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Adam Smith's Problems: Sympathy in Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl* and Edgeworth's *Ennui*

It is a critical commonplace to read Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809) as national tales that use allegories of marriage to model a successful reconciliation between England and Ireland in the aftermath of the Act of Union. The national tale was a clearly political mode, one with the primary goal of representing Ireland anew to a class of English readers who saw the Irish as hopelessly backward and savage, and thereby articulating a model for the Union on the level of sentiment. This aim was hardly covert: it is openly declared, for example, on the title page of *The Wild Irish Girl*, which quotes Fazio Delli Uberti's *Travels Though Ireland in the 14th Century*: "This race of men, tho' savage they may seem / The country, too, with many a mountain rough, / Yet are they sweet to him who tries and tastes them."¹

The link between this project of propaganda and the Act of Union was clearly recognized at the time—perhaps most explicitly by Walter Scott, who wrote that Edgeworth's depictions of Ireland "have gone so far to make the English familiar with the character of their gay and kind-hearted neighbours of Ireland, that she may be truly said to have done more towards completing the Union than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up."² In both *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Ennui*, national reconciliation is symbolized by the marriage between the British narrator and an Irish woman. The narrative preceding the weddings serves to enumerate various lessons about Irish culture and history, and to illustrate how an Englishman can come to love the country and the people. Philosophical theories of "sympathy" and fellow-feeling—particularly those of Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)—provide the framework for this process.

The two novels are often read together: their plots are noticeably similar (even within the subgroup of national tales that end in marriage), making the

1. Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson), *The Wild Irish Girl*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (1806; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), title page; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (WIG title page).

2. Walter Scott, "General Preface," in *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Andrew Hook (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 523.

differences between them appear as explicit markers of divergent approaches to the broader political problems that they address. Indeed, Robert Tracy went so far as to suggest that *Ennui* was written, or at least revised, in response to the massive success of *The Wild Irish Girl*.³ Various commentators, including Tracy, Ina Ferris, Seamus Deane, Julia Wright, Katie Trumpener, and Claire Connolly have examined the political implications of both works, particularly as they relate to the colonial context: they consider what the novels suggest about the legitimacy of power, or the intrinsic national character of the Irish, or how they reflect on their historical moment. Despite this sustained critical attention, the ways in which these two novels engage with theoretical frameworks of fellow-feeling have not been fully explored. Rather, the novels are generally seen—and even mocked—as oversimplified allegories, manufacturing easy, sentimentalized solutions to real political problems.⁴ When seen through the lens of theories of sympathy, however, a different view emerges.

Both Edgeworth and Morgan are searching for an intellectual framework upon which to build a politics of fellow-feeling—and failing to find one. Instead, both authors find themselves forced to rely on various novelistic tricks in order to ensure happy endings for their texts. Reading these novels with an eye to their treatment of sympathy as a philosophical problem opens up a way to make sense of the ambivalences and quirks of the texts that bedevil more conventional readings. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, the power of emotional contagion becomes a threatening, gothic force, suggesting a more sinister view of the supposedly charming Glorvina. Likewise, the bizarre plot twist at the center of *Ennui*, which serves to confound any allegorical readings of national identity, makes perfect sense

3. See Robert Tracy, *The Unappeasable Host: Studies in Irish Identities* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998). Tracy notes that although Edgeworth said in a letter that she was completing *Ennui* in April of 1805, it is known that various portions were added or revised later. He asserts that “it is probable that the character of Lady Geraldine in *Ennui* represents both a response to and a rejection of a theme Lady Morgan develops in *The Wild Irish Girl*” (p. 29). Julia Wright, discussing *The Wild Irish Girl*, inverts this claim. She writes that the main character “complains on terms that seems to anticipate the Irish protagonist of Edgeworth’s *Ennui*.” Julia Wright, *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 68.

4. Claire Connolly writes that for Seamus Deane, “the marriage plot (as developed by Edgeworth in particular) blinds readers to the social realities it pretends to depict and is thus guilty of a form of political bad faith. Despite masquerading as a form of analysis, Deane writes, the ‘real’ effect of the marriage plot ‘was to have produced an analgesic version of the question of Anglo-Irish relations.’ This judgment has been recycled by a number of other critics and informs a general suspicion of what are presumed to be the simplifying and damaging effects of allegory.” Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790–1829* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 87. Connolly’s introduction to a 2000 edition of *The Wild Irish Girl* admirably delves into some of the complexities of the marriage in the novel. See *The Wild Irish Girl*, ed. Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (London: Pickering Women’s Classics, 2000).

when considered from the perspective of sympathy, as it is a literal example of Smith's theorization of the process. What is more, the identity swap enacted by the novel can be viewed as a way to bridge the divide within Adam Smith's own work, the radically diverging views of human nature in his major writings that leads to the so-called "Adam Smith problem." Such interpretations of these works would, perhaps, surprise the authors themselves: they describe aspects of the novels that in some ways appear to be accidental by-products of a process of grappling with theories that do not fully apply to their intended contexts. The happy endings appear, at first, to compensate for all the problems that came before, leading to views of the texts as oversimplified. Re-reading both books with an eye to how they theorize the paths leading to those endings, however, one is struck by how insistent their doubts appear, and how insightfully they present their own limitations.

That Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was an important influence on Edgeworth is well known: Marilyn Butler tells us that it was "the first major book that R. L. Edgeworth gave her to read when he took her from her English boarding-school in 1782."⁵ That Edgeworth also read *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is extremely likely, given that it is mentioned in one of her *Moral Tales*, "The Good French Governess," in a scene where a character's ignorance of the book signals her lack of education.⁶ Although Lady Morgan does not cite Smith in *The Wild Irish Girl*, Edmund Burke is mentioned in two different footnotes. It is quite clear that both Morgan and Edgeworth had some familiarity with these authors and their works.

In her groundbreaking work on the topic, Ina Ferris suggested that the mechanism of sympathy described by Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* proved inadequate to the needs of the national tale, and argued that Lady Morgan adapted it by integrating David Hume's idea of communication in order to account for the ways in which the spectator may be affected by the Other.⁷ Scholars of Romanticism and the eighteenth century are divided as to whether Hume or Smith's notion of sympathy are more representative of the period.⁸ In

5. Marilyn Butler, "Introduction," *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 29.

6. Maria Edgeworth, "The Good French Governess," in *Moral Tales*, vol. 3 (London: R. Hunter and Baldwin, 1821), p. 106.

7. See Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

8. In a recent article, Miranda Burgess writes that "Scholars generally agree about one major aspect of sympathy: the term designated more than the pity that it implies etymologically, and that is now conventionally associated with it, so that it came to mean something like feeling with, as well as feeling for, another. There is no consensus, however, about the way sympathy functioned in practice. There are scholars, like David Marshall (1988) and Julie Ellison (1999), who take Adam Smith's heavily individuated and volitional understanding of sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)

fact, the deliberation between these two models is not one that is limited to critics today, but was an open question in the literature of the time: *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Ennui* can be read as actively interrogating these two models, uncovering the problems and advantages of both Smith and Hume's theories. Yet, despite their ostensibly happy endings, neither text is ultimately able to find a wholly satisfactory theoretical framework on which to model a successful union: both novels struggle with serious limitations in the theories they strive to deploy. The peculiar machinations of their plots come to seem like desperate attempts to salvage a situation that refuses to admit a ready solution.

Smith's theory of sympathy describes it as a process of vicarious feeling: by imagining how you would feel in another person's position, you rouse the requisite emotional response (such as anger, sadness, or joy) and thereby enter into a kind of emotional communion with the other person. Crucial to this process, however, is a certain stoicism on the part of the person seeking sympathy. In order to facilitate emotional harmony, the person must lower his feelings to a more accessible level: "But he can only hope to obtain this [sympathy] by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and accord with the emotions of those who are about him."⁹ Excessive emotion, in Smith's view, is off-putting to the spectator, and actually prevents sympathy. This generates the idea of the "impartial spectator": internalizing this observer, the subject learns to modify his behavior so as to conform to social protocol. This aspect of Smith's theory presents particular problems for the Irish context in these novels, given that the Irish are said to be, by nature, extravagant in their emotional expressions, making it dubious whether such restraint is not only possible, but even desirable. As Luke Gibbons points out, a problematic drive toward homogenization lurks in this idea of a harmonious concord of sentiment, "a renunciation of local or national allegiances in favour of a 'generalized other,' or 'impartial' standard of humanity."¹⁰ This raises

as exemplary of the period. Others, like Adela Pinch, "argue instead for an account . . . more closely associated with David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), in which sympathy appeared as an inescapably contagious form of affective migrancy. The division within the philosophy of sympathy is itself a lasting consequence of the rhetorical processes that characterized late eighteenth-century interiority and anxiety." Miranda Burgess, "On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form," *Poetics Today*, 32, 2 (Summer, 2011), 297.

9. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (1759; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 22.

10. Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 107. Gibbons adds that in a colonial context, the position of the "impartial spectator" becomes problematically aligned with imperial power: "the role of 'impartial spectator' merges imperceptibly with Britishness, in its colonial guise as synonym for

the question as to whether sympathy can cut across cultural difference without striving to erase it.

The problem of emotional excess is related to the way that sympathy is initially engaged in Smith's account, through an intellectual description of the subject's woes. This markedly contrasts with the earlier theory of David Hume, and its later articulation in the work of Edmund Burke. Whereas Smith argues that the "imaginative leap" of sympathy always begins with a rational engagement, Hume describes a more purely emotional transference: "As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movement in every human creature."¹¹ While another's emotions may not win the spectator over to their cause, they cannot fail to have an impact:

So close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls, that no sooner any person approaches me, then he diffuses on me all his opinions, and draws along my judgment to a greater or lesser degree. And tho', on many occasions, my sympathy with his goes not so far as entirely to change my sentiments, and my way of thinking; yet it is seldom so weak as not to disturb the easy course of my thought, and give an authority to that opinion, which is recommended to me by his assent and approbation.¹²

Yet Smith seems to insist that this is not possible. He emphasizes that sensory input is futile. Rather, it is only through the imagination that we form an idea of another's feelings:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of his sensations.¹³

Edmund Burke directly refutes Smith, agreeing with Hume that:

The truth is, all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact, conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the slightest effect, if the speaker did not call in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself. Then, by conta-

progress, civility, and humanity itself. . . . It its realignment of the inner life of the subject, the 'impartial' readily evolved into the 'imperial' spectator" (p. 98).

11. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (1739; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 576.

12. Hume, p. 592.

13. Smith, p. 9.

gion of our passions, we catch a fire, already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described.¹⁴

The distinction turns on the mechanisms that initiate an emotional connection between two people: is it by a transference of emotion, by a kind of sentimental contagion, or through a rationally governed act of imagination? This question of how sympathy is initiated proves to be a central problem in both *Ennui* and *The Wild Irish Girl*. Edgeworth and Morgan each clearly refute Smith's notion of a purely rational engagement, but they adopt different strategies in actually producing sympathetic harmony. Neither can be said to be completely successful.

The Wild Irish Girl tells the story of a young Englishman named Horatio, who, in punishment for his hedonistic lifestyle and the pile of debts he has accrued, is sent to Ireland by his father. The largest part of the novel is written in the form of letters that Horatio writes to a friend describing his experiences, though toward the end the text inexplicably shifts to a third-person speaker, who offers a conclusion to the tale. Horatio arrives to Ireland fully prepared to hate it, convinced that it is a savage, barbaric place. Though he had been aware that his family's land was won during the Cromwellian wars, he learns that the descendants of the Irish family whom the land was won from, an old prince and his daughter Glorvina, occupy a crumbling castle in the vicinity, the last of their holdings. Curious to see this family, he spies on them at church one night, where, entranced by Glorvina's singing, he falls from a ledge and loses consciousness, and awakens to find himself in the castle. Knowing that their family despises his own, he claims to be an artist named Henry Mortimer, and spends his time recuperating and learning about Irish history from Glorvina, her father, and their family priest. In what would appear to be typical romance fashion, he falls in love with Glorvina, and the novel concludes, after a brief hiccup, with their wedding. As will become clear, however, all is far more complicated than it first appears.

Horatio's encounter with Ireland in *The Wild Irish Girl* noticeably follows a Humean model of sympathy.¹⁵ In fact, the novel presents only one moment of what might be called a strictly Smithian form of sympathy, early in the narrative when Horatio meets Murtoch O'Shaughnessy. In this case, it is in fact the peasant's stoicism that impresses the young Englishman. Murtoch enumerates his sorrows with "an air of despondency that touched my very soul" (WIG 25). He then brushes the tear from his eye and mourns, instead, the suffering experi-

14. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757; Philadelphia: J. Watts, 1806), p. 61.

15. Ina Ferris argues that it "infuses a Humean moment of 'communication' into the rational Smithian model of sympathy." Ferris, p. 60.

enced by his cow Horatio is not only impressed by the tender feelings expressed toward the bovine, but also by the man's calm acceptance of his fate: "resignation smooths the furrow which affliction has traced upon thy brow, and the national exility of thy character cheers and supports the national susceptibility of thy heart" (WIG 26). Here, then, it is indeed the peasant's ability to control his emotions that ensures him a sympathetic hearing. However, the singularity of this account makes it rather more anomalous than representative, and renders the phrase that follows somewhat circumspect: Horatio gives the man money and says that "his surprise and gratitude was expressed in the true hyperbola of Irish emotion" (WIG 26). The word "true" stands out here, as it implies that the preceding equanimity was mere pretense. It does not seem unreasonable to see this as a suggestion that Smith's proposal of an emotional concordance requiring stoicism would encourage an inauthentic way of being—a mode that would be of questionable use to the native Irish, whose excessive emotion is their unique charm.

The rest of the novel repeatedly displays the strengths of these charms: the stereotypically effusive Irish sing, dance, lament, and tell stories in their amusing accents with such exuberance that Horatio cannot help but be won over. It is not the content of the message but the mode of expression that repeatedly captures his heart. For example,

When it was shewn to the Prince, he gazed on it in silence, till tears obscured his glance; then laying it down, he embraced me, but said nothing. Had he detailed the merits and demerits of the picture in all the technical farrago of *cognoscenti* phrase, his comments would not have been half so eloquent as this simple action, and the silence which accompanied it. (WIG 101)

This is particularly the case for Glorvina's character: the "*matter* of this little *po-litesse* was nothing; but the *manner*, the air, with which it was delivered!" (WIG 69). This effect of emotional contagion, in which Horatio finds himself moved seemingly for no rational reason, is carried out not only through affect, but also through gesture, or sound.¹⁶

Repeatedly, however, Morgan's novel makes clear that expression trumps content, and moreover, that words are inadequate to convey the message contained in a glance or a smile, as when Horatio writes, "I could weep my heart's most vital drop for such another glance—such another smile!—they seemed to say, but who dares translate the language of the soul, which the eye only can

16. Ferris argues that it is precisely the effect of an alien sound on the cosmopolitan ear that enables the dislocation of self necessary for the imaginative leap of sympathy: "the voice of an unknown woman in a strange setting produces a response that bypasses the circuits of rationality" (p. 60).

express!" (WIG 74).¹⁷ Indeed, he observes that to "repeat the words of the Prince is to deprive them of half their effect" (WIG 178); the power lies entirely in the way they are expressed.

Horatio's initial interactions with Glorvina, and with Ireland, seem to be a balance of sentimental and rational thought, a process of learning about the nation's history and investing it with emotion. But as the text progresses the sentimental side moves increasingly to the fore. Horatio suggests that the setting of his education plays an important role, guiding his thoughts along a specific path: "You see, my good friend, how much we are the creatures of situation and circumstance, and with what pliant servility the mind resigns itself to the impressions of the senses, or the illusions of the imagination" (WIG 46). Though conscious that he is being carried away on waves of sentiment, he nonetheless seems a willing victim, even when in the throes of agony from the possibility of heartbreak.¹⁸ This sympathetic indoctrination is at the root of the novel's political project, and will culminate in Horatio's marriage to Glorvina. In the most positive reading, then, the novel demonstrates "Horatio's development of a more refined and moral sensibility among people emphatically marked as benevolent"—it is, in other words, the success story of sentimental education.¹⁹

Yet there is a gothic undertone to this process that is particularly crucial, given that the book is viewed as "the novel that sets the template for the integration of love and marriage within a national plot."²⁰ It should be noted that in Hume's account of emotional transmission, there is a more threatening note in the way that the sentiments of another have the power to "disturb the easy course

17. This is, of course, a common paradox of sentimental literature—the use of fiction to depict a communication that it insists cannot be conveyed in words. Another example in *The Wild Irish Girl* bemoans the problem explicitly: "But how cold—how inanimate—how imperfect this description is! Oh! could I but seize the touching features—could I but realize the vivid tints of this enchanting picture, as they then glowed on my fancy!" (WIG 52–53).

18. The novel encourages this further by making clear that, prior to his interactions with Glorvina Horatio is suffering from a lack of emotion, in such statements as "I can support this wretched state of non-existence, this *artícula mortis*, no longer. I cannot read—I cannot think—nothing touches, nothing interests me" (WIG 35), or "my taste, like my senses, is flat and palled" (WIG 37).

19. Wright, p. 69. Wright, however, sees the ending differently, arguing that the final letter of the novel, written to Horatio by his father, shifts the discourse from romantic love and sympathetic education to parenting and proper management: "Horatio's dependence on Glorvina and her family for his sensibility and new benevolence is set aside as Horatio is assigned the task of managing Irish sensibility, containing it and directing it in support of the colonial status quo. . . . A novel of sentimental education thus veers into sentimental mimicry as Horatio is transformed from would-be husband to responsible parent: instead of sympathizing with the Irish, or even enjoying a sentimental marriage, Horatio is commanded to become a foster-father to the Irish . . . the pragmatically instructive tone of the conclusion looks forward only to a continuation of English domination under a superficially sentimental guise" (p. 72).

20. Connolly, p. 96.

of thought." This notion of contagion is subconsciously registered in the text through the repeated iterations of Glorvina as a sorceress, whose powers may not be entirely benign: "What if this Glorvina has an *evil eye*, and has overlooked me? The witch haunts me, not only in my dreams, but when *I fancy myself*, at least, awake" (WIG 133). References to Glorvina as bewitching or possessed of supernatural powers abound in the text—for instance, "this little Irish girl, with all her witcheries" (WIG 132) and "the enchantress!" (WIG 211)—and, perhaps most sinister, she is also repeatedly called a "syren," a reminder that a beautiful voice can easily imperil the listener. Though such descriptions are a convention of sentimental romances, their excessive frequency in this novel, and the context, gives them a different valence.²¹

Horatio's suspicion of Glorvina is ultimately revealed as partly justified. She has in fact been deceiving him: she has another betrothed, who is none other than Horatio's father. Although the novel hastily remedies this apparent flaw, making it clear that Glorvina was to marry Horatio's father out of filial obedience rather than love, it cannot be avoided that both men have been led on to some extent: "she was obedient—and I was—deceived" (WIG 249). Of course, all is forgiven, and Horatio's father is quite pleased to let his son take his place, insisting that his feelings for her were always parental in nature.²² Glorvina's willingness, in a time of affliction, to give herself in marriage to a man who is not the one she truly loves is left unexamined.²³

However, the political aspect of the union cannot be entirely ignored. Despite Horatio's aesthetic readings of the ruined landscape—as he describes it, a sort of "delightful horror" (WIG 19), containing "finely interesting ruins which spread grandly desolate" (WIG 51)—the remnants of the Irish past that he de-

21. The sheer volume of these allusions is remarkable: see pages 52, 53, 67, 68, 73, 124, 132, 133, 137, 151, 160, 161, 163, 164, 171, 181, 195, 211, and 219.

22. Mary Jean Corbett sees this twist in the plot as "crucial," offering a political reading which sees this triumph of son over father as the new generation overcoming the sins of the past. Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000), p. 66.

23. A cynical reading could see this as calculation on her part, but one could also read it as a subtle reminder of how the female body enters into political economy. That Glorvina's love for Horatio is genuine is attested to by her nurse, who tells Horatio that when he left the castle, "Glorvina was seized with a fever in which, after the first day, she became delirious; that during the night, as the nurse sat by her, she awakened from a deep sleep and began to speak much of Mr Mortimer, whom she frequently called her *friend*, her *preceptor*, and her *lover*; talked wildly of her having been *united to him by God in the vale of Inismore*, and drew from her bosom a sprig of withered myrtle which, she said, had been a bridal gift of from her beloved, and that she often pressed it to her lip, and smiled" (WIG 237). When asked about it several days later, upon regaining her health, Glorvina does not deny it, but rather abjures her nurse to never speak of it again, and says it is her duty to forget it and marry another.

rives such enjoyment from are also ruptures in the text, markers of historical trauma. These visible wounds serve a mnemonic function, appearing as insistent symptoms of a lingering past that refuse erasure.²⁴ Lurking just below the surface, or even at the surface, then, are very real fears of Irish violence and barbarism—one that a reader of 1806, for whom the violence of the 1798 rebellion was still a fresh memory, could not fail to register.

This explains one of the most peculiar scenes of the novel, Horatio's nightmare. He recalls that, "I fell into a gentle slumber, in which I dreamed that the Princess of Inismore approached my bed, drew aside the curtains, and raising her veil, discovered a face I had hitherto rather guessed at, than seen. Imagine my horror—it was the face, the head, of a *Gorgon*!" (WIG 60) Ina Ferris reads this scene as Horatio acknowledging the colonial guilt of his ancestors, but it lends itself to a far more troubling interpretation: the face of the Gorgon is that of Irish Otherness, their barbarity, "a face I had hitherto rather guessed at, than seen."²⁵ Is it possible that Glorvina's bewitching charms serve to mask this Gorgon face?

Refusing Smith's rational description of pain in favor of a more sentimental version, Lady Morgan allows for the possibility for sympathy to be conveyed

24. Kevin Whelan writes that the "treatment of ruins is politically explicit: they are the materializations of the colonized's defeat, the presence of absence, in which the long-term effects of historical trauma have become fixed in place. Colonial guilt would then establish the gulf which traverses these multiple layers of time sedimented in space: ruins become mausolea of memory, the site of rupture rather than aesthetic rapture, where the uncanny oozes out of a living landscape . . . not the dead but the living weight of history." Kevin Whelan, "Writing Ireland: Reading England," in *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century: Regional Identity*, ed. Leon Litvack and Glenn Hooper (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 195.

25. Ina Ferris, "Narrating Cultural Encounter: Lady, Morgan and the Irish National Tale" in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 51, 3 (December, 1996), 297. Ferris writes that the dream shows how "the image of Glorvina mingles fearful guilt with ardent longing." While the logic of reversal in dreams could, perhaps, account for why it is Glorvina, rather than Horatio, who appears monstrous in this image, it is worth noting that earlier in the novel Horatio absolves himself of colonial guilt precisely by imagining Glorvina as repulsive: upon first hearing the story of his family's crimes, he says, "I am glad, however, that this old Irish chieftain is such a ferocious savage; that one pity his fate awakens, is qualified by aversion for his implacable, irascible disposition. I am glad his daughter is red-headed, a pedant, a romp; that she spouts Latin like the priest of the parish, and cures sore fingers; that she avoids genteel society, where her ideal rank would procure her no respect, and her unpolished ignorance, by force of contrast, makes her feel her real inferiority; that she gossips among the poor peasants, over whom she can reign liege Lady, and, that she has been brought up by a Jesuitical priest, who has doubtlessly rendered her as bigoted and illiberal as himself. All this soothes my conscientious throes of feeling and compassion; for Oh! if this savage chief was generous and benevolent, as he is independent and spirited; if this daughter was amiable and intelligent, as she must be simple and unvitiated! But I dare not pursue the supposition. It is better as it is" (WIG 42–43). One could then, read the nightmare as a desperate attempt of Horatio's subconscious to resolve him of guilt, rather than acknowledge it, but is it more persuasive to see it as a symptom of an underlying anxiety about Glorvina.

across cultural difference, without requiring the sacrifice of particularity for the sake of comprehension. This forces her, however, to ascribe to a kind of sentimental sorcery as a means of emotional transmission, one that opens the door for an Otherness that may even be monstrous. Some critics have noted the novel's gothic undertone, but none have extended it to Glorvina herself. *The Wild Irish Girl* has often been criticized for its heavy-handed use of sentiment; Jane Austen famously commented that "if the warmth of her Language could affect the Body, it might be worth reading in this weather."²⁶ But in some sense, Lady Morgan's sentimentality has succeeded: Glorvina's charm has apparently distracted most readers from her more problematic features. It is surprising, in fact, to re-read the novel and realize how numerous these ambivalences are, and how tenuous its contented conclusion appears.²⁷ The insistent references to the supernatural and the decidedly dark tenor of the work as a whole cast a pall that is not entirely erased by the happy ending.

Maria Edgeworth's *Ennui* challenges the solutions offered by Morgan's novel, sometimes almost explicitly. Many of the events narrated are similar, but Edgeworth refuses to use sentiment to propel the plot in a blatant way. The novel, which takes the form of a memoir, chronicles the life of a young man named Glenthorn, an indolent lord who suffers from the titular ennui. A coincidental series of events reunites him with his Irish childhood nurse, then persuades him to revisit the country itself. There he meets the spirited Lady Geraldine, who, like Lady Morgan's Glorvina, has much to say about negative portrayals of Ireland. He falls in love, proposes—and is rejected. The novel continues, detailing Glenthorn's experiences running his estate, until a shocking twist reveals that he is not actually Lord Glenthorn at all, but Christy O'Donoghoe, the son of an Irish peasant who was switched at birth. Deprived of his land and title overnight, the erstwhile Glenthorn sets out to make something of himself. He not only works hard and becomes a lawyer, but also, of course, falls in love with and marries a young Irish woman named Cecilia Delamere. By the end of the

26. Cited in Burgess, 317.

27. Claire Connolly points out that in a way, the novel is actually unable to provide the necessary happy ending. It must shift out of its first person voice in order to do so: "*The Wild Irish Girl* thus ends with an evocation of differences that first ignite and then are extinguished within the 'liquid light' of sympathetic identification. The narrative context for this fantasy of union is significant: a third-person voice replaces the epistolary style of the rest of the novel and frames a public, quasi-parliamentary form of address such as might be found within a political speech or pamphlet. The conclusion to *The Wild Irish Girl* suggests the promise of sympathy to redress historical wrong and correct asymmetries of power, as well as the narrative instability attendant on such an outcome." Connolly, p. 96

novel, he is again lord of the land, and confident that he has been fully cured of his former afflictions.

Although the novel ends in a marriage, love is nowhere near as central to the story of *Ennui* as it is to *The Wild Irish Girl*. In fact, Edgeworth makes a point of dismissing the possibility of a spark of emotion to cause real change in the protagonist. When Glenthorn is first touched by his former nurse's devotion, he is so moved as to promise her that he will remember to ensure that she will be allowed to light his fire every morning. But as emotion is fleeting, so is the resolution that accompanies it: "I will remember to speak about it," said I; but I went down stairs and forgot it."²⁸

Edgeworth also refuses to allow Glenthorn to be bewitched by the lovable eccentricities of the Irish.²⁹ Although Glenthorn is often amused by the strange and somewhat exotic things he encounters upon his arrival to Ireland, his curiosity hardly serves to tie him closer to the oppressed nation. This difference from Lady Morgan's rhetorical strategy is explicit in the foiled romance between Glenthorn and Lady Geraldine, the fervent patriot who, much like Glorvina before her, offers several discourses on the mistreatment and misrepresentation of the Irish, including a passage where she excoriates the usual representations of the Irish in travel literature (E 211). Furthermore, she is also described as "*striking—fascinating—bewitching*" (E 203). The plot clearly seems geared toward a marriage with Lady Geraldine, but Edgeworth refuses this attachment and instead marries Glenthorn to Cecilia Delamere.

Unlike Lady Geraldine, who proclaims her nationality with pride, there is very little that is particularly "Irish" about Cecilia. Although she has legal rights to Glenthorn's land and her upper-class name, she is in many ways a bland presence, particularly in contrast to her more caustic counterpart: "Perhaps Cecilia

28. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui, or Memoirs of a Gentleman*, ed. Marilyn Butler (1809; London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 180; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (E 180).

29. Edgeworth seems particularly attuned to the way in which the Irish brogue serves to jeopardize their chance for sympathy. As Claire Connolly reminds us, the Edgeworths focus very specifically on this issue in *Essay on Irish Bulls*: "The pathos of this poor fellow will not probably affect delicate sensibility, because he says wid instead of with, and Jasus instead of Jesus." Quoted in Connolly, p. 100. That this is specifically an Irish problem is attested to by the fact that in one of her moral tales, "The Good French Governess," the titular character's accent and uncommon diction is seen as charming and original: "Madame de Rosier did speak English remarkably well; she had spent some years in England, in her early youth, and, perhaps, the effect of her conversation was heightened by an air of foreign novelty. As she was not hacknied in the common language of conversation, her ideas were expressed in select and accurate terms, so that her thoughts appeared original, as well as just." Maria Edgeworth, "The Good French Governess," pp. 8–9. For a fascinating account of eighteenth-century attitudes regarding language, accents, and authenticity, see Daniel DeWispelare, "Spectacular Speech: Performing Language in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies*, 51, 4 (October, 2012), 858–82.

was not so fascinating, but she was more attractive" (E 302). The romance between Glenthorn and Cecilia is scarcely described; Edgeworth declares, "I will spare the reader the protracted journal of a lover's hopes and fears" (E 320). Rather, what is emphasized is that Glenthorn must earn her love. It is not romantic longing and sentiment that constitute the action, but hard work and the moral change of the character. It is Glenthorn's ability to overcome his ennui that impresses Cecilia, and not any learned respect or love for her native land. Ireland, in fact, seems to fade into the background, serving as little more than evidence of Glenthorn's metamorphosis.³⁰ His newfound ties to the country have little to do with the country itself. The changes in his behavior are driven more by self-interest than by anything like sympathy.

A stark testament to this motivation is provided in what might otherwise appear to be the first moment where sympathy exerts a meaningful effect on Glenthorn, the scene where he is roused to defend his foster brother, Christy. Christy's home is searched for weapons, and in the process, he is wounded. Although Glenthorn says that his "indignation was excited in the extreme, by the injury done to my foster-brother; his sufferings, the tears of his mother" (E 245), making it appear that sympathy is indeed the prime motive for his outrage, he continues by saying that "the taunts of Mr (now *Captain*) Hardcastle, and the opposition made by his party, called forth all the faculties of my mind and body" (E 245). This suggests that the desire for retribution is more self-indulgent. The scene is introduced from the outset in self-interested terms: "I was provoked by the conduct of some of the violent party, which wounded my personal pride, and infringed upon my imagined consequence" (E 245). Admittedly, we do see restraint operating to fuel sympathy in this case, as both Christy and his mother tell Glenthorn not to bother defending Christy, thereby spurring him on to action. Glenthorn's attempt ultimately fails—the jury acquits Christy's attackers—but he proclaims himself "happier and better satisfied with myself than I had ever been before. I was not only conscious of having acted in a manly and generous manner; but . . . the continual agitation in which I was kept, whilst my character and life were at stake, relieved me effectually from the intolerable burden of ennui" (E 248). The heroism of this moment is tempered by Glenthorn's air of self-congratulation in light of the fact that Christy does not receive justice.

30. Kathleen Costello-Sullivan offers an even more strongly stated reading, asserting that Irishness is foreclosed in the text: "Glenthorn's Irishness is relevant precisely because it was *never really there*, save as an origin inaccessible to Glenthorn even in its very exposure. Via life-long education as an Anglo-Irish aristocrat, Glenthorn's very Irishness has been exorcised. In this way, his Irishness is relevant only in its *absence*. Education serves to cover over the constitutive absence it represents." Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, "National Character and Foreclosed Irishness: A Reconsideration of *Ennui*," in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 150.

Glenthorn's rehabilitation, his herculean attempt to finally overcome his ennui and indolence, is likewise motivated more by self-interest than sympathy. In his own words,

Fired with ambition,—I hope generous ambition,—to distinguish myself among men, and to win the favour of the most amiable and the most lovely of women, all the faculties of my soul were awakened: I became active, permanently active. The enchantment of indolence was dissolved, and the demon of ennui was cast out forever. (E 305)

Although there is a romantic element involved in the desire to win an Irish woman's love, it is not a sympathetic bond at work, but a self-centered one. What is fascinating about this is that it indicates that what Edgeworth is grappling with here is not so much a Smithian theory of sympathy, but rather, Smith's theories as laid out in *The Wealth of Nations*, and the question of how it could be applied to a colonial context. In other words, Edgeworth runs into what German philosophers called "das Adam Smith problem," the question of whether man is motivated by benevolence (sympathy) or self-interest.

In many ways, Edgeworth appears to side with *Wealth of Nations* against *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This is most clear in the character of M'Leod, the Scottish agent of Glenthorn's lands. Glenthorn's interactions with M'Leod seem almost engineered to disprove Smith's theories of sympathy. To begin with, Glenthorn is so blinded by the past wrongs he has endured at the hands of his former agent—as well as an inherent suspicion of Scots in general—that he persistently ascribes malicious intentions to the able, honest Scotsman.³¹ He is unable to see past his own experience and prejudice to appreciate M'Leod's goodness, a clear failure of the sympathetic imagination. Rather than imagining himself in M'Leod's position, Glenthorn projects his own tyrannical impulses onto the innocent man: "I transferred to him instantly the feelings that were passing in my own mind, and took it for granted that he must be actuated by a love of power in every thing that he did apparently for my service" (E 184). M'Leod's stoic restraint, moreover, does not help his cause in the slightest. Quite the opposite, it annoys and bores Glenthorn, who complains, "I was weary of listening to this cold reasoning" (E 190). The change in their relationship occurs when M'Leod is, at long last, driven to an excess of emotion, an angry outburst: "I liked him better for his warmth: his anger wakened me" (E 260). Tellingly, this is also the sole moment in the text where M'Leod's Scottish accent makes an appearance, which again im-

31. "I was not influenced in his favor even by his striking appearance of plain-dealing, so strong was the general abhorrence which Crawley's treachery had left in my mind. . . . Mr. M'Leod was not only an agent, but a Scotchman; and I had a notion that all Scotchmen were crafty, therefore I concluded that his blunt manner was assumed, and his plain dealing but a more refined species of policy" (E 181). This is profoundly ironic, given that Adam Smith was Scottish.

plies that emotional restraint is a British trait that is inappropriate to the Scottish, and perhaps to the Irish as well. But it also suggests, once more, that fellow-feeling is born through an explicitly emotional engagement, rather than a rational one. It is the warmth of an argument that persuades, rather than its content.

The project of improving Ireland in *Ennui* is clearly based on a framework emerging from *Wealth of Nations*. The agent M'Leod even cites Smith's book when advocating for changes to be made on the estate (*E* 191). Moreover, *The Wealth of Nations* offers a diagnosis of the very ailment that Glenthorn is beset with. It is not that landlords do not stand to benefit personally by contributing to the general interests of society; rather, it is that they are rarely aware that they do, because their wealth renders them indolent. Smith argues that landlords' interest "is strictly and inseparably connected with the general interest of the society. . . . When the public deliberates concerning any regulation of commerce or police, the proprietors of land never can mislead it, with a view to promote the interest of their own particular order; at least, if they have any tolerable knowledge of that interest."³²

That is, however, a big "if." Smith rapidly makes clear that this is rarely the case:

They are, indeed, too often defective in this tolerable knowledge. . . . That indolence, which is the natural effect of the ease and security of their situation, renders them too often, not only ignorant, but incapable of that application of mind which is necessary in order to foresee and understand the consequences of any public regulation.³³

Glenthorn is a case study in this form of ignorance. His story is in fact the struggle to overcome that very indolence.

The difficulty, then, is how to persuade the landlord that his self-interest lies in improving the lives of his tenants. Although Glenthorn does come to take up benevolence as a kind of hobby, he remains relatively disinterested. For instance, although he fights for justice in Christy's case, his investment in the case is largely for the sake of his own pride. How then, to get Glenthorn to see the matters from the perspective of his tenants? Or, to put it differently, how does one initiate the leap of sympathy, and experience another's sufferings as his own?

Edgeworth offers a surprising solution to this problem by means of a bizarre plot twist in which it is revealed that Glenthorn is not Glenthorn at all, but Christy O'Donoghoe, switched at birth with another child. Turning over his property to the rightful owner, he is at last driven to make something of himself,

32. Smith, vol. 2, p. 262.

33. Smith, vol. 2., p. 262.

and pursues an education and a career as a lawyer.³⁴ Such a course of action is precisely the one prescribed by Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. He argues that although laborers' own interests are equally connected to that of society at large, they are generally as incapable as landlords of perceiving it, but for very different reasons: "His condition leaves him no time to receive the necessary information, and his education and habits are commonly such as to render him unfit to judge even though he was fully informed."³⁵ The solution Smith offers is that of public education; Glenthorn seems to prove him correct.³⁶ By educating himself, the erstwhile Glenthorn behaves in his own interest, which in turn is revealed to be precisely what is needed for the owner of the estate, which he ultimately becomes.

Edgeworth's approach to the Adam Smith problem might appear to be simply to dismiss his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as unrealistic, and to see human behavior as rooted in self-interest rather than benevolence. It is clear, however, that self-interest can only get you so far: in *Ennui*, it does not initially suffice to make Glenthorn a worthy landlord. Although his self-interest and that of his tenants are hypothetically aligned, he is incapable of realizing this until he is forced to see the world from a different point of view. Smith's theory, in other words, is incomplete: an "invisible hand" is needed to cure Glenthorn of his ignorance and teach him to pursue a self-interest attuned to the betterment of society.³⁷ This is where the plot twist comes in, providing the necessary impetus finally to reform the indolent lord and give him the education he clearly needs.³⁸

34. Julia Wright sees this as an assimilation to Britishness: "Glenthorn must learn, and disseminate, the Anglo-Protestant work ethic and earn the approbation of respected guardians of English law and English Protestantism in order to be redeemed at the end" (p. 79).

35. Smith, vol. 2, p. 263.

36. "But though the common people cannot, in any civilized society, be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune, the most essential parts of education, however, to read, write, and account, can be acquired at so early a period of life that the greater part even of those who are to be bred to the lowest occupations have time to acquire them before they can be employed in those occupations. For a very small expence the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education." Smith, vol. 1, p. 182.

37. A recent book by Eleanor Courtemache traces the use of Smith's idea of "the invisible hand" in nineteenth-century British fiction, and an earlier article by Stefan Andriopoulos describe its deployment in the gothic, but in both pieces, the invisible hand is essentially akin to an idea of Providence. See: Eleanor Courtemache, *The 'Invisible Hand' and British Fiction, 1818–1860* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Stefan Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel," *ELH*, 66, 3 (Fall, 1999), 739–58. The case that Edgeworth describes in *Ennui* may be unique in the way it stresses that "the invisible hand's" action is cloaked in the illusion of acting out of self-interest.

38. In the aftermath of epiphany, he realizes that his privileged existence left him ill-prepared for the realities of the world: "I reflected upon my helplessness in all the common business of life; and

Strikingly, the change that Edgeworth's novel portrays can be read as a literal operation of Smithian sympathy—that is, of putting oneself in the position of the other.

The jarringly literal aspect of this switch can be read as a critique of Smithian sympathy, an assertion that imagination is insufficient to the task of fellow-feeling, and men are always motivated primarily by self-interest, rather than by benevolence. But it also suggests that the theory of *Wealth of Nations* needs to be supplemented with an emotional investment that would bring self-interest in harmony with the overall interests of society. In other words, Edgeworth provides a critique of the problem in *Wealth of Nations* that draws from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and paves the way for a Smithian solution for the Adam Smith problem.³⁹ Self-interest and benevolence are not incompatible; the difficulty lies, rather, in making someone understand that his or her own interests are aligned with those of others. Sympathy is the exact mechanism that has the power to generate this understanding; the problem is merely how to initiate it. Obviously, it is not possible to make the British and Irish literally trade places, but Edgeworth provides a strong account of the need for sympathetic imagination, even as she illuminates how difficult it is to achieve.

The central problem raised by both novels, then, turns around the question of the way in which sympathy is engaged. By allowing for the possibility of emotional contagion, Lady Morgan raises the possibility of a dangerous manipulation of the subject, one that her novel cannot fully lay to rest. The gothic undertones of the novel belie a persistent anxiety, the fear of a Gorgon's face that seduces the hapless subject with a siren's song. Maria Edgeworth forecloses such manipulation, and appears to pursue a fully rational strategy instead, an approach based on Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Yet she cannot guarantee a lasting conversion through the intellect alone. Forced to find some way of producing

the more I considered that I was totally unfit for any employment or profession, by which I could either earn money, or distinguish myself, the deeper became my despondency" (*E* 293–94). In fact, Glenthorn opens his memoirs with an account of the poor quality of his education as a young man, and later avenges himself on the teacher who pampered him.

39. Doğan Göçmen suggests that while *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations* do provide different accounts of human nature, the view provided by *Theory of Sentiments* serves as the framework for a critique of the one provided in *Wealth of Nations*. The contradiction, he writes, is not a contradiction in Smith, but a tension between man as he naturally is and what he is made to be by society; "a real historical contradiction prevailing in commercial society, which Smith criticises implicitly and explicitly in different contexts." Doğan Göçmen, *The Adam Smith Problem: Reconciling Human Nature and Society in the 'Theory of Moral Sentiments' and 'Wealth of Nations'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 161. He argues, furthermore, that a solution can be found by attending to the utopian strain of Smith's writing. Edgeworth does not reach the same conclusion in her reading of Smith, but *Ennui* is attuned to the immanent critique of society that Göçmen sees in *Wealth of Nations*.

an emotional bond, Edgeworth reinstates sympathy as a means of harmonizing the self-interested aims of various social classes. In order to avoid the dangers of emotional contagion, however, she must resort to producing a literal swap in characters in order to initiate a sympathetic accord.

Neither novel, then, is able to resolve fully the problems they uncover in the philosophical theories they apparently depend upon. In the context of the story, however, this does not matter: both novels provide satisfactory endings for the characters that override the obstacles in their path. It is enough to say that Glorvina and Horatio are truly in love, and that Glenthorn has been reformed. The happy endings achieved by the characters provide a tenuous triumph of fiction over theory. But the apparent simplicity of the solutions belies the subtlety of their inquiry into the attending problems. These books are not clumsily generating political harmony by riding roughshod over complexity in complete oblivion, and plastering theories of sympathy onto recalcitrant practice. Lady Morgan and Maria Edgeworth are actively interrogating those theories, and finding them lacking.

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