the lives of both Glenthorn and Christy. At the same time, however, Edgeworth offers an interesting commentary on "identity" by implying that it is not clear what this upheaval represents. Gallagher reads

this ambiguity about “identity” as demonstrating Edgeworth’s “‘productivist’ account of the self: “there is no unproblematically given personality against which false and fictional identities might be simply contrasted” (281). This reading becomes more evident in Glenthorn’s greater concern with the status of the inheritance than about issues of “self,” biological or cultural. To Glenthorn, the possession of wealth is the indicator of “who one is,” rather than biology (or Irishness): “To be or not to be Lord Glenthorn; . . . I had no right to keep possession of that which I knew to be another’s lawful property” (289). He further contemplates: “yet, educated as I had been, and accustomed to the long enjoyment of those luxuries. . . ; habituated to attendance[.]. . . how was I at once to change my habits, to abdicate my rank and power. . . ?” (278). This internal dialogue reveals the true “nature” of identity for Glenthorn and for Edgeworth: lawful property, education, and habits. The remainder of *Ennui* can thus be understood as investigating the nature of self and identity-constitution. It has also been argued that “the plot of the ‘change at nurse’ is clearly a metaphor for revolution,” a reading which has prevailed amongst “Irish critics in the twentieth century” (Ó Gallchoir, “ME’s Revolutionary Morality” 94). At the very least then, *Ennui* considers the force of revolution in the sense that—beyond the political—even the bedrock of existence, the self, has become mercurial.

In such a reading, Edgeworth underscores the unmooring of the self through both a rhetorical and a narrative dissolution of identity. Thus, while Glenthorn establishes Christy’s legitimacy by examining childhood scars thereby appealing to a biological sense of identity, the narrative itself never validates Christy’s re-establishment as Lord Glenthorn. Christy’s return to his role given by birth is continually marked as

incongruous with that part of him which has been molded by his experience. Moreover, at the level of rhetoric, the narrative withholds endorsement of this change of personas. There is a “refusal of both the text and the character to employ the character’s legal name,” Kathleen Costello-Sullivan points out (150). As Catherine Gallagher argues, the former Lord Glenthorn becomes “the absence of [personal] properties”—“a placeholder, a conspicuously not-yet-there Nobody” (301). In fact, there seem to be only one or two instances wherein either character is referred to by their new “legitimate” names. Thus, Edgeworth casts Glenthorn and Christy as returning to a kind of initial position from which they must shape their new identities.

Having swept aside society’s socioeconomic structures, this reading suggests, Edgeworth’s *Ennui* rebuilds Irish society from the ground up as a meritocracy. In keeping with the Edgeworths’ privileging of pedagogy, Glenthorn’s early education and habits (however faulty) become representative of his “true” self. However faulty, Glenthorn’s upbringing is not entirely castoff; it merely requires improvement. Glenthorn’s progression is not marked as one from a foreclosure of Irishness to Anglo-Irishness.<sup>4</sup> Instead, his improvement is of the type Edgeworth calls for in *Castle Rackrent*: the reformation of a dissipated gentry. This explains why Glenthorn’s earlier ennui is what must be vanquished but which, conversely, establishes him as a legitimate nobleman for other characters. Mrs. Delamere, for example, does not disdain the former Lord Glenthorn’s rakishness: because it points to his “breeding” as gentleman. “Why? What

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<sup>4</sup> This is to disagree with Costello-Sullivan’s perspective that Glenthorn’s progress represents a foreclosure of native Irish identity (153) since it is clear that Glenthorn never participates, in Edgeworth’s understanding, in its culture.

was he said to be, my dear?—a little dissipated, a little extravagant only: and if he had fortune to support it, child, what matter?” Mrs. Delamere says dismissively (299). And, Lady Y— adds, “what could be expected from a young nobleman, bred up as Lord Glenthorn was?” (300).<sup>5</sup> Since the narrative endorses the idea that Lord Glenthorn is noble by habit and education, all that remains is that he should earn the property that he merely possessed by birth. Such a reading of *Ennui*, which sees Edgeworth as privileging merit, argues, as Gallagher does, that “Edgeworth demonstrates the ‘fictional’ status of the self and its properties, denaturalizing both, so as to shift the grounds of entitlement from *birth* to *merit*” (emphasis added, 300).

Ostensibly then, *Ennui* is invested in demonstrating the importance of establishing one’s own identity, independent of that which has been bequeathed by family or society. Despite the text’s superficial premise of education and merit as the principal foundation of the self, this picture is complicated by the impossibility of severing the individual from its societal entanglements. This is the paradox of Edgeworth’s seeming “revolution” in the change-at-birth plot. Edgeworth uses this plot device to suggest an erasure of prior social conditions, a clean slate. Glenthorn’s improvement is thus meant to proceed from this zero-point of origin through an education which cultivates his industriousness, relieves his ennui, and creates a benevolent landlord. However, the text undermines such a reading, unwittingly reflecting the inevitability of the complex enmeshment of the self within an always pre-existing socius.

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<sup>5</sup> The contradictory invocations of “breeding” which imply a biological or hereditary sense of identity, indicative of an aristocratic sensibility, with those of “habit” which seem to be connected to education or self-construction are apparent.



When he leaves Glenthorn Castle, he may be rhetorically nameless in the text, but he is not an entirely blank space. In spite of Glenthorn's greatly changed habits and outlook, his new professional successes are entirely owing to his former life as Lord Glenthorn.<sup>6</sup> Without these prior connections, it would have been extremely unlikely that he could have become a lawyer, let alone that he could rise in his profession at such a meteoric rate. One of the key instances of the importance of his prior life to his new one is when the former Glenthorn receives a letter re-directed to his new lodgings: "the direction to the Earl of Glenthorn scratched out, and in its place inserted my new address" (294). Glenthorn the narrator recalls that "one of my letters was from Lord Y—, an Irish nobleman, with whom I was not personally acquainted" (294). Lord Y— is writing to request a character appraisal of Glenthorn's former tutor, whom Glenthorn now credits with introducing his bad habits and ennui. Because the former Glenthorn cannot bear to sign his new Irish name of O'Donaghue, he decides to meet Lord Y— in person to explain his assessment of the tutor and "to become personally acquainted with a nobleman of whom I had heard so much" (294). This letter, then, crosses the boundaries between Glenthorn's old identity and allows the creation of his new one. The letter has clearly been written before Lord Y— was aware of Glenthorn's change in status. Its successful passage is therefore dependent on chance to the extent that Lord Y— had to have written it *before* finding out Glenthorn's change (it can be presumed that he would not have asked the advice of "the former Lord Glenthorn"), but it also had to have been written *as close to* this event as possible in order to crossover to his new life. The letter, a

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<sup>6</sup> However, Trumpener sees this as Edgeworth's ironic commentary (59).

remnant of his former privilege, conditions his opportunity to become acquainted with Lord Y—, a relationship which turns out to allow his reinstatement. The letter further witnesses the impossibility of erasing one's former identity since it bears Glenthorn's former name, scratched out, but still visible beneath.

In several other instances, the text continues to reveal the ways in which Glenthorn's former relationships allows the creation of his new self. Cecil Devereux's recommendation of Glenthorn's character, for example, is shown to solidify Glenthorn's ability to become Lord Y--'s protégé (296).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, a specific type of knowledge, that which is acquired only through prior experience, is shown to be crucial to one's ability to gain status. Thus one's status is shown to be an *effect*, not the cause, of one's knowledge. The transmission of such knowledge from those like Lord Y— who already possess it via their status, is therefore also shown to be necessary to Glenthorn's professional advancement. His friendship with Lord Y—, an effect of the letter, means that Lord Y— can direct Glenthorn: "The profession of the law was that to which he advised me to turn my thoughts: he predicted, that, if for five years I would persevere in application to the necessary preparatory studies, I should afterwards distinguish myself at the bar, more than I had ever been distinguished by the title of Earl of Glenthorn" (297). Similarly, upon hearing of Glenthorn's newly-chosen profession, Christy sends along all of the books from the "big booke-room at the castle" (305) which enable him to enter "this studious period of my life" (306). Cecil Devereux becomes even more central to

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<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, or not so incidentally, Cecil indicates that Glenthorn had been his "generous benefactor" although he freely gives his recommendation of Glenthorn and is "not influenced by the partiality of gratitude" (296). Therefore, Cecil pays back his obligation to Glenthorn by substantiating his new relationship with Lord Y—.

Glenthorn's rise when he introduces him to "almost all the men of eminence at the Irish bar; men who are not mere lawyers, but persons of literature" (306). Glenthorn details their assistance wherein,

they directed [his] . . . industry to the best and shortest means of preparing [himself]. . . for their profession; they put into [his] . . . hands the best books; told [him]. . . all that experience had taught them of the art of distinguishing. . . the useful from the useless; instructed [him]. . . in the methods of indexing and common-placing; and *gave [him]. . . all of those advantages, which solitary students so often want*, and the want of which so often makes the study of the law appear an endless maze without a plan. (emphasis added 306)

While Glenthorn pursues his studies with great aplomb, he also acknowledges that without the wealth of information given to him by the connections of his former life, it would be nearly impossible for him to surmount the "endless maze" of gaining status. Therefore, the impression of merit that Edgeworth attempts to give through Glenthorn's changed circumstance is illusory. Glenthorn's former life is indispensable to the creation of his new one.<sup>8</sup> However, the text continually moves to occlude the contributions of his original status by substituting merit *after the fact*.

*Ennui* has largely been understood as an outgrowth of Edgeworth's dual interests in the reformation of the Anglo-Irish gentry and in pedagogy more generally. Whether read as a commentary on the 1798 Rebellion or more specifically on the nature of individuality, the narrative clearly works to unseat many traditional aspects of identity.

Yet underneath the veneer of what scholars have described as transcendence, instability

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<sup>8</sup> It might reasonably be argued that, in a way, Glenthorn does "earn" the support of those from his former life through his kindness (Cecil and Christy) as well as his increasing enlightenment prior to the revelation of his illegitimacy. It is probable that this is what Edgeworth wishes to convey in the text; however, the fact is that Glenthorn is only able to obtain their favor by his initial status, not through any merit on his part. In other words, if Glenthorn had been Christy in childhood, despite any efforts on his part, he would not have been able to have the same experiences as he had being Glenthorn.

or changeableness, there is a remainder, if not a reconstitution, of an essentialized self with which Edgeworth is unable to dispense. This can be seen in the circularity of Glenthorn's narrative arc, his superficial change from a titled aristocrat to a wealthy landlord. Insofar as it functions as a moral tale, *Ennui* insists that Glenthorn's return to Castle Glenthorn is the sign of his merit. Glenthorn/Delamere suggests as much with the closing lines: "Glenthorn Castle is now rebuilding; when I return thither," he says, "I flatter myself that I shall not relapse into indolence; my understanding has been cultivated. . . , and the example of Lord Y—convinces me, that a man may at once be rich and noble, active and happy" (323). In the world of the text, then, "justice" has been done: those who are industrious earn their reward. Such a reading requires the bracketing of Glenthorn's former role as lord, something which the text itself belies. Furthermore, the argument for the construction of a meritocracy in *Ennui* either leaves aside the thorny question of the status of the former Christy O'Donaghue or asks the reader to consent to his unworthiness.

If these are then the terms through which Edgeworth understands identity, as made not born, what is the status of colonial pedagogy in *Ennui*? In the reading offered above, Edgeworth's pedagogical emphasis can be seen in Glenthorn's (re)education. However, while this reading fits well with the former Glenthorn, it leaves something to be desired in terms of Christy O'Donaghue's characterization unless he is meant to serve as an example of the necessity of a proper education. The violent and painful disintegration of the (former) O'Donaghues would then emerge as a demonstration of the idea that society must be based on earned wealth alone. For those without the proper

education and merit, an unfortunate debauched end awaits. The somewhat obvious contradiction is that while Glenthorn is given the opportunity to conquer his ennui, the possibility of Christy's improvement is not raised. Furthermore, while Glenthorn's identity is ambiguously defined as he struggles to re-establish himself, Christy's identity never seems to waver. Although perhaps defined as the result of habit and experience, the reality is that in *Ennui*, Christy's development is fixed. Glenthorn recognizes this when he comments that he knew Christy would ultimately decide to take on the earldom "notwithstanding that his good sense had so clearly demonstrated to him in theory, that, with his education and habits, he must be happier working in his forge, than he could be as Lord of Glenthorn Castle" (283). Worse, in contrast to the narrative's equation of Glenthorn's happiness with monetary and professional success, Christy is shown to humbly refuse the inheritance at the outset since, as he says, "I've all I want in the world, a good mother, and a good wife, and good *childer*, and a reasonable good little cabin, and my little *praties*, and the grazing of my cow, and work enough always, and not called on to *slave*. . .;and what more could I have if I should be made a lord to-morrow?" (281).<sup>9</sup> Christy's refusal serves to justify a "contented" peasantry who, given the opportunity, would not change the status quo. It becomes clear that Christy (and the O'Donaghues more generally) represents the limit of Maria Edgeworth's optimism about colonial improvement.

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<sup>9</sup> It is especially important that this description echoes RL Edgeworth's own disdain for the closed economy of the Irish cottager (see page 58).

At the same time, Christy's immutability cannot be considered without also comparing it to M'Leod's contention, which Edgeworth represents positively, that the Irish peasantry *can* be improved. This contradiction is, in fact, representative of the ambivalence of the pedagogy of the British Empire more generally. As will be argued here, Edgeworth's narrative represents the challenges that colonial ideology faced at the turn of the nineteenth century to resolve the incongruities between earlier Enlightenment norms of identity, which characterized humanity as equal yet changing, against those of emerging nineteenth-century technologies of the self, which increasingly insisted that the individual was shaped by nature alone. In *Ennui*, this struggle becomes manifest. In the case of M'Leod's efforts at colonial pedagogy, within his utopian village, the process of improvement can be envisioned as the *becoming* of the Irish peasantry. M'Leod says that his experiment has taken place over a number of years; consequently, he is able to measure the inculcation of habits within his soon-to-be-civilized subjects. M'Leod's village thus represents in microcosm what the Edgeworths hoped to effect for Ireland as an (British) entirety. The vision of improvement, which the Edgeworths shared with M'Leod, is the moment in which the Irish peasantry enter a fully capitalized sphere: a point in time that has *not yet* arrived. In other words, the image of the village is one in which the mechanism of improvement is still at work with the promise of success in a tenuous future. If colonial pedagogy offers improvement as a process, M'Leod's village becomes a single moment, a slice of time in the teleology of progress. So long as other cultures can be viewed as in-progress, their "identities" are also in flux. In the Edgeworth's liberal benevolence, then, their commitment to the pedagogy of the

marginalized indicates their optimism about the ability of the British Empire to properly civilize its subjects. With Britain as the *telos* of empire, the path of improvement is pre-determined. M'Leod's village represents the first steps in the discipline of habits proper to capitalized production and consumption. From tending the garden to creating an idealized domestic space, they all serve to create, as Glenthorn says, "such an air of neatness and comfort, order and activity" (215). Rationalized agriculture forms a central feature of improvement since, in the teleology of Empire, it represents the ability of humanity to escape the most basic restraints of nature. For the British, in particular, it represents the threshold of civilization through progress. Rationalized agriculture, which embeds capitalized economics within itself, is thereby the British Empire's *initial gift* to the colonized native.

However, while the extension of improvement may be a feature of early colonial contact, the possibility of the failure of the civilizing project increased with time. This could be seen in the course of the nineteenth century as there was increasing pessimism about the ability of the native to change, to become. Already in the late-eighteenth century, as the figure of Christy suggests, certain features and characterizations had begun to concretize as representations of this difference, this lag in progress. Stadiol theories, for instance, were aspects of this extraction of qualities which became names or Spivak's "concept-metaphors" (*Outside* 31) for explaining the continuing drag of cultures which were not "keeping up." At some point then, at some moment in time, the British could view the inability or unwillingness of the colonial other to make use of the gift as not a problem of time or, certainly, a problem with the gift itself, but as a problem which

must be inherent to the recipients themselves. In such a moment, identity could no longer be seen as something in flux, full of potentiality; it had been calcified as a specific moment in the teleology of progress, one which froze the colonial subject-in-progress in a permanent state of inferiority. It was only at this point in which “identity” became hardened that Empire could imagine humanity as whole as marked by external indicators of progress. Civilization became legible on the body; progress was essentialized.

In *Ennui*, this shift in symbolic logic takes place at the limit of the Edgeworths’ contemplation about improvement, a gift which truly had the capacity to unsettle given hierarchies. Therefore, it is not, *in the first place*, Christy’s Irishness which marks him as unworthy of the inheritance. It is that Christy’s immutability or inability to improve *consequently* marks his Irishness. The temporalization of this production is important since it avoids reading Christy’s “Irishness” as a given that can then explain his narrative downfall; to do so is to allow historical conditions to be substituted by or covered over with an essentialized (and, indeed, inferior) Irishness. In fact, it is a similar paradoxical shift which characterizes *Ennui*’s ending.

### **The Phantasm of Change**

While Glenthorn’s disestablishment gives the impression of radical change, it is also true that the end of the narrative is an echo of its beginning. Glenthorn’s circumabulatory trajectory results in a repetition with a difference: titled wealth has been replaced by bourgeois merit. This mirroring or doubling of Glenthorn’s positionality is the crux of *Ennui*. For *Ennui* enacts a fixed game with the illusion of merit as a legitimizing strategy. In brief, *Ennui* would have its audience believe that Glenthorn



earns back his position, but the path of his return is entirely dependent on *coincidence*, not merit. Regardless of Glenthorn's education, it is his chance meeting with Cecilia Delamere alone which enables his return as master of Castle Glenthorn. Therefore, in effect, the text suggests that *fate* has led the former Glenthorn to repossess Glenthorn estate. This unavoidably undercuts Edgeworth's claims for a meritocracy. With Cecilia Delamere as the legal inheritor of the estate, there is simply no way for Glenthorn to earn it back. And, yet, the narrative insists on the importance of Glenthorn's return to his original position as master of Glenthorn estate. The effect of this circular repetition is to lend an inevitability to Glenthorn/Delamere's redemption. Consequently, while identity of birth seems to be unseated, the ending argues that the universe (nature) reinstates Glenthorn (by coincidence or fate) to his pre-destined status. As the narrator says after the "real" revolution occurs in the text, "Things and persons settled to their natural level. The influence of men and property, and birth, and education, and character, once more prevailed" (248). In the representation of both revolutions, then, there is no drastic alteration in the structure of society: those who were *naturally* born to rule continue to rule. This reading argues that the purpose of suggesting change without actually allowing it to happen is for *Ennui* to enact Edgeworth's fantasy of Anglo-Irish reform. The change-at-birth plot depicts Glenthorn's reform without offering substantial change. *Ennui* imagines a way of forcing the Anglo-Irish gentry to improve, to become better, a process which Edgeworth sees as validating their existence. Therefore, superficially, *Ennui* seems to offer a gamble: if a lord's title and wealth were to be taken away, what would result? Edgeworth chooses to enact the construction of this supposed meritocracy

not through a “real” revolution, but through its weaker double in the form of the change-at-birth. Edgeworth thus constructs an illusory game of chance. All things being equal, *Ennui* attempts to argue, Glenthorn would simply *earn* back his position. The only way that the text can represent Glenthorn’s reclamation of “his” estate is to introduce coincidence: the lucky circumstance of meeting its heiress. This coincidence belies Edgeworth’s aim of representing a society in which each of its members earns his or her just reward. Finally, it points to the impossibility of representing an Ireland in which one’s merit serves to establish one’s position in society. This truth underlines the vacuity of Lord Y—’s declaration that “in our country, you know, the highest offices of the state are open to talents and perseverance; a man of abilities and application cannot fail to secure independence, and obtain distinction” (304). To point out the legal disenfranchisement of all Irish women and all Catholics is to only scratch the surface of Lord Y—’s logic.

### **The Metalepsis of the Gift**

At a further remove, Maria Edgeworth’s use of coincidence insidiously naturalizes Ireland’s existing socioeconomic structures. In order to understand how coincidence becomes a gift from nature, it will be helpful to situate it within the larger system of gift-giving which Jacques Derrida describes in *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*. Additionally, by reading *Ennui* together with *Given Time*, the relationship between the gift of improvement and the simultaneous re-institutionalization of Anglo-Irish power will become more clear.

*Given Time* discusses the impossibility of giving a “true” gift. The process of giving and receiving becomes a system of complex obligations which by definition, Derrida argues, nullifies the idea of a “gift.” Like Edgeworth’s text, then, *Given Time* is structured around a paradox (in both texts, that which appears is an illusion) (9-12; 16). As this chapter has suggested in its examination of pedagogy as a gift, the circulation of the (non)gift is not an alternative system external to a market economy but one which operates alongside it, intersecting and overlapping with it, sometimes in unexpected ways (6-7; 16-17). For Derrida, the circulation of the (non)gift between donor and recipient forms a continuous chain. In other words, one could pick a single moment of giving or receiving in the circular economy of the (non)gift, but there is no originary or initial event. Previously, the chapter has examined (non)gift-giving by focusing on the role of the donor and the use of the gift as a way to circumscribe the recipient within the circle of the economy. At the same time, Derrida’s discussion of the (non)gift is strikingly relevant to this discussion of the overall structure of *Ennui* and its use of coincidence.

(Pure) Gift-giving is defined as a spontaneous event in which an object is freely given to another person without imposing an obligation for return on the recipient. Derrida argues that this process is an impossibility since there are myriad ways in which its structure can be tainted by spoken and unspoken debts, self-congratulations, and the like. In practice then, in order to conserve the idea of the (pure) gift, its participation in a circular economy of recompense and reward is repressed. Additionally, Derrida points out that the entire system or notion of (non)gift-giving depends upon a donor who has a surplus to give, but the recognition of the donor’s surplus would threaten the status of the

(pure) gift as a spontaneous event. This is the “given” of the (non)gift economy. Since (non)gift-giving unavoidably invokes obligation, it must also be recognized as a power structure. In fact, the (impure) process of giving enacts this power dynamic as it is carried out. Through the act of (non)gift-giving, the self names itself as such while simultaneously naming the recipient as an object. This is what Derrida means when he says “a subject will never give an object to another subject” (24). In general, the logic of (non)gift-giving is that of as a singular process from the benefactor to the donee. This is the kind of, as it were, forward-motion of the circular economy. Since the (non)gift and (non)gift-giving are defined in such a way, the status of the gift-giver and the reasons for the donor’s surplus remain unquestioned. The gift-giver’s position is assumed and thereby becomes the “given” of the circuit. Examining the idea of the “given,” Derrida calls attention to the way that the “given” is described as the *a priori*, the origin of something. In other words, “the given” is that which is assumed to be provided “by nature” (126). Thus, in assuming that the status of the donor is “given,” it is unconsciously thought of as a happenstance of nature. There is, of course, an unresolvable paradox between the idea of “happenstance” and that of “nature.” Yet, by focusing on the movement of the (non)gift from the donor to the recipient, there is an unconscious assent to the assumption that the donor’s status is *natural*. There can be no explanation for why something is said to be “given;” in theory, there is no prior moment before that which is given by nature; it is by definition *a priori*. When something is said to be “given by nature,” Derrida argues, it is thus also claimed to be by chance, fortune or luck (126-7). Derrida draws attention to the fact that the (non)gift economy thereby

avoids thinking about who or what “gave” the donor his or her surplus. Therefore, in repressing the circularity of (non)gift-giving, there is also a repression of the social conditions which allow its economy (126). The result of this repression is such that “everything happens as if it were natural, as if nature had decided this belonging to social class. Fortune is nature” (126). Derrida refers to this as “the enigmatic unity of fortune (from *fors*) and productive or donating nature” (128). It is indeed enigmatic, but in the structure of *Ennui*, there is a more clear elucidation of this paradox and its workings.

At the risk of oversimplification, let us retrace Glenthorn’s path in *Ennui* in order to track Edgeworth’s repression of her own circular logic. It has often been noted that the change-at-birth plot suggests Maria Edgeworth’s awareness of the constructedness of identity, whether this is ethnic or economic. Indeed, the revelation of Glenthorn’s and Christy’s births questions what is “given” about their identities. Many aspects of the plot intimate that Edgeworth chafed against the notion of “the given” and sought to replace “the given” with a bourgeois individuality which involved the self-made person.

Numerous other stories of Edgeworth’s also lead to the conclusion that she and her father saw the pedagogical process as one that was invested in the idea of earning one’s qualities. In this way, *Ennui* repeats this concern by showing that Glenthorn, regardless of “birth,” can become the legitimate master of Castle Glenthorn. In fact, the text intimates, in the end, Glenthorn/Delamere may be *more* legitimate than a born-lord because, unlike them, he has been forced to earn his reward. The “given” of the Anglo-Irish lord as she conceives it seems primarily to involve inheritance, which doubles as both an economic and quasi-biological marker in the sense of the passage of money and property coupled

with an aristocratic title (validated by blood or birth). With the change-at-birth plot, Edgeworth takes away both aspects of inheritance from Glenthorn, but, as Koditschek highlights, “this legal disestablishment turns out to be an emancipatory release compelling him to learn self-reliance” (25). However, the enormous coincidence of Glenthorn’s encounter with Cecilia Delamere invalidates Edgeworth’s claims for the promise of education and merit. The reason Edgeworth must make use of coincidence, which can only be read as a gift from nature, is that it is the *only* way that Glenthorn can return to his original starting point. Edgeworth needs Glenthorn to return precisely to his origin in order to prove that the Anglo-Irish have always already earned their status. “Things and persons settled to their *natural* level” is what Edgeworth ultimately argues (emphasis added, 248).

### **Counterfeit Money in *Ennui***

As other scholars have suggested, *Ennui*’s rhetorical devices often reflect their workings at the thematic level (Corbett 305). Consequently, the text’s occlusion of coincidence should be discussed as a rhetorical strategy as well. *Given Time* offers a way to understand how *Ennui* might function rhetorically to efface its status while resurrecting Glenthorn’s. Derrida argues that the workings of fiction are sometimes analogous to those of the circulation of counterfeit money. Counterfeit money is that which “must be *taken* for true money and for that it must *give itself* for correctly titled money” (84). This means that the acknowledgement of its false status by a giver or a recipient nullifies its existence as a counterfeit. Therefore, counterfeit money must pose

as actual specie. Derrida reminds the reader that, unlike counterfeit money, fiction operates by way of a kind of unspoken or prearranged contract between the author and the reader that acknowledges the text's fictional status: "This is what it seems to share with the phenomenon of counterfeit money (to pass off a fiction as 'true'). But since the convention permits us to know. . .that this fiction is a fiction, there is no phenomenon here of 'counterfeit money,' that is, of an abuse of trust that passes off the false for the true" (94). However, Derrida has opened the possibility that, despite its protests to the contrary, fiction can violate this unspoken contract. There are ways in which fiction can become counterfeit money, but in a contradictory fashion that must constitute "an abuse of trust that passes off the false for the true." Such a moment, when fiction lapses into the status of counterfeit money, occurs when it does "not give itself *with certainty* to be counterfeit money" or when it is "credited" (95). In other words, fiction acts as counterfeit money when it stops acknowledging its fictive status and instead poses as truth. It is important to note that this is not a question of "realism" as such since neither seemingly plausible nor implausible events necessarily claim truth status of the kind to which Derrida is referring here. He teases out this distinction by using the example of a fictive secret (in the actual story of Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money"); he explains that within the borders of a story, when there is a potential secret from which the narrator is kept apart, there is no way for the reader to access this secret, but there is, for the reader, a recognizable sense that there is "no sense wondering what actually happened" because the characters have "no consistency, no depth beyond their literary phenomenon, the absolute inviolability of the secret they carry depends . . .on the essential superficiality of

their phenomenality” (153). So, it is only when its condition as “*too-obvious*” is obscured that fiction can act as counterfeit money. The danger with agreed-upon-fictions such as both narratives and the money form is that, at some point, their circulation encourages their fictional status to be forgotten. Money, which is meant to stand in for value, and fiction, which is meant to stand in for truth, has a tendency to elide their fictionality. Consequently, just as counterfeit money, when credited as such, becomes indistinguishable from “true” money, fiction, when taken as such, becomes indistinguishable from truth (153). When fiction becomes counterfeit money, it is also therefore claiming the place of nature, the giver of truth. Fiction is then “passing itself off as natural” and asking the reader to “suspend. . .the old opposition between nature and institution, *phusis* and *thesis*, *phusis* and *nomos*, nature and convention, knowledge and credit (faith), nature and all its others” (170). The switch or lapse that Derrida proposes here, the moment in which fiction becomes counterfeit money, is not as elusive as his complex formulation might suggest. In fact, in *Ennui*, Edgeworth’s plot which lends inevitability to Glenthorn’s reprisal of the estate is performing much the same manoeuvre.

*Ennui* masquerades as an investigation of the given, questioning what is “real” about identity. Hence, Glenthorn’s track in *Ennui* is meant to assert the legitimacy of his identity (and bourgeois individuality more generally), having seemingly disturbed its basis earlier in the tale. Glenthorn’s reconstitution is meant to follow his earlier erasure. Yet, Edgeworth’s efforts to return Glenthorn to a blank space, an originary identity, have been shown here to be illusory. The narrative itself belies the idea of an initial condition when it conveys the extent to which Glenthorn’s professional advancement is made



possible by his prior life. Therefore, *Ennui* unwittingly undermines attempts to return Glenthorn to a space which society has not already defined and which conditions the resulting individual.

The “real” counterfeit in *Ennui*, however, is when Edgeworth passes off Glenthorn’s reiteration as an effect of merit when in fact his return is enabled only through coincidence. This is the moment when *Ennui* claims to speak for nature and in doing so naturalizes both itself as truth and Glenthorn’s socioeconomic status. The ending of *Ennui* poses as truth because it functions as the just, moral end of the tale.

Again, this is not a way of questioning the “realism” of the tale; paradoxically, this is to argue that *Ennui* becomes most objectionable when it appears to be most “real.” Discussions of *Ennui*’s generic qualities seem to have begun with its publication when one contemporary critic labeled the plot as “trite,” according to Michael Gamer’s discussion of Edgeworth’s complex narrative tendencies (256, 8). More recently, scholars have taken issue with *Ennui*’s depiction of the 1798 Rebellion in particular, arguing that they are misrepresentations of history that seek to dampen its impact (Dunne, “Representations of Rebellion” 20). One simply called the events in *Ennui* “thin and unconvincing. . .bear[ing] little relation to historical reality;” another labeled the plot “too schematic and too romantic” (Ó Gallchoir, “ME’s Revolutionary Morality” 95; Eagleton 173). Other readers have responded by suggesting the ways in which Edgeworth’s use of outlandish narrative devices may provide an intentional foregrounding of masculinist versions of history as well as of the instability of perspectives created by revolution

(Myers, "Completing Union;" Corbett, "Between History and Fiction"). Gamer argues for Edgeworth's participation in a sub-genre he names "real-life romancers" whom he defines, generally, as female authors writing just before and after the turn of the nineteenth century who borrowed stylistic elements from romance in their largely didactic or moral narratives (235-8). They eschewed conventional generic binaries in their quest to "delight readers while delivering the pedagogical heft of an empirically verified 'real'" (Gamer 256). Gamer's observations are important because they underscore the fact that, despite Edgeworth's inclusion of supposedly "unrealistic" events, this is not an indication of Edgeworth's complete abdication of "truth."

If one takes seriously Corbett's argument that the implausibility of both Glenthorn's change-at-birth and the plot against him unavoidably demonstrate the constructedness of history and narration, then Glenthorn's reinstatement becomes problematically "realistic" in comparison. As several feminist scholars have suggested, Edgeworth's use of seemingly fantastical events are the result of narrative strategy and are not "unintentional blemishes" in the text (Gamer 259). Corbett sees Edgeworth as "foregrounding. . .the mechanisms of plot" as an "ironic formal comment" which is "symptomatic of the instability that arises with a broad transformation of social and political relations" (306, 7, 311). However, as *Ennui* progresses, it moves farther away from the instabilities that characterize earlier parts of the text. Glenthorn himself becomes more reliable as the "gap" which Corbett identifies between his earlier naïve self and the "present" of his narration continues to close (308). Thus, while the narrator may create

“intermittent irony at the expense of his former self,” the resolution of the tale brings Glenthorn the narrator into full focus, narrating his own redemption (Corbett 308).

Therefore, the “unlikely” events early in the text, actively foregrounded by their own implausibility, work to occlude the underlying mechanics of the text, distracting the reader from Edgeworth’s purpose like a sleight of hand. The spectacle of the change-at-birth plot in combination with the discovery of Glenthorn’s treacherous servant and the events of rebellion distract readers from the use of coincidence, which becomes the “truth” of the tale. As Gamer astutely notes, where few others have, *Ennui* is at its “most Romantic” when it is “supposedly . . . most ‘plodding’” (258). With the end of the tale, the text appears to be at its most sober, like Glenthorn himself. Looking backward on his story, Glenthorn/Delamere declares no “wish of [his]. . . heart remains ungratified” and that he has no desire beyond the “continuance of the blessings [he possesses]” (321). As if such self-denial awakens the bounty of the universe, his humble profession is immediately followed by the news of the O’Donaghue’s tragic destruction, Christy’s call for Glenthorn/Delamere to “come to reign over us again,” and Glenthorn’s avowal that he has learned to be “at once rich and noble, and active and happy” (261). This is the moment when *Ennui* claims the justice of Ireland’s hierarchical structure; beyond even Glenthorn himself, his return signals the superiority not of cultural or biological inheritance, but of the forces of the marketplace which, given the chance, would simply reinforce the prevailing order. Thus, in accepting Glenthorn’s return, the reader is validating Edgeworth’s counterfeit coin which is also to accept that status in Ireland is naturalized. The given has already been given by nature.

## The Perils of the Gift of Improvement

Catherine Gallagher diagnoses the Edgeworths as possessing a “stronger sense than most landlords of the arbitrariness of their right” (285). Perhaps this explains *Ennui*’s ending, which suggests that while Maria Edgeworth could imagine offering the gift of improvement, it was another thing altogether to envision the full implications of its acceptance: the destabilization and even delegitimization of Anglo-Irish power. Jacques Derrida, in fact, warns of inherent dangers involved in giving both impossible gifts and their impure counterparts. The giving subject has an undue amount of power in the circulation of the (non)gift. Among the aspects of the giver’s power is the ability to surprise the donee with the presentation of the gift. Derrida explains that surprise is an exercise of control since “unable to anticipate, [the donee]. . .is delivered over to the mercy, to the *merci* of the giver; he is taken in, by the trap, overtaken, imprisoned, indeed poisoned by the very fact that. . .he remains. . .defenseless, open, exposed. He is the other’s catch or take [*prise*], he has given the other a hold [*prise*]” (147). Derrida notes that “such violence may be considered the very condition of the gift” and that violence results both from an excessive, and thereby more surprising and more overpowering (non)gift, and from a “measured” (non)gift, which is the donation of a calculated present. The logic of improvement as a deployment of Empire, seen throughout the Edgeworths’ writings, demonstrates the ability of benevolent gifts to effect violent change or integration. As when the Quakers insist upon the moderateness of their gift of tools and agricultural knowledge, there seems to be an awareness on the part of the (colonizer) giver that excessive gifts are coercive. By seeking to avoid the spectacular gift, the

improver's project both literally and figuratively enters the economy of the calculable gift, the gift that will yield a return. For the Edgeworths, as well as others like Lord Selkirk, the future return of the gift of improvement is the entrance of the colonized peasantry into the circulation of capital.

If successful then, the gift of improvement, of colonial pedagogy which Empire extends, is a (non)gift given with obligation in mind. It is both the relational obligation that functions like a contract, which is implied by the acceptance of the (non)gift and the parallel circuit of economics in which the gift promises to mire its recipients. This understanding exposes the violence of such a (non)gift as well as the way in which the economies of the gift and of capital inevitably take as well as give. They demand return while also conferring benefits. This is not to imply an equalization of power between giver and recipient, but it does mean that the (non)gift circulates in unexpected ways. It has the *potential* to threaten the position of the donor. This is what Spivak refers to as the enabling violation that conditions the colonized subject's entrance into a capitalized sphere.

However, the problematics of the (non)gift are not fully encompassed by the violation of the (non)gift economy; while the circumscription of the donee within the circle of the gift economy enacts the violent constitution of both the giver and the recipient, remaining outside this circuit of obligations does not necessarily free the non-capitalized subject from the effects of this vicious circle. For the Edgeworths, the utopia of colonial improvement involved the successful exchange of (rationalist) knowledge for

gratitude, but, as Richard Lovell Edgeworth's correspondence with Lord Selkirk demonstrates, finding a way to break through the "sordid content" of the Irish peasantry was easier conceived than achieved. As David Lloyd explains, this "content" was not simply an unwitting or idle failure on the part of the peasantry; their "recalcitrance" was an "often vehement resistance" to the teleology of rationalist norms (Lloyd, *Irish Times* 45). The pre-Famine years in Ireland were characterized by a vacillation between the utopian hopes witnessed in Edgeworth's fiction and the frustrated energy generated by the refusal/failure of the gift of improvement. The closed economy which sustained the Irish peasantry appeared to "haunt" the rationalized ideology of Empire with "the spectre of Irish abundance, Irish contentment" (*Irish Time* 45). However, with the advent of the Famine and the virtual destruction of such "alternative potentials," as Lloyd terms them (*Irish Times* 18), the rationalist teleology that the Edgeworths had advocated appeared to be verified by "nature" in the form of the potato blight. Like the "given" of *Ennui's* socioeconomic structure, rationalized agriculture was understood not as an effect of society's (capitalized) production, but as an effect of nature itself. For the British Empire, in particular, agricultural production was seen as "originary nature" (Derrida 126) which was always already given, universally, to mankind. In this formulation, which is a teleology of (agri)culture, the labor and capital required for agricultural production is elided; nature has provided for humanity's sustenance; culture or civilization, on the other hand, are in excess of natural need. Civilization is that which is beyond or other than nature itself. Therefore, Irish subsistence on the potato, a staple which like the Irish peasantry themselves stood outside of capitalist circulation, placed them in a space

anterior to nature (agricultural production) and thus anterior to civilization. Derrida explains that

naturizing, originary, and productive *phusis*, nature can be *on the one hand* the great, generous, and genial donor to which everything returns, with the result that all of nature's others. . . come back to nature, are still nature *itself in difference*; and, *on the other hand*, let us say after a Cartesian epoch, nature can be the order of so-called natural necessities—in opposition, precisely to art, law . . ., freedom, society, history, mind and so forth. So the natural is once again referred to the gift but this time in the form of the given. (127)

Since British imperial ideology characterized rationalized agriculture as given by nature, the Famine could then be read as a kind of retribution for failing to properly make use of nature's gifts. The colonial and economic contexts, like the dispossession of the Irish peasantry, that conditioned Irish dependence on a marginalized foodstuff could be occluded in favor of the image of an Irish failure to improve. In fact, the events of the Famine served to calcify Britain's growing self-confidence in its own teleology of improvement, which was witnessed through the increasing deployment of economic discourse. However, as with Derrida's formulation of the gift's relation to time, it is important that the logic of improvement works paradoxically to confirm its fitness or justice through an imagined re-structuring of the past. This is why the Famine becomes such a pivotal moment in Irish historiography since its historical figuration can enact a violence which echoes the Event itself. For this reason, David Lloyd warns that it is "crucial to dispense with the satisfaction of hindsight" when examining the Famine because "its apparent inevitability should not structure in advance our attempts to comprehend not simply *what* happened but what *meanings* circulated around the event" (Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* 23). Such retrospective views are illusory

in much the same manner as Edgeworth's deployment of Glenthorn's reinstitution: "it is one of those singular accidents that reorganizes the preceding and subsequent constellation of events into a predetermined pattern, thus coming to seem the only possible occurrence" (*Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* 23). In order to prevent the passage of this counterfeit coin of Empire's capitalist teleology, it is incumbent upon the reader to remain vigilant even in the face of a seemingly benevolent gift.



## Conclusion

In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus famously contends that, “history. . . is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” Of course, one of the most ghoulisn nightmares of Stephen’s history is that of the Great Famine. While it is only one of the exceptionally violent legacies of Irish colonization, it necessarily overshadows other attempts at interventions into Irish history. Yet, as the chapter “Framing Famine” suggests, it is imperative that the “specter” of the Great Famine not be allowed to overtake studies of earlier periods to such an extent that it becomes an inexplicable, other-worldly event. Indeed, as Stephen suggests, while it is impossible to remove oneself from such a “nightmare,” severing oneself not only from the events themselves but also from the reverberating perceptions of them, it is nonetheless essential to resist falling back into history’s teleology of violence. To do so, to allow oneself to succumb to the nightmare, is to tacitly concede defeat to the logic of history, a history that has been written and inaugurated by the spread of Western imperialism.

*Cultivating Civilized Subjects* has examined the plantation of such a history within an Irish landscape. Together with its Atlantic counterparts, early British colonial exploits sought to grow profits in the “blank spaces” beyond English shores. The mission of these early adventurers was sometimes more baldly exploitative than was acceptable to their British contemporaries (or modern historians); yet it is still the case that the zeal of their pursuit stemmed directly from the heart of cherished British beliefs such as the interrelation of governmental freedoms and private enterprise or the idea that nature’s

bounty guaranteed the produce of worthy husbandmen. It has been the task of this study to highlight the links between such beliefs and their development into the “sciences” of agriculture and political economy. Their lineages are no less concerned with normalizing cultural practices than with measuring production and efficiency. This study has shown as much by attending carefully to the rhetorical strategies of their practitioners in the eighteenth-century.

Finally, *Cultivating Civilized Subjects* demonstrates that the discourses of political economy and cultural difference became increasingly intertwined as the eighteenth century progressed. It was not inevitable that the logic of rationalized economics should become virtually indistinguishable from the West’s views of “other” cultures, including Ireland, but, once begun, colonization fed a relentless drive for consumption from European metropolitan centers such as London, Paris, and Amsterdam. The commodity culture of nineteenth-century Britain, which made visible exotic colonial imports, served to reinforce the notion of British cultural superiority despite the fact that, by that time, the majority of its populace survived on imported food, depending upon peripheral production for its high standard of living. The violent demands of colonial production had been met by slaves, indentured servants, and impoverished peasants throughout the British Empire with the inexorable logic of racial difference to justify their continuing enthrallment. While the rhetoric of improvement continued to provide liberal vindication for imperialism, one of its driving forces, political economy, had become so successful at explaining cultural inferiority, that racial difference simply stood in for it, masking the complex historical processes that were hidden beneath. *Cultivating Civilized Subjects*

contends that it is only by unmasking racial theories, not to find an essence beneath, but to expose the normalizing gaze of political economy, that we can strive to find new hope.

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## Appendix

### “The Lion and the Mouse”

A Lion by accident laid his paw upon a poor innocent mouse. The frightened little creature, imagining she was just going to be devoured, begged hard for her life, urged that clemency was the fairest attribute of power, and earnestly intreated his majesty not to stain his illustrious paws with the blood of so insignificant an animal: upon which, the Lion very generously set her at liberty. It happened a few days afterwards, that the Lion ranging for his prey, fell into the toils of the hunter. The Mouse heard his roarings, knew the voice of her benefactor, and immediately repairing to his assistance, gnawed in pieces the meshes of the net, and by delivering her preserver, convinced him that there is no creature so much below another, but may have it in his power to return a good office.

(21-22)

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