

Leaving Utopia Behind: Maria Edgeworth's Views of America¹

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Abstract. Maria Edgeworth was an Anglo-Irish writer who was born in 1768 and died in 1849 and thus was able to witness the economic and ideological changes that shaped British society in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Though Edgeworth upheld utilitarian and enlightened ideas very similar to the ones inspiring the American Founding Fathers, studies on her *oeuvre* have never been interested in the vision of America reflected in her tales and novels. This paper analyses some of Edgeworth's little-explored narratives and corresponds to three different moments in her career. Edgeworth considered America to be a place where the individual could begin a new life away from home ("Tomorrow" [1804]), a tolerant country open to all religious creeds (*Harrington* [1817]) and an alternative motherland for the Irish during the Famine (*Orlandino* [1847]). The author was conditioned by the historical circumstances in Ireland, and she remained faithful to her pedagogic aim. However, instead of resorting to an idealisation of America, Edgeworth associated the new land with freedom and hope. In these narratives, and from a more or less serious point of view, she depicted America as a prize reserved for courageous hardworking people and even as an escape from the grim reality at home.

Key words. Maria Edgeworth, Ireland, American dream, the Famine, multiculturalism.

Resumen. Maria Edgeworth fue una escritora angloirlandesa que vivió de 1768 a 1849 y pudo presenciar los cambios económicos e ideológicos que configuraron a la sociedad británica tras la Revolución Francesa. Aunque Edgeworth defendió ideas utilitaristas e ilustradas muy similares a las que inspiraron a los Padres Fundadores Americanos, los estudios sobre su obra nunca se han interesado por la visión de América reflejada en sus cuentos y novelas. Este artículo analiza algunas historias de Edgeworth escasamente exploradas y que corresponden a tres momentos diferentes en su carrera. Edgeworth consideró a América como un lugar donde el individuo podía comenzar una nueva vida lejos del hogar ("Tomorrow" [1804]), un país tolerante abierto a todos los credos religiosos (*Harrington* [1817]) y una patria alternativa para los irlandeses durante la Hambruna (*Orlandino* [1847]). La autora se vio condicionada por las circunstancias históricas en Irlanda y se mantuvo fiel a su propósito didáctico. Sin embargo, en vez recurrir a una idealización de América, Edgeworth asoció las nuevas tierras con la libertad y la esperanza. En estas narraciones, y desde un punto de vista más o menos serio, ella retrató América como un premio reservado para la gente valiente y trabajadora e incluso como una escapatoria ante la triste realidad cotidiana.

Palabras clave. Maria Edgeworth, Irlanda, sueño americano, la Hambruna, multiculturalismo..

1. This paper has been possible thanks to the research network "Rede de lingua e literatura inglesa e identidade" (2007/00145-0) funded by the Galician Government and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

1. Introduction.

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), a leading figure of Anglo-Irish literature, tried to promote industry, practicality and responsibility by following the utilitarian creed and the ideas inculcated by her enlightened father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth. As her diverse pedagogic tales (*The Parent's Assistant* [1796]), novels of manners (*Belinda* [1802], *Helen* [1834]) and regionalist writings (*Castle Rackrent* [1800], *Ennui* [1809], *The Absentee* [1812] or *Ormond* [1817]) show, she had no doubt about the determining influence of reason and the imperatives of self-help, and of personal and social progress.

If there is one place in the world where reformist concepts could be applied at their best, it is America, a utopia of the European imagination and suggestive of adventure. Nevertheless, Edgeworth has not hitherto been considered in relation to America, understood here as the United States. It is the English connection that has received all the attention, especially with how Edgeworth articulated a critique of the British Empire. Many postcolonial studies on Edgeworth emphasise how territories such as the West Indies come to represent alterity and resemble the Irish case. Some of them support the idea that Edgeworth used otherness to justify a protest against the Empire (this approach has been the favoured one since Gallagher 1994. See also Boulukos 1999; McLoughlin 2002 and Corbett 2002). In recent years, compilations have included works on Edgeworth's educational writings, colonialism, regionalism and gender studies (Heidi Kauffman and Chris Fauske 2004, Julie Nash 2006), but America is scarcely mentioned, and the same thing happens in the admirable profile penned by Susan Manly in *The Female Spectator* (2006) – despite the inaccuracy in Edgeworth's date of death.

The lacuna regarding America, which might be appropriately called the Great Forgetting, seems surprising for two reasons. First of all, Edgeworth was a cultivated woman and a privileged chronicler of the age of capitalism who witnessed social upheaval in convulsive nineteenth-century Europe. She considered society more in global than in regionalist terms, upholding the same tenets which inspired the American Founding Fathers. For Arthur Mann, these people were:

learned men and drew on arguments from varied sources-biblical, classical, legal, Whiggish. Above all, they expressed themselves in the language of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, proclaiming that the American people had been born free and meant to stay free through institutions of their own making (1998: 92-3).

As for immigrants, who are frequently portrayed in Edgeworth's stories, David Mauk and John Oakland explain that they "strengthened the nation's commitment to 'the dream' and to its ideal of being a refuge for the poor and the oppressed, a nation of nations" (2005: 48). However, America never meant a comfortable existence for the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle, Edgeworth's adopted country, who celebrated American wakes before their long journey and travelled to America in coffin ships. One example of their attitude towards the new land is found in *The Absentee*, where Widow O'Neill sells her gown to prevent Brian's journey to America: "'it's only talk - I won't let him, he's dutiful'" (Edgeworth 1994: 185).

On the other hand, Edgeworth was well-known and cherished in the USA. Her works were repeatedly edited there, and, though her influence on American authors, such as Mark Twain, has not been properly assessed so far, she left an imprint on American women writers: "Edgeworth's moral tales were the childhood reading of the first generation of American women authors, the generation active in the twenties, thirties and forties, who led the way for the first of woman's fiction in the fifties and sixties" (Baym 1978: 29). Her fame reached the point that, in the 1820s, Joseph

A new path is thus open for female exertion ... Man no longer aspires to an exclusive dominion in authorship ... Who ... does not contemplate with enthusiasm ... the fine character painting, the practical instructions of Miss Edgeworth, the great known, standing ... by the side of the great Unknown [Scott] (1826: 17).

Years later, W.O.B. Peabody celebrated Edgeworth's literary return in a review of *Helen* ("We remember her as the morning star, whose radiance was lost for a time in the excessive brightness of the rising sun [Scott]; now we see her reappearing more beautiful than ever as the planet of evening, after that sun has left the sky" [1834: 167]), at the same

time that it was pointed out that “There is scarcely an intelligent child in America, who does not love her name” (1834: 175). Although Edgeworth never visited America, she read the American classics (Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving and Fennimore Cooper) and had a long epistolary correspondence with two American women: Harriet Cruger, who visited Edgeworthstown in 1827, and, as we will see, Rachel Lazarus Mordicai. Her opinion of America is, therefore, worthy of attention.

The Anglo-Irish writer covered many subjects, and nowadays studies on Edgeworth compose a rich mosaic. The more one analyses her works, the more forcefully one must abandon stereotyped images. Julie Nash warns that “Edgeworth’s life and work – at once moralistic and doubting, conservative and radical – resist easy categorization” (2006: XV), and accurately defines Edgeworth as “a feminist who parodied Wollstonecraftian radicalism, an abolitionist who idealized the loyal slave, a paternalist who undermined patriarchal power, a realist who never lost sight of the ideal” (2006: xvii). With this paper, we want to open up new paths and to shift the focus of research on Edgeworth – usually excessively concerned with localism and Irishness – to a wider cultural sphere. It is time to start considering the Promised Land and how it is envisioned in Edgeworth’s fiction. Though the Anglo-Irish female writer does not mention America in her earliest writings which contain the principles she would illustrate in her later fiction, she *did* consider America and establish a fruitful dialogue with the new continent. We will resort to personal comments and narratives corresponding to very different moments in her career: “Tomorrow”, a tale of the collection *Popular Tales* (1804); *Harrington* (1817) and *Orlandino* (1847). Two points must be taken into account. Firstly, this selection is based on the fact that references to America in Edgeworth’s fiction are dispersed, such as the one in *Ormond*, where America is metonymically seen as an uncivilised territory represented in King Corny’s tomahawk contrasting with Sir Ulick’s refined Damask sword: “‘Savage!’ ... The tomahawk was too much for him” (1972: 69). Furthermore, some comments in personal correspondence must be considered. Secondly, we must not forget that Edgeworth did not understand multiculturalism as we do nowadays and that our image of the

American Dream does not exactly apply to what the Irish had in mind at the beginning of the nineteenth century. My argument is that in these ‘American’ stories – scarcely explored and never studied together – Edgeworth shifted from the enlightened idea that cultural differences are secondary to individual effort to a more complex approach conditioned by her personal situation and the social circumstances in Ireland. Edgeworth also substituted the high-flown rhetoric of universalism for simpler terms where women and the land have a prominent role as in her narratives set in Ireland. America meant freedom and hope, and it was reserved for those with an enterprising spirit. Instead of public images, the Anglo-Irish writer offered more familiar renderings of America without forgetting her pedagogic aim. By resorting to characterological contrast, we will see how America is seen as a sister or foster land which is not so different from Europe.

2. “Tomorrow”: no rule for a gentleman born.

Edgeworth believed in universal vices and virtues. She extensively quoted and rewrote well-known authors, choosing characters and settings which were more exotic than local and ranged a lot. Tales such as “Forrester” (*Moral Tales* [1801]), “Lame Jervas” or “Murad the Unlucky” (both in *Popular Tales*) confirm an internationalism which provided some variety and entertainment for the young readers.

The first reference to America in Edgeworth appears in the eleventh story of *Popular Tales*, a collection intended for the middle and working classes in opposition to a previous volume, *Moral Tales*, which was addressed to the well-off. They are stories that “may be current beyond circles which are sometimes exclusively considered as polite” (Edgeworth 1967: VI). Christina Flanagan (2005) has shown that Edgeworth reflected the Protestant ideology concerning the importance of labour, and this is precisely the main subject in *Popular Tales*, where, according to Gary Kelly, the moral and material value of the discourse of merit understood as the moral, intellectual and cultural capital parallels the monetary one (1994: 89, 91). Edgeworth used to prepare a sketch of the plot for her tales. The one for “Tomorrow” is headed “Things to be done,” and she explained that she wanted “to show that those who have the habit of

procrastination may lose fortune, fame, friends and happiness” (Butler 1972: 236). The narrative opens with a quotation by Samuel Johnson on the uselessness of postponing assignments (“Oh, this detestable To-morrow! – a thing always expected, yet never found” [Edgeworth 1969b: 421]), and, like most tales in *Popular Tales*, is composed of a series of comic episodes much indebted to Jean-Francois Marmontel’s moral tales or *contes*. “Tomorrow” is a first-person narrative about an irresponsible young man, an antihero christened with the name of a wise man in the hope that the boy would become a great figure. Basil is brilliant, and his father is proud of him, but he needs to catch people’s attention and his vices are never corrected and his indolence is never punished. The moral message of the story is, of course, in the line of *The Parent’s Assistant*: laziness must be avoided.

The fiction of America began long before the Declaration of Independence. Theoretically, to be American is to be happy, free and prosperous, as established in the Constitution. This was the idea that Edgeworth offered to the world, and it corresponds with the ethic of Enlightenment, which had an attraction for a new generation of immigrants eager to stake their claim and improve their lot in a new land with abundant resources. This is how Basil thinks of America because it would give him the opportunity to make a new character and fortune (Edgeworth 1969b: 457) as a relative of his wife Lucy did. However, hardships also exist in America, and America becomes the setting to test oneself. Nun, one of Basil’s creditors, warns him that “in the new world, as in the old one, a character and fortune must be made by much the same means; and forgive me if I add, the same bad habits that are against a man in one country will be as much against him in another” (Edgeworth 1969b: 457). Despite this advice, the protagonist does not realise that a man must work for the betterment of society and his own improvement and that strength and determination are foremost in these cases.

Like most tales by Edgeworth, “Tomorrow” is a story where characters are flat and contrasted against each other, a flaw repeatedly condemned by critics, such as O. Elizabeth McWhorter Harden: “[characters] infrequently experience growth or development in a prescribed course of events ... the character’s actions are often warped out of their natural

course so that the lesson may be taught or the thesis preached” (1971: 229). In the ship carrying him to America, Basil meets a man who will function as his *alter ego* in the story. Barnaby or Barnby – the contraction of the name is revelatory of the character’s difficulties – O’Grady has travelled to America to work during harvest time and is going back there with his family to earn more money. Aware that his sons would be redemption men, that is, forced to work for the captain in order to pay their passage, Basil readily helps the Barnbys, which provokes a spontaneous – and sentimental – demonstration of gratitude:

He dropped down on the deck upon both his knees as suddenly as if he had been shot, and, holding up his hands to heaven, prayed, first in Irish, and then in English, with fervent fluency, that ‘I and mine might never want; that I might live long to reign over him; that success might attend my honour wherever I went; and that I might enjoy for evermore all sorts of blessings and crowns of glory’ (Edgeworth 1969b: 458-9).

In “Tomorrow”, America only reproduces Europe, and Basil will learn that class, prudence and the ability to make contacts still matter much in the new land. His American patron, Croft, is, accordingly, a hard-working methodical man inclined to what is proper, a characteristic not exclusive of the American man, but of all self-made men in *Popular Tales*, like the French entrepreneur in “Murad the Unlucky”. Croft adores punctuality and wants to help Basil, so, when he asks him about his abilities, Basil’s answer leaves him perplexed: Basil departs from the *homo economicus*, because, though he has got money, he is determined to be guided by circumstances and *he does not know what he wants*. Croft tries to make Basil understand that good luck is not enough in America, a wife and a child are a burden there and only some workers prosper in the new land: “artificers and mechanics, carpenters, shipwrights, wheelwrights, smiths, bricklayers, masons” (Edgeworth 1969b: 461). On the contrary, booksellers or planters do not succeed there because this needs capital and experience. American opulence rests on the social interaction of exchange, and here Edgeworth followed Adam Smith’s ideas that the division of labour leads naturally and necessarily to improved productivity. Nor is the life of a back settler good for Basil since

he is not used to it. From his personal experience, he advises Basil to be sensible and become a merchant or a clerk. Croft knew how to profit from family contacts and he himself married his partner's daughter. Eventually, the merchant takes Basil up with him for a fortnight with a warning: "I enter it into no engagement, and make no promise" (Edgeworth 1969b: 461-2).

During his stay with Croft, Basil meets Hudson, a spendthrift whose father is a wealthy planter. Hudson represents a way of life above Basil's possibilities – an American Dream, in a way –, and, following his wife's advice, Basil unsuccessfully tries to shun contact with him:

She observed that these people, who invited me to their houses as a good companion, followed merely their own pleasure, and would never be of any real advantage to me; that Mr. Croft, on the contrary showed, from the first hour when I applied to him, a desire to serve me; that he had pointed out the means of establishing myself; and that, in the advice he gave me, he could be actuated only by a wish to be of use to me; that it was more reasonable to suspect him of despising than of envying talents which were not directed to the grand object of gaining money (Edgeworth 1969b: 465).

Basil's mistakes in his job are less remarkable than his attempts to assimilate himself to the planter's lifestyle. He disregards Croft's motto: "Midnight carousing will not do for men of business", (Edgeworth 1969b: 467), and Basil begins to consider his patron "too *punctual*, too much of an automaton, for me" (Edgeworth 1969b: 468). In a word, Croft's philosophy has nothing to do with Basil's and is very close to Sir James Brooke's reformist views in *The Absentee*: "*Deeds not words* is my motto. Remember, we can judge better by the conduct of people towards others than by their own manner towards ourselves" (Edgeworth 1994: 139).

Basil wants to obtain some ceded land in Louisiana to settle there and take some Irish and Scottish immigrants. Hudson's father promises to help, but words vanish in the air while subscribers do not pay: "We will talk of that, Basil, to-morrow" (Edgeworth 1969b: 469). Basil has to attend some parties; he becomes more and more extravagant and refuses the idea of joining Croft in a small plantation. At the same time – and as many self-sacrificing women in Edgeworth's fiction – Basil's wife

teaches needlework to get some money from American ladies, and Hudson meets an actress, Marion, who makes him forget Basil. During a celebration, Basil almost poisons the guests, comments begin and he feels as miserable as he would do in Great Britain: "Such is the fate of all good fellows, and excellent bottle companions! Certain to be deserted, by their dear friends, at the least reverse of fortune" (Edgeworth 1969b: 465).

When Basil is desperate and about to leave the American Paradise, he meets Barny, who has prospered by working hard and saving money. He tells him that he had been hired as a mason and his two boys had been helping a blacksmith and a carpenter until they became masters. The Irishman is aware of the reasons for his success: "Upon my conscience, myself does not know; except it be that we never made Saint Monday, nor never put off till the morrow what we could do the day" (Edgeworth 1969b: 478) and adds: "But all this is no rule for a gentleman born ... nor it is disparagement to him if he has not done as well in a place like America, where he had not the means; not being used to bricklaying and slaving his hands, and striving as we did" (Edgeworth, 1969b: 479). The problem, therefore, is that one must abandon snobbish attitudes and social prejudices to succeed in America.

Basil could equally have destroyed his life if he had travelled to South America, Africa or if he had stayed in London because he lacked the American quality distinguishing a hard-working man and failure was predictable in this case. However, we cannot say the same for Barnby, who had no formal education at all but knew how to take advantage of a land which offered unrivalled opportunities to prosper and become a self-made man. Perhaps misery teaches one how to succeed, but, for Edgeworth, Basil's problem is clearly an educational or attitudinal one, and, in "Tomorrow," The Anglo-Irish writer is echoing Benjamin Franklin's idea that "America is the land of labour, by no means what the English call Lubberland [imaginary land of plenty] and the French Pays de Cocagne [land of milk and honey]" (1998: 42). Franklin also linked good luck with morality:

Industry and constant employment are great preservatives of the morals of the nation. Hence, bad examples to youth are more rare in

America ... To this may be truly added that serious religion, under its various denominations, is not only tolerated, but respected and practiced (1998: 43).

This issue and the respect for the different sects which results in rich multiculturalism are the central subjects in *Harrington*, Edgeworth's Jewish fiction *par excellence*.

3. The American Jewess.

In the summer of 1815, Edgeworth received a letter from Rachel Mordicai, an American woman who complained about the negative portrait of the Jews that Maria offered in some of her tales:

how it can be that she, who on all other subjects shows such justice and liberality, should on one alone appear biased by prejudice: should even instil that prejudice into the minds of youth! Can my illusion be mistaken? It is to the species of character which wherever a *Jew* is introduced is invariably attached to him. Can it be believed that this race of men are by nature mean, avaricious, and unprincipled? (MacDonald 1977: 6, 7th August 1815).

Mordicai was right. In *The Parent's Assistant*, "The Little Merchants" presents how a Jew gives little money for a cross, and the narrator comments "We do not wish to lay open to our young readers scenes of iniquity" (Edgeworth 1969a: 127). *Moral Tales* includes another story, "The Prussian Vase", where a Jew insults the Christians (Edgeworth 1969a: 140), and, in the same collection, "The Good Aunt" depicts a Jew, Carat, who lacks ethics and organises illegal lotteries (Edgeworth 1969a: 191). Likewise, in "Murad the Unlucky", Rachub sells clothes infected with the plague, and one of the worst pictures appears, undoubtedly, in *The Absentee* with a coachmaker Jew, Mr. Mordicai, who Shylock-like tries to ruin wealthy families.

What matters is that the American Jewess's observations had an effect on Edgeworth, and the letters between the two women were edited in the 1970s as *The Education of the Heart*. In her correspondence, and more than twenty years after the publication of *Popular Tales*, Edgeworth expresses optimistic opinions on America, especially regarding literature:

Your America is not like Scotland a land of traditions, it has little influence over our minds

by early associations, great by actual curiosity. The present not the past must therefore be the American writer's domain (MacDonald 1977: 73, 2nd May 1825).

Edgeworth believes in American exceptionalism and in one advantage that America has over Europe:

America is in fact placed in circumstances in which no other nation, of whom we have any tradition, was ever placed before. She has not gone through the regular gradation in civilization from childhood to age, from savage to polished life, but began as it were in manhood, and without savage ancestors (MacDonald 1977: 258, 18th September 1834).

The Anglo-Irish writer anticipates the American splendour based on the coal monopoly and equates material with intellectual progress: "Civil, commercial, military, literary and scientific – what a range! And what a new and higher order and progress of ideas open to imagination, not merely 'Visions of glory'" (MacDonald 1977: 259, 18th September, 1834; see Bannet 2006: 37-8 on the range of subjects and nature of the correspondence). We perceive some change in Edgeworth – intentional or not – concerning America and this confident view contrasts sharply with the tone prevailing in Edgeworth's earlier fiction.

Harrington was, in a way, the offspring of the relationship between Edgeworth and Mordicai, and it was published together with *Ormond* shortly after Richard Lovell Edgeworth's death. Despite his illness, Maria's father always insisted that *Ormond* and *Harrington* should be finished and brought to light, and the former was called "that poor Orphan Book" (in Butler 1972: 402). Richard Lovell Edgeworth did not supervise the volumes as much as he did others, and some expressions in *Harrington* were purposefully taken from Mordicai's letters, such as "mean, avaricious, and unprincipled" to characterise the Jews (MacDonald 1977: 6), or the paragraph describing Berenice's childhood and education in America (MacDonald 1977: 15, see also Bannet 2006). Comic scenes are left aside, and *Harrington* becomes a metanarrative or metatext on the power of fiction. Like *Ennui*, it is a first-person account about the consequences of prejudices and of believing

false stories. It deals with the childish fears of a spoilt, impressionable young man, Harrington, terrorised by his nurse, Fowler, a woman who tells him stories about the Jews and, in this way, helps Harrington to create his own fiction about them: “‘If you don’t come quietly this moment, Master Harrington,...I’ll call to Simon the Jew there...and he shall come up and carry you away in his great bag’” (Edgeworth 1893: 2). Due to this fact and to the negative image of the Jews promoted by his family and friends, Harrington will alternately support and hate the Jews, but, what is more important, in his *bildung* as a hero, he will have to show his self-control and strength to deserve the hand of his beloved Berenice. The narrative is set against the background of the Jew Bill – or the Jewish Naturalisation Act (1753) – and the Gordon Riots which took place in London in 1780. Critics have repeatedly stressed this historical dimension in *Harrington*. For Manly, the story gives an anti-aristocratic and cosmopolitan view and is a deliberate attack on Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (2001: 1554). However, apart from being a psychological novel concerned with fear, *Harrington* enquires into art, the nature of representation and on how the Europeans and the Americans saw each other. On the one hand, Mr. Montenero, Berenice’s father, likes paintings and purchases a picture called “The Dentition of the Jew” to conceal it from public view and “‘To destroy it, my dear, as I would, were it in my power, every record of cruelty and intolerance. So perish all that can keep alive feelings of hatred and vengeance between Jews and Christians!’” (Edgeworth 1893: 106). On the other hand, Edgeworth anticipates the conflict between American and European culture so prominent in later authors. Henry James, for example, often depicted the impressions of Americans coming to Europe and facing a world where appearances and class matter. This is the case in *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879) or *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and *Harrington* also hinges on this cultural contrast.

In this narrative, America is sexualised and initially embodied in the character of Berenice, who has Spanish ancestors on her father’s side – Mr. Montenero is also of mixed ethnicity hybrid – and, despite appearances, turns out to be the daughter of an English lady (Edgeworth

1893: 203). There fore, she is not totally Jewish, and she has been brought up in an ideal community as Mr. Montenero explains:

a happy part of that country, where religious distinctions are scarcely known – where characters and talents are all sufficient to attain advancement – where the Jews form a respectable part of the community – , where, in most instances, they are liberally educated, many following the honourable professions of law and physic with credit and ability, and associating with the best society that country affords ... all her juvenile friendships and attachments had been formed with those of different persuasions; yet each had looked upon the variations of the other as things of course, or rather as things which do not affect the moral character – differences which take place in every society (Edgeworth 1893: 67).

America is then a perfectly regulated structure, the social hive envisioned by Richard Lovell Edgeworth (Dunne 1991). Regarding Europe, Mr. Montenero is sceptical and slightly worried since Berenice lacks prejudices and he is afraid of the generalisations she would have to face in London, the opposite of America: “‘There was only a little want of consideration for the feelings of others – a little one of liberality’” (Edgeworth 1893: 68). Society will not take into account Berenice’s wealth. For Edgeworth, cultural bias towards the Americans exists for the mere fact that they represent alterity or strangeness, as Bannet points out: “‘in *Harrington*, no matter how civilized, how polite, how charming, how cultivated, how charitable, how anglicised or how wealthy Mr Montenero is, he and his daughter remain unassimilable by English society as long as they are Jews” (2006: 44). In a way, America engenders as much suspicion as women do in patriarchal society, and critics have already stressed woman’s subversive role and othering in Edgeworth (see Gallagher 1994 and Corbett 2002). Thus, the malicious comments on Grace Nugent’s mother as a St Omar and a woman *sans reproche* (Edgeworth 1994: 150) make the female protagonist in *The Absentee* an alienated figure in London society, and Belinda cannot but be seen as a despicable manhunter in the homonymous novel. In the end, Harrington and Berenice are happily married not only because Harrington overcomes his fears but also because

Berenice's English ancestry facilitates her acceptance in England. The narrative concludes with some tension: Fowler is transported in a vessel to America in order to punish her conduct. Obviously, the image recalls the American past as a colony for the convicts, but Fowler also helps to illustrate Edgeworth's reformist views since Mr. Harrington paternalistically gives the exile a place to stay in the new land. When Harrington's father asks if only a Christian is capable of forgiving his enemies, Berenice retorts and, Lady Delacour-like, closes the narrative with a rhetoric question against all cultural dichotomies: "why not a good Jew?" (Edgeworth 1893: 208).

4. "My much beloved but miserable country".

Of the three narratives we are analysing here, only *Orlandino* takes place in Ireland and was produced without paternal interference. The book was published in Edinburgh by the editor William Chambers, who presented it as a story of self-denial in a small note preceding the text. Edgeworth wrote *Orlandino* after many years retired from the literary world (*Helen* was published in 1834), and it coincided with a period of disbelief and pessimism motivated by the increasing intervention of the Church in Irish politics. While in the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth optimistically dreamt of the future of her adopted country ("When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain, she will look back, with a smile of good-humoured complacency, on the Sir Kits and Sir Condys of her former existence" [Edgeworth 1994: 5]), years later she comments:

[it] is impossible to draw Ireland as she is now in a book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature, in a fever (qtd. Butler 1972: 452, letter to Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, 19th February 1834).

If in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America was a place to avoid for the Irish, in the 1840s it proved a solution to the Irish problem. In fact, we can trace a certain sisterhood between the two countries: both the USA and Ireland opposed British rule and supremacy. As Kim explains, "The Irish nationalist and unionist group, the United Irishmen, for example, often drew upon

cause of Irish political independence" (2003: 107). In this sense, "Tomorrow" and *Orlandino* are instances of a double colonization, showing how the Irish went to America to work as subjects of people who had previously been colonised by the Empire and had had the means to develop an identity on their own. We may say that, at that time, the USA had become the *alter ego* or the mirror where the Irish would like to look at themselves.

Orlandino was Edgeworth's gift for the Irish and one of her most sentimental works. It was written to raise funds for the victims of the Famine, but was an idea which Edgeworth already had in 1822 when she was going to organise a ball for the benefit of the Irish (Colvin 1971: 400-1, letter to Mrs. Edgeworth, 20th May). Aid arrived from all over the world, especially from the American east coast, where many Irish people had settled and formed closed communities. The problem with *Orlandino* is that it has been scarcely explored by the critics. Margaret Kelleher, for example, contextualises the text by stressing Edgeworth's philanthropic actions during the Great Hunger, and she recovers private correspondence. For Kelleher, *Orlandino* is a temperance story, and, since it is basically an account of a young man's reform, the moral dimension becomes more prominent than the political one (1997: 60). The late Mitzi Myers, who was probably the leading specialist on Edgeworth's tales, went further: *Orlandino* is "an Irish story structured by colonialism and community, a genealogy and imaginative resolution of orphanage, estrangement and famine" (1995: 201). Before the publication, Edgeworth received the benefits from the Bank of Ireland, and, according to Myers, she wrote to a Mrs. Hall insisting that the book did not need a preface, a quite shocking anti-Edgeworthian attitude. She also made it clear that, more than obtaining money, she wanted to promote industry among her tenants:

Blessings on him [Chambers] and I hope he will not be the worse for me. I am surely the better for him, and so are numbers now working and eating; for *Ms. Edgeworth's principle and mine is to excite the people to work for good wages, and not, by gratis feeding, to make beggars of them, and ungrateful beggars*, as the case may be (qtd. in Myers 1995: 203, my italics).

Apart from her last work, *Orlandino* meant Edgeworth's reconciliation with Ireland and

reveals a deep commitment to her land. *Orlandino* describes the regeneration of the country represented in a young man of mysterious origin and polite manners who has fled from Ireland and his family. Everybody thinks that he has gone to America with some Irishmen, but he never arrived there – America is once more reserved for the enterprising man. Instead of crossing the Ocean, Orlandino had met a man who cheated him and made him join a circus. He profited from the boy for many, many years by making him perform throughout the country while Orlandino is really John Orlando More and an aristocrat. In fact, Orlandino's dependence metonymically refers to Ireland's dependence on Great Britain. Towards the end of the tale, the protagonist describes what has been left of the show, a metaphor of the disintegration of the Empire:

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Thanks to the help of a boy called Walter and his family, Orlandino is rehabilitated from his vices – mainly alcohol drinking and intemperance – and gradually becomes a sensible person. One of the factors that promotes this change is the reading of a supposedly authentic letter from an Irish immigrant in the USA (see Edgeworth's note 1847: 18) almost at the beginning of the narrative. According to Butler, the Edgeworths usually kept contact with their Irish tenants as far away as America after they went away (1972: 87). Instead of describing problems, Peter Walsh asks his mother to join him in America because life in Ireland is now

unbearable. From a painful distant fiction, America has become an urgent and desired reality.

“UNITED STATES HOTEL,
PHILADELPHIA.

DEAR MOTHER,

Enclosed you will find a bill of exchange for about £5, 5s. 2d. Write immediately on receipt of this, and say what time you can set out; and depend on punctual further remittance for passage, &c.

The news from Ireland is of the worst character. I would not have you live another day, if that could be avoided, in my much beloved but miserable country. I must be brief to perform a promise I made to my wife, to ask you all to come to live with us the balance of your days. This request comes from one who will take no excuse, accept no refusal. You will like her and her family. The little children are almost crazed at the idea of seeing you, also myself and wife. It is with the greatest feeling of gratitude for the advantages afforded me in my youth I now address you. But I must be brief. I don't intend you to enter the house of a strange. You will, from first to last live with me. When you are under my own eyes, I can tell you what you want, and see you don't want it long. There is no getting out of coming.

Dear Mother, and sister Ellen, you will not deny me and my companion the boon of once more beholding you, dear mother with my own eyes, and you, dearly beloved sister. I know you will have no objection to coming under my humble roof and protection to complete our happiness. Come, and we hope we will make you comfortable completely. The children are all talking of what walks they will take you. Make my respects to * * * * &c. I shall never forget those who have befriended you as long as I live. Do not on any account disappoint me. Write directly; and whenever you do, please direct to Peter Walsh, United States Hotel, Philadelphia, U.S.

Believe me to be your most affectionate and devoted Son,
PETER WALSH.

In *The Absentee*, Larry Brady's letter closed the narrative by inviting Paddy to return to Ireland since “it [was] growing the fashion not to be an Absentee” (Edgeworth 1994: 278). Now the times have definitely changed for the Irish and they promote going to America instead of shunning it. Peter has been successful and is now quite integrated in America. More than losing the Irish national

traits, Peter has doubly enriched his identity following Smith's equation of economic development and cultural homogeneity. According to Aileen Douglas, one of the greatest traits revealing character is writing and, in Edgeworth, the individual's worth is related to his/her capacity to produce suitable documents (2002: 373, 376), which Peter demonstrates in a letter very different from Brady's one full of Hiberno-Irish words and native expressions. Besides, Peter has married an American woman, and they have American children. His personal wealth has increased, but he does not forget Ireland or his mother. He still feels the call of Ireland, and this attitude departs greatly from Orlandino's selfish one, who hears Peter's letter read aloud and feels ashamed. His *alter ego* has conducted himself as he should have done, so Orlandino is full of sorrow and repentance: "he stood like a statue – motionless; his eyes closed, tears gathered on the long eyelashes, and one had rolled down and stood upon the cheek" (Edgeworth, 1847: 20). Though Orlandino has forgotten his land, his mother and has never sent her a penny, she still remembers him and thinks of the worst:

A *bad* son, I will not call him ... for once he was good – no better nor fonder when he was a child ever was or could be of the mother that doted on him – so she did; and the joy and pride of my heart he was – and never heard a sentence of him good nor bad these eight long years now

come Whitsuntide that he left me. It can't be, and he alive: so he can't be alive (Edgeworth, 1847: 59).

Orlandino is a tale, and Edgeworth needs to round it off with a touch of conciliatory optimism. The protagonist meets his mother and is given the opportunity to be reformed or reborn at the end: "A fellow creature saved! – a youth of superior talents redeemed from disgrace, misery, and vice: and redeemed to be an honour and blessing to his family" (1847: 175).

In the popular imagination, America had always been a painful nightmare, a place where the Irish worked hard and were paid low wages. We have analysed how Edgeworth saw America as a reality presided by multiculturalism and even by the possibility to become a second nation for the Irish. She did not forget sentimentalism and the relationship between woman and the land is the same as in her productions set in Ireland. The comic tome in *Tomorrow* is surpassed and gives place to a more serious ethical concern in *Harrington* and *Orlandino*. Despite the confrontation between Enlightenment and Romanticism which always permeated Edgeworth's production, the author never idealised America completely, and this paper insists once more on her richness as a pedagogic writer whose 'American stories' confirm the success of hardworking, good-natured people.

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