A Discipline in Shifting Perspective

Why We Need Irish Studies

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The field of Irish Studies has begun to flourish in places beyond Ireland. In order to raise the question of what Irish Studies might mean in and for today’s university, I wish to provide some sense of the experience of working in certain quarters of the Humanities in the last thirty or thirty-five years. And so, at the risk of exposing what may be idiosyncratic lapses in my education, I offer here three academic anecdotes from the recent study of literature and culture.

Each records an occasion in which the institutionalized distance of the field of English from the study of Irish issues postponed a key revelation. My hope is that they can serve both as cautionary tales about the ancien régime of the disciplines and arguments for the place of Irish Studies in a new disciplinary order of things. In the final part of the essay I shall turn to the case of Maria Edgeworth, a writer whose work the advent of Irish Studies has made newly interesting for commentary and critique. Her willingness to move between local and general levels of analysis speaks to developments within Irish Studies while also connecting to key disciplinary transformations currently underway in the academy. I myself will be moving between local and general levels of analysis here, as well as in and out of the milieu of Irish Studies. Some of what I say will be familiar to scholars of that field, but it strikes me as salutary to be addressing the question of changing disciplines for a mix of specialist and non-specialist readers.

Irish Studies, I am aware, has strong connections to several longstanding disciplines and its intellectual roots go back many decades. Daniel Corkery’s Hidden Ireland (1925), to let one title stand for many, is a book that seems a clear precursor in its willingness to fold poetry, politics, and culture into an overarching analysis. My subject here, however, is work that has come to be recognized as constituting a field only in the last thirty or forty years, a period that has also seen the emergence of a number of related fields. Some of these fields—Scottish Studies and Australian Studies, for example—are closely analogous with Irish Studies. Others—such as cultural studies and postcolonial studies—are somewhat less so but are nonetheless part-and-parcel of the same reorganization of research and teaching. All five of these fields are in close dialogue with one another.

Irish Studies arguably belongs to a whole range of ‘shadow disciplines’ haunting the traditional categories under which knowledge has been organized in the humanities and social sciences. My interest in Irish Studies is twofold, both as a set of particular questions and practices in its own right—i.e., as a distinctive intellectual
intervention — and as a case of the larger disciplinary transformation of our age. The latter interest connects to an ongoing project at the University of Chicago's Franke Institute that bears the title New Perspectives on the Disciplines: Comparative Studies in Higher Education. In what follows I will be invoking the notion of perspective quite centrally, far more centrally than we have done in the larger project. Indeed, thinking about the question of perspective in Irish Studies may help to lend more substance and force to the term in the larger account.

I

The first of my anecdotes, then, involves a course I began to teach in the early 1980s at the University of Chicago, a reworked version of a Romanticism course I had by then already been offering for several years. The course was a response to a felt need to address the question of historical context in the study of Romantic literature while preserving the advantages of the New-Critical classroom. That style of classroom, defended by as unlikely an advocate as Edward Said at Chicago in 1981, offered a kind of democracy of access to literary authority that empowered students and enlivened discussion. The cost of such a classroom, however, was the reinforcement of a certain brand of non-historical formalism that, at that time, had for many of us come to seem unsustainable.

My thought in redesigning this course was to cluster the materials around two particular years in the period. Both dates, as it happened, were associated with an impressive body of literary production, and both have resonance for even the least historically minded students of Romanticism. One was 1819, the year Shelley memorialized in 'England in 1819', the trenchant sonnet he wrote in the wake of the Peterloo Massacre. It was also the year of much of the best work of Keats, Byron, Scott, Hazlitt, and Shelley himself. I went on to write a book about that year, about the place of Peterloo in it, and about the issues of literary and cultural periodization in the Romantic period and in ours. The other year, 1798, was the year of Wordsworth and Coleridge's revolutionary poetic experiments in Lyrical Ballads, the '1789' of English literary history. Clustering texts published or composed in 1798 made it possible to look at the Lyrical Ballads phenomenon in the context of Coleridge's conversation poems, Wordsworth's blank-verse trial runs for what would become The Prelude and The Excursion, as well as some work by Blake and some fiction (Charlotte Smith), drama (Joanna Baillie), political and economic writing (Thomas Malthus), and journalism. We also read historical accounts of the late 1790s in Elie Halévy and E. P. Thompson.

There was plenty to do, and it all went well enough. Yet there was, I came to see in retrospect, a massive absence lurking in the pedagogical exercise. For if 1798 carries resonance in the study of 'English' for its specifically literary associations, it of course carries far broader associations in Ireland, as in the phrase popularized by Thomas Flanagan's novel The Year of the French: the date of the risings in Wicklow, Wexford, and Antrim, and of the ill-starred French landing at Killala in Mayo. Looking back now, it strikes me as supremely ironic that we probably devoted a full ninety-minute class to a discussion of Coleridge's poem 'Fears in Solitude', a blank-verse meditation of February 1798 in which he registered his anxieties about the possibilities of a French invasion of southern England, where he was then living. For we never connected any of this to the fact that an invasion actually occurred a few short months later in the west of Ireland.

It is not just that the Irish events of 1798 marked the first foreign invasion of either
island in many decades, or that these events involved thousands of casualties (and many state executions), and ushered in the Act of Union of 1801. There were also some crucial political, literary, and cultural developments of the years leading to 1798 in Ireland that formed a potentially important parallel plot to the story of 'Wordsworth’s 1798'. As with the English 1790s, those years in Ireland saw the widespread circulation of ideas and ideologies imported from the French Revolution, especially through the active offices of Wolfe Tone who, like Wordsworth himself in the early years of the decade, lived in France and imported its brand of republicanism to his country of birth. These years in Ireland saw the formation of the United Irishmen, who, like the members of the London Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Information, developed new forms of organization across disparate constituencies in ways that would shape later socialist movements in the nineteenth century such as the Saint-Simonians and the Chartists.

Closer still to Wordsworth’s interests in 1798, Ireland witnessed a burst of activity in the popular ballad, so that, after years of relatively bookish antiquarian research, one suddenly had the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792 which, as Katie Trumpener and others have shown, proved something of a watershed for the folklorizing of many fields. Again, all of this formed a highly suggestive parallel to events in 1790s Britain where, as scholars have known since at least Robert Mayo’s seminal essay on ‘The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads’, Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s ballad experiments were very much of their time and place. Lastly, there is the interesting case of Maria Edgeworth’s first novel, *Castle Rackrent*. Edgeworth, born just a year earlier than Wordsworth, was already at work on this novel when the Rising of ’98 reached her family’s estate in Longford. To read the Preface to her self-described experiment with rustic language and popular forms of narration is to discover an extraordinary parallel to what students of ‘English’ have long been encouraged to recognize as ‘original’ in the Lyrical Ballads project and in its prefaces.

In spite of all these resonant parallels, it did not occur to me, when teaching the 1798 part of my course in the early 1980s, to turn any serious attention to matters in Ireland. I have learned to do better since then, and I believe that the recent rise of Irish Studies is partly responsible. But how do we best describe what Irish Studies offers in such a case? For 1798, one could say, Irish Studies supplies an elevation of perspective, a shift of scale that allows one to extend a horizon and thus to bring parallel histories into relation with one another. This shift of scale offers an expanded canon. It makes possible the revelation of an Ireland that had lain beyond the ken, that had been ‘hidden’, to use Cockery’s term.

II

This is already a great deal, and, even if Irish Studies did no more for the disciplines and the world, it would be worth encouraging on this account alone. But my second anecdote, which also involves a pedagogical exercise at Chicago, will suggest how Irish Studies needs to, and does, do more than ‘elevate’ our perspective. It concerns a first year humanities course entitled ‘Form, Problem, Event’, which was designed to introduce university students to the methods and issues of literature, philosophy, and history. The third of its three ten-week terms centred on an historical ‘event’ large enough to sustain interdisciplinary study. In the first incarnation of the course, the event was the French Revolution, with diverse framing accounts from Michelet, Carlyle, George Lefebvre and ‘texts’ by Rousseau, Burke, Paine, Wollstonecraft, and Wordsworth. In
the second incarnation the event was the English Revolution, with diverse framing accounts from Clarendon, Samuel Rawson Gardiner, and Christopher Hill, and *Leviathan, Paradise Lost*, and pamphlets of the 1640s and 1650s as texts. I myself taught the course in its second incarnation several times running and found it immensely rewarding.

As with any experience in narrative historiography, certain issues of sympathy and point of view would come into play in the course of working through these materials. Invariably, it seemed, especially in reading the liberal narrative of the 1640s by Gardiner and the Marxist account by Hill, a collective bond of sympathy would develop between the participants in class and the Puritan revolutionaries, who clearly appeared to represent the 'progressive' cause in the conflict. Cromwell's heroic New Model Army became a particular point of identification. Whatever the cultural idiosyncrasies of the 'Puritan mind,' the New Model Army, when it rode to the rescue in 1644 and beat back the Royal Army in key battles thereafter, came to stand for resistance to arbitrary monarchical power — a kind of modernity, if you will — that seemed relatively easy to endorse.

At one point in the course every year, we read and discussed the famous 1647 Army Debates at Putney in the text compiled from William Clarke's eyewitness stenographic notes. After the stunning victories at Marsden Moor and Naseby, Cromwell's army had marched toward London, arriving en masse at Putney just south-west of London. The metropolis was theirs for the taking, but instead of seizing it, they established camp and held an open debate about how government should be conducted under Puritan auspices. For purposes of the course, this debate became an intellectual linchpin, serving to introduce *Leviathan* and *Paradise Lost*. Filling in Clarke's sometimes sketchy stenography, my students and I admired the openness of this debate, the recognition of emergent parties, the enlightened impulse to deliberate rather than dominate. Moreover, the terms of the debate itself seemed to us extraordinarily

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Maria Simonds-Gooding
*Fields Outside the Enclosure*
2003
plasterwork
80 x 114 cm
forward-looking, as Cromwell and William Ireton engaged with the Levellers, for example, a newly emergent faction whose views on property distribution, which were given their first full airing in this setting, seemed to anticipate socialist programmes of the nineteenth century and after. Indeed, by this point in the course, such was the extent of the identification with ‘the Cause’ that we registered collective anxiety when — in the midst, say, of Gardiner’s detailed Victorian narrative — Cromwell would disappear from the scene for months on end. What in the world could be so important as to distract him from his historic mission in England? What would become of the revolutionary cause in his absence? Could his lieutenants — or his brother Richard — possibly rise to the task of keeping things together in the meantime? Just where was he, and what was keeping him there so long?

He was, of course, in Ireland, and we were not unaware of this fact. We must also have had some sense of what he was doing there. When I turn back now to the historical works that we read in this course, I find passages that represent these episodes, but always narrated from the perspective of the Puritan revolutionary interest. Hill, I now recognize, was downright explicit in his apologetics: ‘The brutality of the Cromwellian conquest in Ireland is not one of the pleasant aspects of our hero’s career, and I have no desire to whitewash his conduct. But we must get the campaign and its aftermath into historical perspective, and try to see it through the eyes of Cromwell and his contemporaries as well as those of posterity’.6 We interpreted the events — read the story, as it were — from that point of view. As in a novel managed by a competent fiction writer, our identification was solicited for particular parties and to particular ends. And when the identification is with the parties that emerged as historically triumphant, the risk of massive occlusion and massive distortion is so much the greater. This kind of resort to a recurring narrative strategy within a culturally dominant formation creates a one-sidedness that becomes all-but absolute.

It was some years later, when I read histories of Ireland for purposes of understanding some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers I was researching, that I was able to register the full force of what the ‘absent’ Cromwell was up to. It was only then that I began to recognize the monstrous brutality of Cromwell’s tactics in Ireland. It was only then that I discerned Cromwell’s central role in the vicious spiral of seventeenth-century Anglo-Irish conflicts that culminated in the Battle of the Boyne and set the stage for the next century of immiseration under the penal codes. It was especially astonishing, for someone whose Cromwell was the general who showed such restraint in parking his army at the gates of an undefended London to debate political principle, to discover how differently he dealt with Catholic Ireland and how differently the ‘conversation’ would go at the gates of town such as Drogheda. Here is a standard account, from a recent middle-of-the-road history of Ireland, of what ensued after the refusal of Cromwell’s call to surrender:

Cromwell replaced his white flag of truce with a red one and opened fire on the city walls, which began to crumble and give way. The defenders put up a very stiff resistance and it was some time before the breaches of the walls were big enough for 7,000 or 8,000 of Cromwell’s men to pour through them into the town. They put the defenders to the sword and then streamed through the streets, mercilessly killing about a thousand of the townspeople. Many may have been technical combatants: who, in such a situation, would not arm themselves with a piece of metal or a stick? Others were certainly defenceless.7
Submit to Puritan rule or be slaughtered was the ultimatum, and it was not a vain threat, as the residents of Drogheda came to learn.  

The history of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries as I had come to know it as background to the field of ‘English’ was a photographic negative of the history that one could find even in moderate histories of Ireland for this period. Many of the key dates would roughly be the same as for the English version — 1603, 1625, 1640–41, 1647–49, 1688–91, and so on. But in the Irish story, to borrow a phrase slightly out of context from Christopher Hill, the world would be turned upside down. The year 1603 marks, not the peaceful transition to a Stuart king, but rather a period of suppression that leads to the departure of the Irish aristocracy, the Flight of the Earls. The year 1641 marks, not the beginning of the Long Parliament, that important step in England’s shift away from monarchical power, but rather the occasion of a series of brutal suppressions across Ireland; and the year 1688, not the Glorious Revolution, but the end of Catholic Ireland’s chance at social justice for many decades to come.

In this second anecdotal example, then, the model for Irish Studies is not so much that of an elevation of perspective as it is that of a reversal of perspective. In cinematic terms, it is not a cut from a medium shot to a long framing shot, but rather a sequence of shot and counter-shot. It follows, I think, that the contribution to knowledge that is possible in this kind of shift will be proportional to the naturalization or domestication that is established with the initial point of view. Amin Malouf’s remarkable The Crusades through Arab Eyes is an example of a book that has great impact precisely to the degree that the perspective it reverses (the Western view of the Crusades) had become a matter of second nature — all there was to know about the case — for so many Western readers. Updating Malouf’s take on the Middle East to the present crisis there, we might note that many observers in the West have trouble understanding that the date 1948 — which for Europe meant the Marshall Plan and for Israel meant the establishment of a new state in the wake of the Holocaust — was from the point of view of the Palestinians nothing less than the Nakba or Catastrophe. It might therefore be said that in this more robust model of Irish Studies, the addition of the Irish side of the question is less the recognition of a parallel set of historical developments (parallel ballad revivals, parallel engagements with French Republicanism, parallel literary experiments with rustic narrators) than the revelation of a suppressed dimension of a larger complex story. Changing metaphors from cinema to the theatre, one can think of the issue along the lines of what Tom Stoppard produced for the story of Hamlet in Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead: the view from a world ‘off-stage’ in which the terms of perception and assessment in the on-stage world are turned inside out.

III

My final anecdote does not yield a third model of Irish Studies but rather points to an implication of the second one. It comes from an experience not from teaching but rather from research, indeed from my first major research project, a re-examination of Wordsworth’s relation to the French Revolution that I undertook in the 1970s. The standard view of Wordsworth at that time, sanctioned by the early comments of Hazlitt and others, was that, though he turned ‘conservative’ late in his career, he nonetheless remained, at least through the major writings of his ‘great decade’ (1797–1807), a kind of Rousseauist in politics and letters. He was, that is, a poet of ‘nature’ in Rousseau’s sense of the term, still very much in sympathy with the ideals,
if not with the upshot, of the French Revolution. On this view, he was a poet, as M. H. Abrams put the matter, for whom ‘the prime opponent power is “habit”, “use and custom”, “the regular action of the world”’.

Looking at Wordsworth’s interest in repetition, and in his positive representations of habit and custom in both the production and reception of his poetry, I came to see things differently. And in particular, I found in Wordsworth’s relation to Edmund Burke — whom Wordsworth came to acknowledge openly but, as he stressed, belatedly, in his later years — a connection that could help to clarify the poet’s political and aesthetic commitments as they changed over time.

Burke was not at that time a writer with a prominent place in many literary histories of the Romantic period. Outside of literary history, at least in America, Burke had been taken over by a number of self-styled conservative thinkers — Russell Kirk, for example — for his views about ‘tradition’ and ‘prejudice’. In England, Burke had figured in Romantic studies for an earlier generation, that of the eminent historian Alfred Cobban in the 1920s, but had not much figured since. By the early 1970s, however, in the New Zealand intellectual historian J. G. A. Pocock, Burke found a commentator and advocate whose fresh approach reanimated his writings — especially those about the French Revolution. Pocock made Burke’s work one of the central case studies in a new methodological campaign he undertook with the English philosopher Quentin Skinner and the English literary critic John Wallace. This new campaign — whose first manifesto was Pocock’s Politics, Language and Time (1973) — undertook to challenge the views of commentators like Leo Strauss who, it was argued, would have us study important works in the history of political writing without respect to their historical contexts. Invoking the notion of ‘language games’ from Wittgenstein-inspired Ordinary

Language Philosophy and the new concept of discourse advanced by the likes of Michel Foucault in France, this programme aspired to situate terms and arguments in respect to the historicity of their rule-governed usage. Burke would become a recurring point of reference for Pocock, first in a seminal essay on Burke and the ancient constitution and later in follow-up essays on Burke’s response to the French Revolution.

It was undoubtedly Pocock’s Burke that I took on board, a Burke who himself seemed to offer a well-nigh Wittgensteinian, performative account of the importance of grammar, of ‘usage’, against excessive reliance on metaphysical definition, and for whom the former value was as distinctively English as the latter error — or vice — was distinctively French. ‘These metaphysic rights,’ wrote Burke, ‘entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line.’ It was Pocock’s Burke, really, whom I attempted to show was a crucially neglected element in received accounts of Wordsworth’s poetic responses to the French Revolution and its Napoleonic consequences.

Some evidence of just how little Burke was in play for Romantic studies at that time can be seen in the absence of any mention whatsoever of Burke’s Reflections in what was then the single most influential book on the subject of how the French Revolution mattered to Wordsworth and his fellow poets, Abrams’s Natural Supernaturalism (1971). I had myself read a great deal on Burke beyond the many works about the French Revolution, including the famous speeches about the American colonies in the 1770s, the work on the prosecution of Warren Hastings’s misdeeds in India, and, yes, even some of the writings on Ireland. I was aware of the general outline of Burke’s biography, including the fact of his birth in Ireland and his education at Trinity College, Dublin. But for me, as for most scholars.
who paid him any mind, Burke was simply a British writer — even an 'English' one, according to his own self-identification in the Reflections. Indeed, it never occurred to me to wonder at the oddity of an Irishman's willingness to align himself so intimately with English national sentiment until a rather different Burke began to appear on the scene in the 1990s.

Looking back, it seems that Conor Cruise O'Brien's widely reviewed 'thematic biography' of Burke, The Great Melody (1992), can be seen to mark a certain turning of the tide, along with Seamus Deane's extensive comments on Burke in Strange Country, the publication of his 1995 Clarendon lectures.\(^{13}\) Also in 1995, in Heathcliff and the Great Hunger, there was Terry Eagleton's chapter on the Protestant Ascendancy as an early embodiment of the notion that Gramsci would later term ‘hegemony'.\(^{14}\) I know that I did not myself begin to see the new critical prospects opened up by what would come to be called the 'Irish Burke' until 1997, at a conference convened in London to commemorate the bicentennial of Burke's death. Excellent papers by Luke Gibbons, Claire Connolly, and others revealed to me a Burke I had never recognized before. Part of this new picture of Burke was drawn in reference to fresh biographical research into Burke's early Irish — even Irish Catholic — connections. Another part was filled in by way of new commentary on Burke's many writings about Ireland and the Protestant Ascendancy. But the sense of a new Irish Burke was powerfully driven home for me in a paper about Burke's response to the French Revolution, in which Tom Paulin suggested that Burke's Irish commitments were such that he must have been 'ventriloquizing' the part of the Englishman in works like the Reflections. The sentence that stayed with me, and that I think I can reproduce almost verbatim from that occasion, was Paulin's culminating observation: 'You cannot persuade me that when Burke boasts that "we English are men of untaught feelings" he does not have his tongue planted firmly in his cheek.' The simple fact of Paulin's intoning this remark with his own Irish voicing itself lent considerable force to the point, and it accentuates the role of performative rhetoric in the adjudication of such questions.

Since that bicentenary moment in the late 1990s we have seen a good deal of work on 'the Irish Burke'. Gibbons's paper evolved into his Edmund Burke and Ireland (2003), which, though not quite an attempt to support Paulin's witty provocation, does press for a serious re-thinking and revaluation of much of what we thought we knew about Burke beforehand.\(^{15}\) And just recently Deane has elaborated some of the insights in Strange Country into a collection of essays, Foreign Affections (2005), which frames Burke's localism, for example, in a wider cosmopolitan context of European Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment writings.\(^{16}\) Thus, to counter the sense of Burke that we associated with his flaunting of 'English prejudice' or his snipe about the 'swinish multitude', we now have a Burke who, if not exactly a theorist of the subaltern, could be understood to have produced his famously contrarian views about British imperialism in America and South Asia because he was so sensitized to it in the case of his Irish homeland. We have a new Burkean sublime, too, conceived by a writer who was so wary of state terror in France at least partly because of having witnessed it in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland under the penal laws.\(^{17}\)

This third anecdote, then, is meant to illustrate what has begun to happen with certain writers in the wake of this more politically charged version of Irish Studies, in which what is achieved in commentary is less an elevation than a reversal of critical perspective. It is almost as if a new major author has been added to the canon: the 'Irish' version of the author we thought we


14 Terry Eagleton, Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture (New York, 1995)


16 Seamus Deane, Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke (Cork, 2005)

17 See Gibbons, Edmund Burke and Ireland, 98–111.
18 See Frank Kinahan, Yeats, Folktile, and Occultism: Contexts of the Early Work and Thought (Boston, 1988) and Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York, 1970).
19 See Philip Harth, Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of a Tale of a Tub (Chicago, 1961) and Carole Fabricant, Swift’s Landscapes (Baltimore, 1982).
22 Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, Semi-Colonial Joyce (Cambridge, 2000).

knew. For certain authors, this move has been available for some time. My late colleague at Chicago, Frank Kinahan, wrote a dissertation at Harvard in the early 1970s that he was already at that time describing as a book about ‘the Irish Yeats’; it was in part a polemic against Yeats critics such as Harold Bloom for whom Yeats’s value and intelligibility was constituted in respect to an almost exclusively English tradition (Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Swinburne). In the same decade, at a time when Swift scholarship was exemplified by Philip Harth’s Swift and Anglican Rationalism, Carole Fabricant’s study of Swift and the Irish landscape did something similar for the work of the Dean of St. Patrick’s. This idea of the ‘Irished’ or ‘Re-Irished’ author, however, has only recently acquired the status of a quasi-disciplinary procedure. Declan Kiberd’s recent Irish Classics, for example, relies sharply on this kind of operation to produce its impressive hermeneutic results. In the case of Bram Stoker, the Irishing of his authorship — and indeed of his most celebrated creation — has already provoked some critical resistance from Joseph Valente, who opens his recent book with the announcement that ‘[t]he decade of the Irish Dracula ended in 2000’, and who goes on to argue that the ‘Irish approach’ has not achieved the ‘epistemological break’ that it pursued. For Valente, this ‘inversion of existing practice’ may prove to do no more than ‘restore, on other terms, the unilateral racial logic that the Irish school has rightly suspected in itself.’ And in the ever-complicated case of Joyce’s Irishness, we have seen suggestions of how the difference might (as it were) be split, in collections such as Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes’s Semi-Colonial Joyce.

In many of these examples, and Burke’s is an especially good case in point, the question of an author’s being ‘Irishable’ is intensified by the sense that, internal to his or her œuvre, we can find not only another side to the story but beyond this, an anticipation of what it means to be able to see or not to see the story from that other side. Familiar, by now, to all students of the debate about the French Revolution in Britain is the challenge we find early in Burke’s Reflections to Richard Price’s views about the meaning of the Revolution of 1688. Price had argued as follows: that the 1688 Revolution had established three constitutional principles, that the English had recently lost sight of these principles, and that the French, with their 1789 Revolution, had revived them in a way that set an example that the English could not but profit from imitating. Burke countered each of these points with claims of his own: that the 1688 Revolution had established no such principles, that the constitution rested on a chivalric system invented by the French but forgotten in their recent revolution, and that the ‘English’, as exemplified in Burke’s own ‘resentment’ of the insult to the honour of the French queen, were positioned to show the French the way forward. The question of the meaning of the 1688 Revolution comes to figure quite centrally in Burke’s writings about Ireland in the 1790s as well, but with a rather different inflection. He wrote as follows to Sir Hercules Langrishe in early 1792:

I cannot possibly confound in my mind all the things which were done at the [1688] Revolution with the principles of the Revolution. As in most great changes, many things were done from the necessities of the time, well or ill understood, from passion or from vengeance, which were not only not perfectly agreeable to its principles, but in the most direct contradiction of them. I shall not think that the deprivation of some millions of people of all the rights of citizens, and all the interest in the constitution, in and to which they were born, was a thing conformable to the declared principles of the Revolution. This I am sure is true relatively to England ... But the Revolution operated.
differently in England and Ireland, in many, and these essential, particulars. Supposing the principles to have been altogether the same in both kingdoms, but the application of those principles to very different objects, the whole spirit of the system was changed, not to say reversed. In England it was the struggle of the great body of the people for the establishment of the power of the smaller number, at the expense of the civil liberties and properties of the far greater part; and at the expense of the political liberties of the whole. It was, to say the truth, not a revolution but a conquest; which is not to say a great deal in its favour. To insist on everything done in Ireland at the Revolution, would be to insist on the severe and jealous policy of a conqueror, in the crude settlement of the new acquisition, as a permanent rule for its future government. This, no power, in no country that ever I heard of, has done or professed to do...  

The point of overlap between this argument and the Reflections' critique of how Price represented 1688 is the idea that many features of the Revolution were incidental to its principles. Such features amounted only, as Burke famously put it, to a 'necessary adjustment' in response to the difficulties of the times. But where the tendency of the Reflections was to rebut Price's ground for urging a reformist extension of political franchise in England, the tendency in the Letter to Langrishe is to rebut those who would continue to exclude a large part of the population from the franchise in Ireland. Burke's key move in the latter argument, moreover, is the assertion that the incidental aspects of the Revolution settlement in Ireland derived from the fact of conquest, from the fact that the settlement was coloured by the passions and circumstances of conquest.

It is in this way that Burke attempts to show that, in the long history of the penal laws, the question of redress for Irish Catholics is not about a constitutionally established Protestant Church. And it is from the hypothesis of conquest, a conquest whose exigencies have been far too long extended, that he retells the history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

For a much longer period than that which had sufficed to bend the Romans with the nation to which of all others they were the most adverse [i.e. the Gauls], the Protestants settled in Ireland, consider themselves in no other light than that of a sort of colonial garrison, to keep the natives in subjection to the other state of Great Britain. The whole spirit of the Revolution in Ireland, was that of not the mildest conqueror. In truth, the spirit of those proceedings did not commence at that aera, nor was religion of any kind their primary object. What was done, was not in the spirit of a contest between two religious factions, but between two adverse nations...

Unheard-of confiscations were made in the northern parts, upon grounds of plots and conspiracies, never proved upon their supposed authors. The war of chicane succeeded to the war of arms and of hostile statutes; and a regular series of operations was carried on, particularly from Chichester's time [the early seventeenth century]... for the purpose of the total extirpation of the interest of the natives in their own soil—until this species of subtle ravage, being carried to the last excess of oppression and insolence under Lord Strafford, it kindled in the flames of that rebellion which broke out in 1641. By the issue of that war... and by the total reduction of the kingdom of Ireland in 1691, the ruin of the native Irish, and, in a great measure, too, of the first races of the English, was completely accomplished. The new English interest was settled with as solid a stability as anything in human affairs can look for. All the penal laws of that unparalleled
code of oppression, which were made after the last event, were manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people; whom the victors delighted to trample upon, and were not at all afraid to provoke. They were not the effect of their fears, but of their security ...²⁵

This account of Anglo-Irish relations revises an English narrative about how stern measures had been taken to preserve the establishment of Protestantism and afford security for Protestant ‘new English’ settlers in Ireland, putting in its place a story about nationalist passions and an overzealous indulgence in the prerogatives of domination on the part of conquerors. In this story, the events associated with dates such as 1603, 1641, and 1688 are revalued, and the question of how far the Revolution of 1688 can serve as a basis for action on the Catholic question in 1792 is very much in play.

For Burke, moreover, the different value assigned to dates means not only a downward assessment of 1688 but also an upward assessment of 1782, the year of Henry Grattan’s parliamentary triumphs:

The true revolution to you, that which most intrinsically and substantially resembled the English Revolution of 1688, was the Irish Revolution of 1782...

... Might it not be as well for your statesmen, on the other side of the water, to take an example from this latter, and surely more conciliatory, revolution, as a pattern for your conduct towards your own fellow-citizens, than from that of 1688, when a paramount sovereignty over both you and them was more loftily claimed, and more sternly exerted, than at any former, or any subsequent period? Great Britain, in 1782, rose above the vulgar ideas of policy, the ordinary jealousies of state, and all the sentiments of national pride and national ambition. If she had been more disposed then, I thank God for it, she was, to listen to the suggestions of passion than to the dictates of prudence; she might have urged the principles, the
maxims, the policy, the practice of the [1688] Revolution, against the demands of the leading description in Ireland, with full as much plausibility, and full as good a grace, as any amongst them can possibly do, against the supplications of so vast and extensive a description of their own people.26

It is not so much that 1782 supplants 1688 as that it supplements it, providing a sense of how to separate the true principles of 1688 from the circumstances of a passionate hatred and an unseemly glorying in domination. If, in 1792, Britain can similarly construe 1782 for purposes of the debate over Irish Roman Catholics, then, Burke suggests, Britain will be true to those same deeper constitutional principles.

Burke's re-reading of Anglo-Irish legal, political, and cultural history is just now coming back into better focus. It is part of the keen interest in the Irish Burke, who emerges as a liberal theorist of colonial domination avant la lettre.27 Burke's œuvre, in other words, has become so rich a subject for Irish Studies in recent years because it affords not only an interesting object of study but also, to a degree, a method of study, one closely connected with those techniques of reversing perspective described above.28

IV

With this story of the transformation of Burke studies in the last thirty-five years or so, I come to the end of my three academic anecdotes. There is, however, another Irish writer about whom controversy has swirled in recent years, Maria Edgeworth, one of Burke's younger contemporaries. Her case, like Burke's, also offers both an object and a kind of model for the project of Irish Studies. One measure of the increased attention that Edgeworth has received in recent years can be found in the record of available editions of her work. In the five decades before 1972, when Marilyn Butler published her seminal biography of Edgeworth, there were only infrequent editions of what are now considered her major novels: two editions of Belinda, two editions of Emmeline, three editions of Ormond. There have been double the number of editions of each novel in the shorter period since 1972. There have also been more editions of Castle Rackrent since 1972 than in the fifty years before. Today, not only are several of Edgeworth's books available in paper, but there is also the extremely valuable Pickering and Chatto edition of the Novels and Tales, which make neglected works such as Patronage and Leonora newly available for critical attention. The corresponding rise in the level of publication about Edgeworth has been even more impressive in recent years: the Modern Language Association records more than 150 journal and book articles on Edgeworth since 1990 and WorldCat registers 42 books and dissertations in the same period.

To be sure, the new attention to Edgeworth has had multiple causes, including the historicist agenda to recover work by authors important in their own time, the feminist challenge to a masculinist literary canon, and the new dispensation in Romantic studies that has rehabilitated the novel (and simultaneous contextualized lyric poetry) in the sixty-five years between the death of Sterne and the emergence of Dickens. Still, however we explain our new access to Edgeworth's remarkable œuvre, it has the advantage — especially in light of recent commentary — of dramatizing vividly some of the problems in what it means to identify an author as 'Irish'.

One feature that distinguishes the case of Edgeworth from some of the other authors is that the debate about her fiction within Irish Studies is not one that, in a straightforward way, poses an 'Irish Edgeworth' against some antecedent...
account of her work. Rather, the case of Edgeworth, especially the Edgeworth of the four novels known as the ‘Irish Tales’, interestingly complicates not only the question of what the ‘Irishing’ of an author might mean, but also that of how to locate an ‘Irish author’ on a larger cultural map. Further, Edgeworth’s commitment to using her novels to ‘teach’, though it has cost her readers over time, makes her especially interesting to consider in the present context. The plots of these ‘educational’ ‘Irish Tales’ are schematic in a way that would probably invite ideologically allegorical readings even in the absence of Edgeworth’s known interest in didactic literature.

Consider the last two of these novels, *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817). Like *Ennui* (1806) before it, *The Absentee* begins in London and returns to Ireland for its central events. It tells the story of the Clonbronys, an Irish aristocratic family who left their double estate in Ireland for a life of fashion in England, where, to court favour with London society, they have spent themselves into massive debt. The honourable young scion of this household, Lord Colambre, unable to solve his parents problems in England and unwilling to marry the heiress for whom his mother intends him, returns to Ireland incognito to investigate how things stand with the two family estates there. One estate, under the management of a worthy agent named Mr. Burke, is doing very well. The other, under an unscrupulous agent named Garraghty, is a moral and economic disaster. In the dénouement, Colambre returns to London with his report just in time to save his father from concluding a disastrous deal with Garraghty; he also pledges half his own inheritance to help relieve his father’s debts on condition that they resume residence in Ireland. Eventually, Colambre marries the woman of his choice, his cousin Grace Nugent, after removing the curious obstacle that stood in their way: the rumour, ultimately proven untrue with the help of his friend Count O’Halloran, that she was descended illegitimately from a line of unchaste women.

In *Ormond*, the last of Edgeworth’s tales, the action is set mainly in Ireland in the 1780s. Young Ormond explicitly described as a kind of Irish Tom Jones, is the foster-son of Sir Ulick O’Shane, a thrice-married Irish politician who has wit and affection but lacks principle and integrity. Like the Rackrents, his is an ancient Catholic family that now holds its land by virtue of a conversion. A rash act by Ormond leads Sir Ulick to distance himself from his ward, and the boy is sent to the isolated Gaelic realm of Sir Ulick’s cousin, King Corny of the Black Islands. This story tracks the growth of a good-hearted but impulsive young man into a suitor worthy of the daughter of Lady Annaly, an enlightened member of the Protestant Ascendancy and a source of moral wisdom and guidance for Ormond from the start. As is usual in Edgeworth’s novels, there is an alternative to the central character’s eventual choice of partner, in this case the daughter of King Corny himself, who rejects Ormond’s suit because of his lack of polish but, during a long Parisian interlude late in the novel, reveals to Ormond how so over polished she herself has become amid the ancien régime excesses of haute ton society that she loses her allure in his eyes.

I have included details of Edgeworth’s character and place-names in these synopses to indicate that Edgeworth’s schematic management of plots is complicated by her way with onomastics. For in addition to place and person names that signify characteristics or qualities — Castle Rackrent, Lady Dashfort — we find an impressive array of historical allusions. Exhaustive recent scholarship by Butler, Mitzi Myers, and W. J. McCormack, in particular, has turned up myriad such references and suggested possible
motivations and connections. The summaries I have just mentioned include Sir Ulick (read as alluding to Ulysses), Mr. Burke (alluding to Edmund), Conlony (alluding to a castle near Edgeworthstown), O’Halloran (alluding to a recent pro-Catholic historian of Ireland), Grace Nugent (alluding to a well-known composition by O’Carolan, which was itself based on an historical personage). In Emma we also find Geraldine (alluding to the celebrated FitzGeralds of Kildare), Cecilia Devereux (alluding to two of Edgeworth’s powerful English ancestors), O’Donohoe (alluding to a Killarney legend of a High King of Ireland).

If the schematic plots and allusive onomastics have prompted commentators to read the novels in terms of an allegorical code, they are nonetheless far from clear about what to make of it. Among the many stances in the criticism, two stand in apparent opposition. There is the view of Eagleton, Deane, and Tom Dunne, who regard Edgeworth as her father’s daughter, and her father as a neo-colonialist, a revisionist of empire. On this view, the novels allegorize a process whereby the traditionalist loyalties of the Irish people are exploited in the service of a new order, one in which the Irish will be shown to be faithful vassals to a new form of (English/Protestant) government, one revised, presumably, in the terms stalked out by Adam Smith and the new theories of political economy. Dunne’s pointed summary goes like this: ‘Edgeworth, like Spenser, was a colonist writing in conditions of siege, and while his specific proposals had long been implemented, she retained his advocacy of thorough Anglicisation, and, like him, presented a stereotype of the native Irish which best suited her preferred approach to that of benevolent, improving landlordism.’

Butler, for her part, in marshalling her findings about Edgeworth’s sources, takes aim at just this position. She considers the very existence of the code as evidence for Edgeworth’s subservience, rather like the Romantic poets’ reading of Blake as of Satan’s party, though perhaps the more apposite comparison is with Christopher Hill’s reading of Milton, where the claim is that, given the forces of censorship and the more insidious forms of hegemony, sublime allegory must always be read to the left. Butler’s Edgeworth is an author who must adopt indirect codes and protocols simply to get her work done. Edgeworth’s facts, names, and references, though on the one hand heavily coded, are, on the other, says Butler, ‘disaggregated as on a newsheet, make no case and are not commented on; the journalist’s minimal cover, when merely to introduce a fact is displeasing to authority.’ Animating such facts, according to Butler, is Edgeworth’s commitment as a ‘determined localist’, dedicated to solutions achieved on the ground in small Irish communities.

It is not clear to me that Butler and Dunne are making arguments about Edgeworth that stand on all fours with each other. I agree with Butler that one can find in Edgeworth’s novels considerably more sympathy for the Catholic cause than many of her critics give her credit for. In The Absentee, for example, there is the figure of the retired military officer, Count O’Halloran, clearly a Catholic and probably one of the Wild Geese who fled to Europe after the Jacobite defeat in the 1690s. Readers on both sides of the question see O’Halloran standing for Gaelic Catholicism. But whereas Dunne reads the treatment of O’Halloran as indication of Edgeworth’s rejection of ‘a Romanticized antiquarianism’, and an ‘entombing [of] the Gaelic past in Count O’Halloran’s house’, Butler seeks to portray O’Halloran as a hero of the story, one whom she credits in part with the rescue of Grace Nugent. As with many other characters in Edgeworth’s fiction, Butler also wishes to see in
O'Halloran an historical allusion, in this case to the Catholic historian, Sylvester O'Halloran, whose pro-Catholic history of Ireland attempted to correct a record of bigoted misrepresentation. I give Butler the advantage in this debate. O'Halloran has a certain degree of agency in this tale, precisely by virtue of his knowledge of the past. In this way, he is reminiscent of a character whom Scott arguably modelled on him, Jonathan Oldbuck, the titular character of the third of Scott's Waverley novels, *The Antiquary* (1817).

I diverge from Butler's against-the-grain approach to Edgeworth, what she herself calls her 'Irish way of reading' the novels, where she suggests that they involve a coded subversion of a Protestant hegemony on behalf of Catholic Ireland. We know that Edgeworth strongly favoured Catholic emancipation. Most of the Irish tales were written deep enough into the period of Union for parties on all sides to recognize that, as with the defaulted terms of the Treaty of Limerick a century before, the British government was prevaccinating with the promised full emancipation of Catholic subjects. The year *The Absentee* was published, the young Shelley was in Dublin leafleting for this very cause. But to write fiction in the cause of Catholic emancipation is not necessarily to produce a coded subversion of the existing terms of rule (which is not to say that such practices as absenteeism were not roundly condemned). Good Catholics are given their due in Edgeworth's novels, and Catholicism as such is not criticized. But good Protestants are also given their due, and Protestantism as such is not criticized — only the notion of a *de jure* Protestant Ascendancy, rather along the lines of Burke's earlier critique in the 1790s. Edgeworth seems to support what might be called a *de facto* Protestant Ascendancy, the rule of landlords whose claim to govern is not that of might or birth but of education. For Edgeworth, education is a value higher than that of religious denomination and should have no basis in conversion proselytism. The authoritative Lady Annaly explicitly avows some such position in *Ormond*, and in so doing she echoes the Edgeworths' 1807 article in the *Edinburgh Review.*

The question that I want to press here is about how tales of the sort that Edgeworth is producing might be understood as serving the cause of 'education' as Edgeworth conceives it. To this end, I take seriously, the notion that the novels are written in a kind of code. But I also want to suggest a different understanding of how it works. The code, I argue, involves a shift from an education based on religious conversion or its resistance — i.e. an education based on the non-fungibility of religious beliefs — to one based on what might be called cultural convertibility, in which there are *levels* of interchangeability that interest Edgeworth immensely. Like Butler's account, mine is based on a notion of 'localism,' but one that is the flip side of a kind of 'generalism.'

Even on Butler's own showing, after all, part of what we might call the allusive structure of these tales is the sense that some of the allusions are highly cosmopolitan. Edgeworth, already famous in 1801 for her educational writings, her early fiction, and her father, began to see the wider world of Parisian, London, and Edinburgh intellectual society and to write for it as well. Her novels, starting with *Emnui,* especially, begin to feature world-historical figures and situations (Rousseau, the French Enlightenment, Madame de Stael, Goethe, German Idealism, British India, etc.). Other allusions relate to the interaction of Great Britain and Ireland, and this in turn is sometimes broken down to suggest local relations between England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. There is then the level of 'Ireland' which the emphasis on the 'Irish Tales' obviously foregrounds. But then there is the more local consideration:
the level of the country, for instance. Thanks to Butler's research, and to the boom in Irish county history of recent years (including work on County Longford), we can now see how active are the allusions on this particular level. But beneath the level of county history there is the level of family history. It seems that as many as one out of three characters in a given tale bears a name or steers a course of conduct that derives from and arguably alludes to some figure in Edgeworth's family. This practice goes back to the first tale, Castle Rackrent, which was based in part on the Edgeworth family's 'black book.'

What stands revealed in Edgeworth's Irish tales, then, is a set of allusions that: 1) involve both the general and the local levels; 2) structure the relation of these levels to one another. But in what sense might this amount to a code? I am struck first of all that, in spite of Butler's and McCormack's suggestive intimations of how this or that allusion might count as coded, neither makes any claim to have 'cracked' the code. Their interpretations remain speculative, rightly peppered with 'possibly's and 'perhapses'. I am led to suspect therefore that no such code of the sort that they are looking for actually exists. Yet, in addition to the sense of eclecticism, suggestiveness, non-homogeneity, and difference, what the exhaustive recent research on Edgeworth discloses is a sense of intelligibility in it all. In what does this sense consist?

My suggestion is that the intelligibility of the code in these novels derives not from a narrative key, in which this or that plot character can be made to stand for this or that sect or group or formation, whether directly or indirectly. Rather, the very hierarchy of localism and generalism is in itself the principle of intelligibility. According to this rather simple genre-species hierarchical code, categories that are distinguished from one another on one level are comprehended as a unity on a higher level. Categories that appear indistinguishable on a given level emerge in their differences on a lower level.

Of some relevance to my claim here is a brief paragraph that Edgeworth produced on the prose style of Burke, a comment written just as Edgeworth was launching on 'solution novels', the three Irish tales that come after Castle Rackrent. The comment focuses precisely on the rhetorical question of 'allusion', a term I have deliberately chosen to use for what others have referred to as Edgeworth's coded hermeticism. The passage is from a notebook and appears in a somewhat stenographic form:

On different taste of French and English — le style bas — le style noble — This idea of preserving a uniform character for certain compositions restrains genius — Burke an example of an orator who draws noble allusions from ignoble objects — Homer — Examine in what the beauty of allusions consists — Popular writer must be regulated in choice of allusions by the actual state of knowledge in his country — Early poets confined to the striking and obvious phenomena of nature — As arts & sciences diffuse themselves orators & poets take from these their most elegant allusions ... Allusions by a single word sometimes show that a man has been in Arcadia — allusions generally preferable to similes.31

Some years later Edgeworth managed to work these observations into a passage for her novel Patronage (1814), where the narrator reports how a conversation turns the question of how 'taste is influenced by different governments and manners', and more specifically into 'le style noble, and to the French laws of criticism which prohibit the descending to allusions to arts and manufactures'.36 Lord Oldborough, the authoritative English chief justice in this dialogue, goes on to make a distinction
between French and English practice, remarking how the strong line of
demarcation formerly kept in France
between the nobility and the citizens had
influenced taste in writing and in eloquence,
and how our more popular government (in
Britain) not only admitted allusions to the
occupations of the lower classes but
required them; 37 And he cites examples
from 'Burke, and others ... in support of the
opinion'. 38

This stylistic observation helps to identify
the governing structure of allusions in
Edgeworth's own work. The hierarchy of
allusions in Burke's mixed style is one in
which lower order allusions are
comprehended in the higher order allusions
but with a loss in particularity and
concreteness. Edgeworth favours the sense
of continuity in this Burkean style to the
demarcated social gradients of le style
noble. Implicit in this overall rhetorical
model, I want to suggest, is a notion of
political culture that Edgeworth may also
have gleaned from Burke, who famously
argued, in response to Richard Price's
'Discourse on the Love of Country', that the
affectations attach to large groups and places
in a way that analogizes to (and depends on)
a smaller group of smaller places, to what he famously called 'the little
platoon'. 39

Certainly such a structure becomes crucial
to the cultural logic, as we might call it, of
Sir Walter Scott's historical fiction in the
Waverley novels, which, of course, he wrote
in avowed emulation of Edgeworth's 'Irish
Tales'. With Scott, sharply differentiated
(even warring) cultural groups typically turn
out to be, on the one hand, divided among
themselves, and on the other, united on
some other level. In Waverley, for example,
the large entity of Great Britain breaks
down into (for purposes of this novel)
operative cultural terms — England and
Scotland. But 'Scotland' is broken down
into Highland and Lowland, and Highland
is in turn divided into the Machiavellian
modernism of Fergus MacIvor and the
traditional clan loyalty expressed by Evan
Dhu. The breakdown of England in Scott's
fiction appears in his first novel on an
English historical subject, Ivanhoe, where
'England' is contested between two warring
factions, the Saxons and the Normans, each
of which is in turn sub-dividable. The facts
of 'Union' stand behind both novelists' work.
We are accustomed to recognizing
that many of Scott's first Waverley novels
turns on the crux of the 1707 Union:
Waverley, Rob Roy, The Bride of
Lammermoor, and The Heart of Midlothian
would be obvious examples. Less obvious
perhaps is how the 'logic of Union' in Scott
may have derived from Edgeworth's Irish
tales, all of them written amid debates,
prospective or retrospective, about the
Anglo-Irish Union of 1801. 40

What I am calling the cultural logic of
hierarchy and interconvertibility within the
framework of Union politics thus implies a
foregoing of 'conversion' politics and
practices in the older sense. That, at least, is
the way I think Edgeworth saw it. The idea
that England and Ireland should be 'united'
at a certain level of political management
and abstraction seems to imply a degree of
interconvertibility from the point of view of
the higher level between components
perceived as different on their own level. It
should be recognized in this connection that
Edgeworth's model of 'Irish Studies' has
aspirations to the condition of natural
science. The genre-species code implies a
scientific frame of reference for this
structure, and Edgeworth's bearings are very
largely taken from the emerging sciences.
Her father's circle included some major
figures in the science of the day, and her
books are filled with explicit discussions of
scientific questions, often put into
stunningly orignal juxtaposition with
problems in moral life. A key scene in
Belinda involves a natural philosopher who
finds some children holding a discussion as

37 NSW, vol. 6, 225
38 NSW, vol. 6, 225
39 WS, vol. 7, 97
40 Of course, the genealogy traced here is far more
complicated than this brief summary suggests,
since Edgeworth very cleary theorized her
understanding of culture, and indeed union, from
the work of an influential group of thinkers whose powerful
work was forged, arguably, in the dialectics of the Scottish-English
Union. I mean Adam
Smith, John Millar, and
the writers of the so-
called Scottish
Enlightenment. At the
age of fifteen, Edgeworth
was made to read Adam
Smith's The Wealth of
Nations, and her
enlightened characters —
MLeod in Emmie and
Ann Percival in Belinda
are often conversant
with Smith's work.
Further, as a women
writer, Edgeworth was
identified with the genre
of the novel before Scott,
along with its distinctive
marriage plots, in ways
that she indicates she
well understood,
especially in relation to
her rival, Lady Morgan.
they tap lightly on a fishbowl. The topic: whether the fish are moved to jump at the tap because they hear something or because they only feel a vibration. In the opening of *Harrington*, the extended causal analysis of a young boy’s anti-Semitic prejudice is introduced by way of his own joy at discovering the material cause of the magical lights outside his window in the streetlamps, when he is shown the work of lamplighter: the boy is said to have taken ‘as much delight as a philosopher ever enjoyed at discovering the cause of a new and grand phenomenon’.41

The key elements of the scientific method, as it appears in Edgeworth’s fiction, are observation, comparison, principled selection of objects to be examined, hypotheses about causal relations, and so on. As it happens these are exactly the defining issues that surround the debates staged within her novels about the cultural question of Ireland itself. When young Colambre sees the wretchedness of the second family estate, he checks his despondency: ‘Let me not, even to my own mind, commit the injustice of taking a speck for the whole. What I have just seen is the picture only of that into which an Irish estate and Irish tenantry may be degraded in the absence of those whose duty and interest it is to reside in Ireland.’42 Here, Colambre’s care with the synecdochal logic of the generic hierarchy — speck for whole — is informed by comparative causal investigation. The point gains weight from Edgeworth’s suggestion that some commentators on Ireland may themselves be motivated to misrepresent by bogus selection and unscientific explanation. Thus (still in *The Absentee*), Lady Dashfort, who hopes to see Colambre married to her daughter and returned to London, ‘knew and followed all the arts of misrepresentation’. ‘She knew’, that is,
'how to select the worst instances, the worst exceptions, and to produce them as examples as precedents from which to condemn whole classes, and establish general false conclusions respecting a nation.'

One might ask: how is the method of the Irish tales proof against that? I would say that, by creating the patchwork of a complex but incomplete hierarchy of cultural allusion, Edgeworth forces work on the reader. By leaving the picture incomplete, in other words, she explicitly foregrounds the problem of cultural exemplarity — speck for whole — rather than exploiting it. But the principle of interconvertibility implicit in this early form of science only reaches so far. It is interesting in this respect that Edgeworth consistently foregrounds both science and literature in her educational programmes. Indeed, if we return to the question of the continuous hierarchy of allusion in the mixed style of Burke, we can see certain contradictions re-emerging.

In the endorsement of a 'mixed rhetoric' associated with Burke's writings and speeches, Edgeworth seems to be signing on to a more general commitment to what Burke called 'mixed systems', a category he used to distinguish Britain from France in a number of areas involving not only 'government and manners', but also economics. Pocock has persuasively argued, for example, that Burke saw Britain as crucially distinguished from France in the eighteenth century by its greater degree of economic miscibility, by the relative ease with which the chief forms of wealth — landed and mobile property — could be mutually converted. Burke read the French Revolution as caused in large part by a rise in mercantile wealth that was restricted by both the French state and the French Church from the purchase of land. He also famously described the English form of government as a 'mixed system of opinion and sentiment', as distinct from the metaphysical purity he claimed was being sought by the theoretical statesmen across the channel. Thus, while the cultural model implicit in Edgeworth's hierarchical framework of allusiveness seems to imply the possibility of a certain open-ended generality as one moved upward from the more local levels of the scale, yet that very model, examined as a cultural formation, is deeply predicated on a British, possibly even English, system of 'government and manners', and of language and rhetoric. The model bears the mark of its location, and with that mark we reach a cultural limit to the flexibility of this 'mixed' style of thought.

In the case of Maria Edgeworth, then, we discover a fascinating object for Irish Studies and, to a degree, a modelling of the kinds of debates that constitute the field. It is a model, one might say, in which both the reversal and the elevation of perspective are expected to play a role in how things are seen and shown, and, if only in this sense, thus represents a step beyond the impasse implicit in Joseph Valente's point that a reversed (Irish) perspective mirrors rather than mends the problematic situation. It remains true for a commentator like Deane that Edgeworth's work is deeply flawed by her failure to take explicit account of the facts of colonial domination, facts that seriously skew the method of observation and comparison and give the lie to her attempt to naturalize politics with a quasi-scientific paradigm. I take this point seriously. Yet, as I have tried to show, the novels tend to be self-dramatizing of their own locations and limitations, so that the facts of hegemony surface willy-nilly, becoming part of the case her work presents to analysis. Edgeworth's invocative comparison of the French aspiration to unmixed purity with a British model of miscibility that was itself expounded by an Irish-born MP amounts to one such self-dramatizing moment.
In the Introduction to *Theorizing Ireland*, a recent collection of essays on Irish Studies, Claire Connolly, who herself employs the metaphor of the elevated viewpoint, rightly warns that the 'desire to seek out new perspectives on Ireland too often retains — or rather is itself retained and restricted by — a narrow understanding of the subject'.

I have tried to suggest ways in which Irish Studies at its best tends to address a subject that is both intensive and extensive, both particularized and relational. This is the Irish Studies that we need, and that we need to have its place in the new disciplinary dispensation — whether that place is a department, institute, programme, or even just a reliable interruption of the usual curriculum. This is the Irish Studies that can keep in view the 1798 of Wordsworth and that of Edgeworth, that can bring together Burke's critique of the Revolution in France with the Burke's unmasking of the Ascendancy in Ireland, that can credit Cromwell for what he did at Putney while taking the full measure of his atrocities at Drogheda, the whole disturbing mix of meanings in that brutal show of force.